

The Electoral Politics of the English Jacobins and Its Legacy, 1796–1807

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Abstract Historians of radicalism have long held that following the repression of the English Jacobins in 1794–95, open agitation by plebeian reformers remained dormant until 1802, when they reemerged in a more clearly constitutionalist pose to fight a number of contests in that year’s general election. According to this view, the contests led directly to Sir Francis Burdett’s victory at the 1807 Westminster election, a foundational moment for nineteenth-century radicalism. This article argues instead that the previously overlooked English Jacobin intervention at the 1796 general election was the ultimate foundation for the 1807 election victory and far more significant than the contests evident in 1802. While this argument indicates that the Jacobin organizations for radical reform were not in a steep terminal decline by 1796, as is widely assumed, it also undermines the notion that the electoral politics of the 1802–1807 period was a major novelty. There was nevertheless not a clear-cut continuity from 1796 to 1807. This article demonstrates that in 1796 Jacobin political thought led to the development of a pure style of electioneering that rejected corrupt practices in order to turn the electoral process into a venue for the enaction of general will through the open use of sovereign reason. Between 1802 and 1804, this position was abandoned in favor of a more traditional, pragmatic and patricianly form of electioneering. However, this article concludes with a major revision of the 1807 Westminster victory by illustrating that, far from an innovation, it was a direct revival of the “purity” pioneered by the Jacobin contests of 1796.

Englishmen are now called upon to exercise their dearest rights, in the choice of Representatives, to whom they must delegate, at this important crisis, powers, on the due exercise of which every thing which Englishmen hold dear in life may eventually depend. It is a duty, therefore, which Electors owe to themselves, to their posterity, to their Country, to choose such men as are wholly free from the infection of Gallic principles; as hold in abhorrence the disseminators of universal anarchy, the friends of *France*, and the enemies of England. Men, who talk about *rights* and neglect *duties*; who conceal private *vices* beneath the *mask* of public *virtue*; who disguise *Disaffection* under a show of *Patriotism*; whose *professions* are, in all respects, at direct variance with their *practice*; now seek to cajole the Electors by panegyriizing themselves, and calumniating their opponents. But let the native good sense of Englishmen be exerted;

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and let them not be betrayed, by artful insinuations, into a reprobation of those ANTI-GALLICAN PRINCIPLES, which it was the boast of their ancestors to cherish and extend!
—*True Briton*, 27 May 1796

Unlike the anti-Jacobin periodical *True Briton*, historians have not viewed the 1796 general election as one with a particularly Jacobin or Gallic element. Instead, the first decade of the nineteenth century is widely perceived as the formative period for radical electoral and parliamentary politics, beginning with the 1802 general election, in which reformist candidates with significant plebeian support won notable victories in Norwich, Nottingham, and Middlesex. For historians of popular politics, these contests, and in particular those of Sir Francis Burdett for Middlesex in 1802 and 1804, represent the revival of popular reformism following a difficult decade.¹ This earlier movement, dubbed *Jacobin* for its sympathies for the French Republic and pursuit of universal suffrage and annual elections, began with the formation of the largely artisanal London Corresponding Society in 1792. Rapid early growth of the London Corresponding Society and affiliated societies in other towns and cities was curbed by government repression in 1794 and 1795, which historians have widely seen as the beginning of a steady terminal decline consummated by the explicit outlawing of the London Corresponding Society and all similar societies in 1799.² The reappearance of many veterans of these organizations as integral components of the electoral challenges in 1802 therefore represents for many historians the revival of a popular movement for reform in a more moderate form, “from *within* the electoral system.”³ Historians of radicalism have particularly viewed the Middlesex contests as laying the basis for Burdett’s later victory in Westminster in 1807, a seat that he held until 1837. This victory has long been seen as the chief formative movement for nineteenth-century popular radicalism, since for decades “Radical Westminster” provided a base for agitation inside and outside of Parliament, and the proving ground of many of British radicalism’s tribunes and leaders like Burdett, Henry Hunt, and William Cobbett.⁴ In these accounts, the 1802 general election was thus the beginning of a

¹ J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796–1821* (Oxford, 1982), 133; Frank O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989), 305.

² Mary Thale, ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792–99* (Cambridge, 1983), xviii; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 1, 20; Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 397–415.

³ O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 306. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, rev. ed. (London, 1991), 492–93; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 133; Anna Clark, “Class, Gender, and British Elections, 1794–1818,” in *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular Politics in the Age of Reform*, ed. Michael T. Davis and Paul A. Pickering (Aldershot, 2008), 107–24, at 107.

⁴ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 504–14; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 133–46; J. M. Main, “Radical Westminster, 1807–1820,” *Historical Studies* 12, no. 46 (1966): 186–204; John Belcham, “Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform,” *English Historical Review* 39, no. 369 (1978): 739–73; Marc Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster, 1780–1890* (Basingstoke, 2012), 12–39; J. R. Dinwiddy, “Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism,” *History* 65, no. 213 (1980): 17–31.

significant recalibration of popular reformism, the most lasting effect of which was the formation of radicalism as a significant national movement.

In fact, and as *True Briton* warned, there was an extensive and vibrant Jacobin intervention in the 1796 general election, an intervention that I argue has been neglected by historians but which leads to important revisions of our understanding of not only the corresponding societies of the 1790s but also their influence on the electoral politics of radical reformers after 1802. These contests, held at the midpoint of the French Revolutionary Wars, have not been seen as a serious challenge to the government. With the Whigs led by Lord Portland having joined the Pitt ministry in July 1794, the remaining opposition, led by Charles James Fox, was an ineffectively small rump. Outside of Parliament, the London Corresponding Society and its affiliated provincial societies suffered under the provisions of the “Two Acts”—the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795—passed to suppress the organizing of mass meetings and the printing of political commentary.⁵ For Frank O’Gorman, 1796 was therefore a year “hardly conducive to great radical causes,” and in the general election, disorganized anti-Pitt candidates were beaten in a handful of constituencies.⁶ I argue the contrary: the 1796 general election was notable for a number of contests put up in borough constituencies by plebeian reform societies affiliated with the London Corresponding Society. These groups intervened to support antiwar and pro-reform candidates in Westminster, Southwark, the City of London, Norwich, Nottingham, Derby, Maidstone, and Rochester, while a member of the society briefly contested Chichester—nine elections that represented a significant minority of the fifty-nine constituencies contested that year.⁷ These events have not only been downplayed by electoral and parliamentary historians but have also been largely ignored by historians of radicalism.⁸ In many accounts, emphasis has been placed upon petitioning, mass meetings, and the extent and sincerity of insurrectionary plotting, accompanied more recently by a focus on the political thought, culture, and language of the Jacobin generation.⁹

⁵ John Derry, “The Opposition Whigs and the French Revolution, 1789–1815,” in *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789–1815*, ed. H. T. Dickenson (London, 1989), 39–60; L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* (London, 1997), 136–57.

⁶ O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 305. The introductory survey to the *History of Parliament* volume for this period concurs with this assessment, although in many of the entries for these constituencies, Jacobin involvement is noted; R. G. Thorne, ed., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1790–1820*, vol. 1, *Survey* (London, 1986), 147–48.

⁷ O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 297. Westminster, Southwark, and Chichester were scot and lot boroughs; in Norwich and Nottingham, the franchise was held by freemen and freeholders; in Rochester, Maidstone, and Derby, it was also held by freemen; and in the City of London, in the livery.

⁸ See Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 24–28, and Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 181, for brief, Westminster-centric discussions. See also E. P. Thompson, “Hunting the Jacobin Fox,” *Past and Present*, no. 142 (1994): 94–140, at 97–98. For local histories, see C. B. Jewson, *Jacobin City: A Portrait of Norwich, 1788–1802* (London, 1975); Malcolm I. Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham, 1785–1835* (Oxford, 1969).

⁹ See Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*; Gregory Claeys, “The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought,” *History of Political Thought* 11, no. 1 (1990): 59–80; James Epstein and David Karr, “Playing at Revolution: British ‘Jacobin’ Performance,” *Journal of Modern History* 79, no. 3 (2007): 495–530; Mark Philp, “The Fragmented Ideology of Reform,” in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge, 1991), 50–77; James Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, 2003), 59–82.

Even those historians who seek to place Jacobinism within an older, constitutionalist tradition of reformism, in which the general election would seem to be a key moment, have overlooked its importance, and while the general elections of 1784, 1802, and 1807 are well studied, the only account focused on 1796 looks at the language of the Westminster contest isolated from its wider context.¹⁰

I begin by outlining the extent of the participation in the 1796 general election by a number of societies within the Jacobin political network of which the London Corresponding Society formed the center. Although *Jacobin* was initially a pejorative term used by opponents to describe this network, they were correct to see in it commonalities and political coalescence. In particular, these organizations shared a popular membership of artisans, tradesmen, and middling professionals, the explicit modeling of their societies on the London Corresponding Society including its program of universal suffrage and annual Parliaments, and the desire for a peace with France that would de facto recognize the republic. *Jacobin* is therefore a justifiable shorthand for describing a specific and organized tendency within the broader politics of popular reform, a shorthand also adopted at times by these reformers themselves.¹¹ This article is therefore not a study of the entire opposition to Pitt's administration in 1796 but is instead tightly focused on the societies within this Jacobin network that directly participated in the elections for their boroughs. As I demonstrate, there were clear signs of collaboration between these geographically disparate groups, with the London Corresponding Society adopting a coordinating position within this nexus, a significant indication that the society and many of its associated bodies outside London had not begun their terminal decline at the beginning of 1796. Although this revitalization was not enough to prevent their dissolution in 1799, the mobilization for the 1802 general election by many veterans of these associations was possible because of the experience gained in the contests of 1796. While undermining the notion of 1802 as the beginning of a new era, or of the 1807 Westminster election as an unheralded novelty, this research is also an important complement to the historiographical emphasis on the legacy of the London Corresponding Society and its affiliates being largely in insurrectionary sects.¹²

¹⁰ Benjamin Weinstein, "Popular Constitutionalism and the London Corresponding Society," *Albion* 34, no. 1 (2002): 37–57. For histories of this earlier movement, see Ian Christie, *Wilkes, Wypil and Reform: The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics, 1760–1785* (London, 1962); E. C. Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769–1793* (Cambridge, 1963); Timothy Jenks, "Language and Politics at the Westminster Election of 1796," *Historical Journal* 44, no. 2 (2001): 419–39. The most studied general election in this period is that of 1784; see Anne Stott, "Female Patriotism": Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire, and the Westminster Election of 1784," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, no. 17 (1993): 60–84; Paul Kelly, "Radicalism and Public Opinion in the General Election of 1784," *Historical Research* 45, no. 111 (1972): 73–88; Phyllis Deutsch, "Moral Trespass in Georgian London: Gaming, Gender, and Electoral Politics in the Age of George III," *Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 637–56.

¹¹ For such appropriation, see John Thelwall, *The Rights of Nature against the Usurpations of the Establishments* [...] (London, 1796), 46; Richard Dinmore, *An Exposition of the Principles of the English Jacobins* [...] (Norwich, 1797). In this use of the term, I am following historians such as Thompson or Claeys, although this usage does not find a consensus; see Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789–1815* (Cambridge, 2013), 287–311; Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park, 2001), 22–42.

¹² Iain MacCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Oxford, 1998). See also Roger Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795–1803* (Gloucester,

Nevertheless, comparison of the general elections of 1796 and 1802 also reveals significant changes; the two elections were not joined by a period of unabridged and clear continuity. While strong contests were put up in Middlesex, Norwich, and Nottingham, in many other constituencies, the elections of 1796 could not be built upon, indicating the lasting damage caused by repression of the corresponding societies. Despite the continuity of personnel, there were also important organizational and tactical differences between the contests in 1796 and those in the 1802 general election, owing to a shift in the reformers' attitudes to political morality. In 1796, the Jacobin reforming societies committed to cheap and legal electioneering conducted entirely by volunteers, in the belief that this strategy would guarantee that elections delivered the good governance that could only be attained by the free and open use of reason. I argue that this application of Jacobin political thought represented a significant break from the conventions of constitutionalist reformism in the preceding decades. This novel electoral morality was, however, abandoned in 1802 in a significant reversion to an older tradition of electioneering that relied upon illegal practices funded by the wealth of patricians like Burdett. Concurrent with this trend was the dissolution of Jacobinism as a coherent, independent, and programmatic political tendency, although, as will be made clear, former Jacobins remained important semi-organized currents within electoral alliances of reformers and Whigs. In the final section, I outline how in London these former members of the society were able by 1807 to reimpose upon Burdett the organization and principles that they had pioneered eleven years before.¹³ Since the 1807 Westminster election is often depicted as the first to utilize widespread popular mobilization behind a cheap and purely legal contest organized largely by artisans and tradesmen, this view is a major revision. The 1807 election, described by one historian as "precocious," was instead a *return* to the methods, culture, and intellectual framework of the 1796 contests.¹⁴

The continuity of participation in the elections between 1796 and 1807 was accompanied by a significant discontinuity in the methods and ideas behind that electioneering, and both require detailed investigation. This revision also suggests that we need to rethink the efficacy and legacy of the popular reformist societies of the 1790s, and that the London Corresponding Society and many associated societies were healthier in 1796 than has generally been thought and were able to establish lasting sentiment for radical reform in several constituencies. The revival in 1807 of the methods pioneered in 1796 also shows that the Jacobin societies provided durable and innovative methods of popular electoral mobilization based in a novel body of political thought that brought significant new approaches to constitutionalist reformism.¹⁵ The

1983); see the contributions in Philp, *French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, especially Roger Wells, "English Society and Revolutionary Politics in the 1790s: The Case for Insurrection," 188–226. Although Hone overstates the novelty and singular importance of the Middlesex elections, hers is an excellent study of the insurrectionary and electoral currents. See Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 41–117.

¹³ While Thompson ignores this corruption, Hone notices it but offers no comment or analysis. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 493, 499–500; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 133–46.

¹⁴ Main, "Radical Westminster," 86; see also Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 508–9; Baer, *Rise and Fall*, 22–24.

¹⁵ Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (London, 1989); Gregory Claeys, *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall* (University Park 1995), xxxvii; Iain Hampsher-Monk,

London Corresponding Society and its affiliated societies played a much more direct role in the legal and electoral aspects of the formation of nineteenth-century popular radicalism than has previously been considered. It is therefore necessary to contextualize the 1807 Westminster victory within a longer, broader, and more complex series of electoral contests beginning in 1796.

I

The general election between May and June 1796 came at the end of a difficult period for the network of popular organizations that had developed in sympathetic response to the French Revolution. In 1794, Habeas Corpus was suspended, and two prominent figures within the London Corresponding Society, Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall, were tried for high treason, along with their mentor John Horne Tooke, a veteran reformer and leading figure within the Society of Constitutional Information, an association of gentlemanly and middle-class reformers closely affiliated with the London Corresponding Society. Although all three were acquitted, the trials caused the collapse of the Society of Constitutional Information and a severe decline in the membership of the London Corresponding Society. By the end of 1795, the ground that had been regained was threatened by the Treason and Sedition bills, which greatly expanded the ability of the government to act against groups and individuals they dubbed Jacobins. The opposition to the bills saw the London Corresponding Society hold two extremely well-attended mass meetings to petition against them. At the same time, economic discontent grew as the war disrupted the trade in food and goods, a problem exacerbated by the bad harvest of 1795. Concurrently, the Foxite Whigs struggled to oppose Pitt in Parliament following the definitive rupture with the Portland Whigs in 1794, and looked to the potential of the growing petitioning movement.¹⁶ After a number of gestures by both sides, a Foxite deputation visited the home of London Corresponding Society member John Gale Jones to suggest an anti-Pitt “junction,” which society members subsequently voted for, fueling rumors of a coalition.¹⁷ By January, however, the society’s general committee rejected any deal, maintaining that the Whig Club was “too equivocal” in its conduct; the committee reassured concerned affiliates such as “the Friends of Reform” in Manchester that reports that they had abandoned their program in return for a coalition with the Whigs were untrue.¹⁸ In March, the London Corresponding Society announced that it would resist an alliance until the Foxites clarified

“John Thelwall and Eighteenth-Century Radical Response to Political Economy,” *Historical Journal* 34, no. 1 (1991): 1–20; Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*.

¹⁶ *The History of the Two Acts* [. . .] (London, 1796); Lord Colchester, *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester*, vol. 1 (London, 1861), 7; “Notes Respecting the London Corresponding Society,” Francis Place Papers, Add. MS 27808, fol. 52, British Library (hereafter this repository is abbreviated as BL); Charles James Fox Papers and Correspondence, BL, Add. MS 47572, fol. 100.

¹⁷ Thale, *Selections*, 330. See also Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence*, 1:17; *True Briton*, 2 and 16 January 1796; *A Speech Delivered* [. . .] *on the Following Question* [. . .] *Which best deserves the Public Confidence, Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox?* (1795); Charles Abbot diary, 10 December 1795, The National Archives, PRO 30/9/31. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA.)

¹⁸ Thale, *Selections*, 342, 345.

their principles, and following this, the society's strategy was explicitly to pressure the Whigs into supporting their full reform program.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Whigs saw their role as leading these societies in a broad opposition. At the beginning of May, the Duke of Bedford told the Whig Club that they would lose the anticipated general election, but that the popular opposition to the Two Acts proved that they could find an extra-Parliamentary following.²⁰ Fox himself believed Whig weakness meant that an alliance with the "democratic or popular party" was necessary, although he stressed that Whig leadership would ensure the moderation of this opposition.²¹ When the general election took place between May and June, both the corresponding society and Foxite strategies therefore required cooperation for conditional and antagonistic reasons: while the Foxites sought to dominate and neuter the "popular party," the London Corresponding Society and its affiliated societies outside London sought to radicalize the Foxites.

This conflict was particularly obvious at the contest for Fox's constituency of Westminster, where Tooke reemerged from a period of seclusion after the 1794 trials to stand. Westminster possessed a "scot and lot" franchise of those who paid the local poor rates; with around twelve thousand electors, it was the most populous constituency in the country.²² Members of the London Corresponding Society played a key organizational role in this contest: they formed the majority of Tooke's committee, which met at Hardy's shop and organized a systematic canvass of the electors, leading to the *True Briton* describing Tooke as the "Society's own candidate."²³ This support was also deliberately prominent on the hustings: Felix Vaughan, barrister and former member of the Society of Constitutional Information, proposed Tooke, while John Thelwall, John Gale Jones, and fellow member of the London Corresponding Society Paul Thomas LeMaitre were the "Political Cerberus which guards the Pluto of Covent-Garden."²⁴ Superficially, the election was a rerun of the contest of 1790, when Tooke had stood against Fox in protest at the agreement he had made with his nemesis, Pitt, to divide Westminster's two seats. Fox and Pitt's "disgraceful compromise" had infuriated Fox's more radical supporters, who were already disappointed that he was not the reformer he had presented himself as in

¹⁹ Thale, *Selections*, 341, 345, 365; John Gale Jones, *Sketch of a Political Tour Through Rochester, Chatham, Maidstone, Gravesend, &c* [. . .] (London, 1796), 99–107; *Report of the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Commons* (Dublin, 1799), 61; John Thelwall, *The Speech of John Thelwall at the Second Meeting of the London Corresponding Society* [. . .] (London, 1795), ii; *Thoughts on Mr. Grey's plan of reform* [. . .] (London, 1797), 1–3.

²⁰ *Morning Post* (London), 4 May 1796. Unless otherwise identified, all newspapers cited were published in London.

²¹ Earl Russell, *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox*, vol. 3 (London, 1854), 135–36, at 135.

²² Although the electorate here would not be as broad as in an open borough, where all men could vote, or a "Potwalloper" borough, where all male householders could vote, under a "scot and lot" franchise of ratepayers, many artisans and tradesmen would possess the franchise, producing a broad electorate. Because most members of the London Corresponding Society were artisans, they were a potentially significant electoral force.

²³ *True Briton*, 9 June 1796.

²⁴ *True Briton*, 9 June 1796. See also *True Briton*, 24 and 28 May, 2 June 1796; *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 16 May 1807; "At a Meeting of the Committee for Promoting the Election of John Horne Tooke, Esq.," Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27837, fol. 68; John Binns, *Recollections of the Life of John Binns* [. . .] (Pittsburgh, 1854), 43.

his first contest in 1780. Tooke subsequently won 1,697 votes.²⁵ When he stood again in 1796, however, he instead praised Fox for opposing the Treason trials and Two Acts and derided the war, taxation, and the “elective Dictator” Pitt, while pressing his desire for a united opposition by requesting that the electors split between himself and Fox.²⁶ Fox criticized Pitt’s government for subverting the constitution of 1688 in order to support despotism in Europe and attacked Tooke’s trial and imprisonment in 1794. Contrary to rumors among Pittites, this accord did not extend to a pact, and Fox responded to Tooke’s overtures by instructing his supporters not to split their votes.²⁷ Many electors ignored the directive, and although in his previous contests Fox had relied upon a core support of “plumpers” who voted solely for him, this section of his electorate now collapsed and he became the centrist candidate who received votes split with both Tooke and the Pittite Sir Alan Gardner. Tooke’s 2,819 votes showed that Fox was vulnerable to a more consistent reformer, a fact underlined at a dinner for Tooke after the election by an elector who warned that if “Mr. Fox continued an enemy to all Reform, he could not expect the friendship of the people.”²⁸

In its other London strongholds, the London Corresponding Society similarly mobilized. In the City, which returned four MPs, efforts had been made by society members and Foxites since 1795 to press an antiwar agenda in the Liverymen’s Common Hall. During the election, these efforts translated into support for William Pickett, the former lord mayor and a member of the Society of Constitutional Information, who came a close fifth with 2,795 votes, and the Foxite H. C. Combe, who came third.²⁹ A similar effort was made in Southwark, which like Westminster possessed a wide “scot and lot” franchise. In early December 1795, the Foxite candidate, Michael Angelo Taylor, was approached by five men from the London Corresponding Society offering him support and “400 out of 500 votes in the Parish of St George.”³⁰ Taylor’s committee informed him that the society’s “interest was very powerful in the Borough,” a fact evident from the large public meeting it held in St. George’s Fields in June 1795 and the frequent meetings the society later held there against the Two Acts.³¹ The delegation made their overture in the same week that Foxites and society members began discussing the

²⁵ Thomas Oldfield, *An Entire and Complete Historical, Political, and Personal History of the Boroughs of Great Britain, together with the Cinque Ports*, vol. 2 (London, 1794), 389–90, at 389. For more on this electoral history, see Baer, *Rise and Fall*, 12–21; Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment Origins of British Radicalism* (London, 2003), 239–67.

²⁶ *The speeches of John Horne Tooke during the Westminster election, 1796* [...] (London, 1796), 5–36, at 5.

²⁷ Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, eds., *The Diary of Joseph Farrington*, vol. 2 (London, 1978), 562.

²⁸ *Speeches of John Horne Tooke*, 39–40, at 39. See also Alexander Stephens, *Memoirs of John Horne Tooke*, vol. 2 (London, 1813), 168; Penelope J. Corfield and Edmund M. Green, “Westminster Man: Charles James Fox and His Electorate, 1780–1806,” *Parliamentary History* 20, no. 2 (2001): 157–85, at 173–74; Cutting of *Morning Chronicle*, 29 June 1796, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27837, fol. 85.

²⁹ Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 26–27; J. R. Dinwiddy, “‘The Patriotic Linen-Draper’: Robert Waithman and the Revival of Radicalism in the City of London, 1795–1818,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 46, no. 113 (1973): 72–94.

³⁰ Charles Abbot diary, 10 December 1795, TNA, PRO 30/9/31, n149.

³¹ Charles Abbot diary, n149. See also *Oracle*, 12 and 25 November 1796; *Account of the Proceedings at a General Meeting of the London Corresponding Society [...] held in [...] St. George’s Fields [...] (London, 1795).*

prospect of a “junction”—an indication that the society had been planning to participate in the general election long before May 1796. It was also likely these members of the London Corresponding Society were those referred to in 1793 as “a kind of jarring interest in the *Borough of Southwark*,” who had begun a canvass that increased the lowest class of electors by “at least *one thousand*.”³² At some point prior to the election, Taylor was replaced by George Tierney. Tierney had formerly been the treasurer of the Society of the Friends of the People, which was founded in Southwark and led by a body of reforming Whigs before their disbandment amid the growing reaction of 1794. As part of this reaction, Tierney was largely responsible for the society’s report *The State of the Representation of England and Wales*, a plan of reform that, despite its moderation, was respected by the Jacobins. Tierney also likely had direct contact in this role with the corresponding society members, since Thelwall was also a member of the society and in 1792 Hardy sought to arrange an affiliation with the society.³³ At the election, Tierney stood under the slogan of “peace and reform against war and corruption” and utilized a canvass and public subscription like those in Westminster.³⁴ His first speech at the hustings was kept among Hardy’s papers, along with a ticket soliciting votes, further indicative of the society members’ roles as canvassers.³⁵ After petitioning the result and fighting a by-election, the result of which he again challenged, Tierney was finally seated in December. The win was celebrated by the society and Hardy in particular.³⁶

This agitation was not confined to London. At the beginning of 1796, the society sent out delegations to organize provincial sympathizers into organizations affiliated with the society, starting with the trips of John Gale Jones and John Binns to Kent and the south coast.³⁷ Society member Francis Place depicted these initiatives as over-ambitious failures, and historians have followed this assessment largely because both Jones and Binns were later arrested in Birmingham. In fact, the south coast tours were important precursors to the electoral organization of May and June.³⁸ Both men were instructed to ensure that those they met formed organizations based on the London Corresponding Society model, which pursued universal suffrage and annual elections, and they were not distracted by the Whig Club’s proposals for united action against the Two Acts.³⁹ The response was enthusiastic, with the Rochester reformers telling Jones after one of his speeches that they “professed their determination to live and die united with the London Corresponding Society.”⁴⁰

³² *Times*, 18 December 1793.

³³ *The State of the Representation of England and Wales* (London, 1793); Cecil Thelwall, *Life of Thelwall*, vol. 1 (London, 1837), 88; Thale, *Selections*, 15n32.

³⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 23 May 1796. See also *Morning Chronicle*, 26 May 1796.

³⁵ “To the Worthy and Independent Electors of the Borough of Southwark,” “Ticket eliciting support for Tierney,” Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fols. 58, 126. See also *Morning Post*, 4 November 1796.

³⁶ *Telegraph*, 23 November 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, 24 December 1796; “G. C. Sitting of Dec. 29,” Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fol. 145; Thale, *Selections*, 280.

³⁷ See Thale, *Selections*, 340 for the initial requests of these sympathizers for the delegations.

³⁸ Mary Thale, ed., *The Autobiography of Francis Place* (Cambridge, 1972), 148–50; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 398–403; Thale, *Selections*, xviii.

³⁹ Gale Jones, *Sketch of a Tour*, 35, 99–107; Binns, *Recollections*, 352; Thale, *Selections*, 343.

⁴⁰ Thale, *Selections*, 345.

This success was followed a few days later by the corresponding societies of Rochester, Chatham, and Brompton pledging to work with the society and pursue their program of reform, “even though it should be at the hazard of their lives.”⁴¹ As in London, these corresponding societies were open to supporting reforming, antiwar Foxites, and Jones likely anticipated the general election in his tour. The precursor of the Rochester Corresponding Society had contested the mayoral election the previous September “as warmly as if it had been for a Member of Parliament.”⁴² The Rochester organization began corresponding with its London counterpart, and Jones wrote that at the time of his visit, “the inhabitants in general were attached both to the Whig interest and to the London Corresponding Society”; he left believing the society was in “the most flourishing state.”⁴³ These reformers asked George Smith, former member of the Society of Constitutional Information and son of the former MP of the same name, to stand, but he declined, owing to the manner in which “the whole frame of Parliament is so completely election vitiated.”⁴⁴ They then pressed the recorder, John Longley, who had written a pamphlet advocating reform that Jones thought highly of, to contest the seat. Similarly, in Maidstone, Jones met the Foxite MP Clement Taylor, whom he described as an ally of the London Corresponding Society and “a strenuous friend to reform.”⁴⁵ While in the town, Jones set to work establishing a corresponding society, which was founded in the home of Taylor’s brother-in-law.⁴⁶ By the time of the election, Taylor declined to re-contest the seat, as he anticipated the government would force an expensive contest upon him; he was replaced with Christopher Hull, a London lawyer who had joined the Society of Constitutional Information in 1791.⁴⁷ Similarly the London Corresponding Society and a group of Portsmouth reformers jointly sought to maintain a group in Chichester, which was likely why William Hodgson, a member of the society recently imprisoned in Newgate for toasting the French Republic, briefly stood there.⁴⁸

This same pattern of deep-rooted electioneering by plebian reforming societies modeled on the London Corresponding Society was repeated in Norwich and Nottingham. In both boroughs, the franchise was held by freemen and freeholders, with weavers particularly prominent among them. Weaving, the principle trade in both boroughs, had been disrupted by the war, which along with the poor harvest of 1795, had increased the price of food. Both boroughs were home to well-organized reformers closely linked to those in London. In Norwich, the Revolution Society, which was affiliated with both the London Corresponding Society and the Society of Constitutional Information, was founded in 1792, before being reorganized into the Norwich Patriotic Society in April 1795. In its inaugural declaration, the

⁴¹ Thale, 345.

⁴² *Oracle*, 23 September 1795. For the precursor organization, see Thale, *Selections*, 314.

⁴³ Thale, *Selections*, 343. See also the correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fols. 7–8, 45, 51, 67, 71–72; Gale Jones, *Sketch of a Tour*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 20 May 1796.

⁴⁵ Gale Jones, *Sketch of a Political Tour*, 80.

⁴⁶ *St. James’s Chronicle*, 28 May 1796; Thale, *Selections*, 347; Gale Jones, *Sketch of a Tour*, 83–84.

⁴⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 27 May, 1 October 1796; *Morning Post*, 30 May 1796; Meetings of 9 December 1791, 9 May 1794, Papers relating to the London Corresponding Society and the Constitutional Society, TNA, TS 11/963; Thomas Howell, ed., *State Trials*, vol. 25 (London, 1818), cols. 255–56, 706.

⁴⁸ Thale, *Selections*, 112, 347; *True Briton*, 30 May 1796; “Address to the Inhabitants of Portsmouth and Southsea,” Miscellaneous Papers on Sedition Cases, TNA, TS 24/3/82.

Patriotic Society blamed excessive taxation and economic distress on abuse of the constitution and recommended universal parliaments and annual elections as the remedy. One of its stated purposes was “corresponding and co-operating with other societies united for the same objects,” and like the Revolution Society before it, it organized the wider region and worked closely with the London Corresponding Society.⁴⁹ In July, the Whig MP William Windham’s acceptance of the position of secretary at war in Pitt’s cabinet caused a by-election, and the opposition, centered around the Patriotic Society, managed to secure seven hundred votes, largely from weavers behind an absentee candidate. This antiwar reformism remained vibrant throughout 1795, with the publication of the openly pro-French *Cabinet* magazine, the organization of a petition of peace in October, and protests against the Two Acts in November and December.⁵⁰ As in London, Norwich’s reformers were organizing in preparation for the general election; as a “trial of strength” in May 1796, they made an “entirely unexpected” intervention in the mayoral election, seeking to remove the Pittite incumbent.⁵¹ In the same month, Anne Plumptre and Amelia Alderson, two local reformers who knew Tooke, invited John Thelwall to give lectures in the city, which he claimed regularly drew four thousand to five thousand people. Alderson was also a contributor to the *Cabinet*, and during the election she visited the Westminster hustings.⁵² Thelwall was almost certainly using these events as covers for electioneering, as at the same time he advertised a course of lectures in his rooms in Westminster “on the Elective Franchise of ancient Rome, and the miseries brought upon the people by its abuses and corruptions,” offered three days a week “during the present Election.”⁵³ Once the election was called, Thelwall sought the candidacy for the city, but as he was not qualified, the “members of the patriotic societies” settled on Bartlett Gurney, a Quaker who had worked on the defense in the Treason Trials and was believed to support “equal and universal suffrage,” with a canvass put together and Thelwall remaining to campaign for him.⁵⁴ The squibs distributed by Gurney’s supporters focused chiefly on the distress caused by the “continuance of this mad, murderous war,” which allowed Windham to earn £30,000 a year as the “War-Minister,” at the cost of both prosperity and human lives.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *The Declaration and Constitution of the Norwich Patriotic Society* [. . .] (Norwich, 1795), 1–4, at 4. *The Diary and Letters of Madame D’Arblay (Frances Burney)*, ed. Muriel Masefield, vol. 3 (London, 1892), 37–38, notes their expansion into neighboring villages.

⁵⁰ *An Address to the Electors of Norwich, Being a Vindication of the Principles and Conduct of Mr. Windham’s opponents* [. . .] (Norwich, 1794), 6; *The Cabinet* (Norwich, 1795); Jewson, *Jacobin City*, 59–61; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 391–92; *History of the Two Acts*, 306, 318–24; Thale, *Selections*, 331.

⁵¹ William Stevenson Notebook, Colman Manuscript Collection, entry for 1 May 1796, CO: 5/20, Norfolk Record Office, Norfolk.

⁵² John Thelwall, *An Appeal to Popular Opinion* [. . .] (London, 1796), 13; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 404; Charles Cestre, *John Thelwall, a Pioneer of Democracy and Social Reform in England during the French Revolution* (London, 1906), 128; Harriet Guest, *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013), 127–28; Page, *John Jebb*, 265.

⁵³ *Morning Chronicle*, 26 May 1796.

⁵⁴ *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, July 1796, 63, 64. See also *True Briton*, 28 May 1796; Guest, *Unbounded Attachment*, 128; Jewson, *Jacobin City*, 72.

⁵⁵ “To the Freemen of the City of Norwich”; “To the Citizens of Norwich,” Norwich Election Squibs, 1796, BUL 14/17, 619X6, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

In Nottingham, reformers had also contacted the London Corresponding Society as early as March 1792, and Hardy visited the town in November. By early 1794, these individuals had formed the Nottingham Society for Promoting a Reform in the Representation of the People, modeled directly on the London Corresponding Society. The group found strong support from workers whose years of agitation for higher pay led to local loyalists describing them as being “disposed to embrace the Levelling principle.”⁵⁶ In response, there was a growth in loyalist violence, which reached its apex in July 1794 and for a time achieved the suppression of reformism and antiwar activism. The 1796 general election therefore served as an opportunity for these reformers to return to operating openly and politicizing social grievances, which focused as in Norwich on the growing food shortages and the economic impact of the war.⁵⁷ Like Windham, one MP, Robert Smith, had been antiwar in 1792 but had since backed Pitt. The other, Daniel Parker Coke, supported the government, although he remained more open to peace. Against both MPs, the reformers adopted Dr. Richard Crompton, a close friend of Thelwall.⁵⁸ Crompton had “somewhat in the style of Horne Tooke”⁵⁹ just contested Derby, another location with a body of reformers who in August 1795 had sought affiliation with the London Corresponding Society.⁶⁰ Although Crompton only received six votes in Derby, in Nottingham he fared better by coming last with 561, compared to Smith’s victory with 1,210 and Coke coming second with 1,069. During the heated election, Crompton’s supporters made several demonstrations in which they allegedly sang the “Marseillaise” and carried a liberty tree, and the election ended with a riot as Crompton’s well-armed supporters successfully routed an attempt to prevent him leaving the town.⁶¹

Thus a significant number of reforming societies with plebeian memberships, in most cases explicitly modeled on the London Corresponding Society and all demanding the same program of peace and radical reform, made coordinated interventions in a number of boroughs with relatively broad electorates. Their involvement had a concrete effect, with lower-class electors mobilized by effective canvassing. Fox never recovered his plumper base in subsequent Westminster elections, while between 1796 and 1807 the vote of independent reformers grew. This development was a major victory for Tooke and his committee and a rejection of Fox’s explicit call for the continuation of his plumpers’ sole support.⁶² In Southwark, the talent of the London Corresponding Society for organizing lower-class electors is

⁵⁶ Joseph Jackson to John Reeves, 8 February 1793, BL, Add. MS 16925.

⁵⁷ John Frost Sutton, *The Date Book of Remarkable and Memorable Events Connected with Nottingham* [. . .] (London, 1852), 195, 197–200, 204–5, 207–13; Roger Wells, *Riot and Disaffection in Nottinghamshire in the Age of Revolutions, 1776–1803* (Nottingham, 1985), 10–12; S. Smith to the Treasurer Solicitor, 25 September, 1794, TNA, TS 11/966/3510; *The Patriot*, 12 March 1792; Thale, *Selections*, 26.

⁵⁸ Thompson, “Hunting the Jacobin Fox,” 112–13.

⁵⁹ Thale, *Selections*, 288.

⁶⁰ *Oracle*, 27 May 1796. See also Sutton, *Date Book*, 226. For some of the interactions between the London Corresponding Society and these organizations, see Thale, *Selections*, 21, 79, 80, 92, 96, 286, 292, 318; Copy of a Letter from Melbourne, Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fol. 2.

⁶¹ Thomas Bailey, *Annals of Nottinghamshire*, vol. 4 (London, 1853), 167–68; Sutton, *Date Book*, 225–26; *Télegraph*, 28 May 1796.

⁶² Corfield and Green, “Westminster Man,” 173–74.

evident in the fact that St. George's parish did go on to poll heavily for Tierney, just as they had promised.⁶³ In Nottingham, notably, Crompton received the most plumpers, at 364 compared to eighty-two for Coke and 282 for Smith. Most of these votes were the worsted weavers.⁶⁴ In Norwich, the poll book similarly illustrates that Gurney was supported by the immiserated weavers. With 1,076 votes, most of them plumpers, he was only eighty-three votes behind the second-placed Windham, whose 1,159 votes were largely secured by electors brought in from London and Norfolk.⁶⁵ Despite the close result, Thelwall was incensed that the wealthy Gurney had remained an absent candidate and did not pay to have electors travel to Norwich. His analysis is reflected in the poll book: only four London and ninety-eight country voters arrived to vote for Gurney, while forty-four and 259 were transported in by Windham. The self-described Jacobin Richard Dinmore, a merchant who canvassed and plumped for Gurney, reported that there were enough out-voters to win the election, but transporting voters looked too much like bribery to implement, despite its legality. The result was nevertheless an impressive one for the Gurney party, who had a mere three days of preparation before the poll.⁶⁶

These elections are revealing about the vitality of the London Corresponding Society in 1796. Francis Place's claim that the delegations and the publication of *The Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society* fatally drained the society's resources has influenced historians, yet in both his autobiography and his manuscript history of Westminster politics, he ignored all of these electoral interventions. This omission was likely because he had come to view the society in a Godwinian light as malignant beyond its encouragement of the consumption of rational reading material.⁶⁷ It is, in fact, evident that the Jacobin groups so far discussed not only made clear impacts during the elections but in most cases were galvanized by them. The elections involved the first large, legal meetings since the passing of the Two Acts. In all of these contests, the speeches coherently linked the war, economic distress, and the ongoing food crisis and attributed them to the constitutional abuses and war policy of Pitt's government. The speeches were reprinted in several publications in the months after the elections, including by publishers and London Corresponding Society members J. S. Jordan and John Smith, providing a legal form of political commentary that defied the Two Acts. Their actions support the suggestion that space still remained for the printing of opposition to Pitt and

⁶³ *Telegraph*, 28 May 1796.

⁶⁴ R. G. Thorne, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1790–1820*, vol. 2, Constituencies (London, 1986), 318.

⁶⁵ *The Poll for Members of Parliament, for the City and County of Norwich, Taken the Twenty-Fifth of May, 1796* (Norwich, 1796), 67.

⁶⁶ Dinmore, *Principles of the English Jacobins; Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, July 1796, 67; Thelwall, *Rights of Nature*, 28; *True Briton*, 31 May 1796; *Poll for Members, Norwich, 1796*, 67.

⁶⁷ Notes Respecting the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27808, fols. 71–72. Place's silence on 1796 is particularly striking since he collected newspapers on the Westminster election; see Collections of newspaper cuttings and other papers relating to elections at Westminster and other political events, from 1771 to 1838, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27837, fols. 50–72. See also Thale, *Autobiography*, 146–47; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 359–415; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 1, 20; Iain McCalman, "Unrespectable Radicalism: Infidels and Pornography in Early Nineteenth-Century London," *Past and Present*, no. 104 (1984): 74–110; Iowerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Abingdon, 1979), 92–93.

the war after 1795.⁶⁸ It caused the return of Tooke, Hardy, and Thelwall to politics following their absence after the 1794 Treason Trials and was likely one reason that the society's membership figures remained healthy during the first half of 1796.⁶⁹ All of this was also true outside London. Although in June the Rochester Society wrote to tell the London Corresponding Society that a case of fraud had caused them to collapse, in August a letter from Maidstone announced the official founding of a corresponding society there.⁷⁰ The societies in Norwich and Nottingham were particularly strengthened. In Norwich, those previously reviled "as Jacobins, Republicans, and Levellers, were now received as the guardians of domestic comfort," and in September the Patriotic Society put forward a member as a candidate in the election for sheriff.⁷¹ Although he narrowly lost, it was to a different reformer who was backed by the government but was nevertheless "a friend" of the society, a fact commended by the London Corresponding Society.⁷² In November a leafletting campaign in the city caused anti-militia protests, and a week later, effigies of Pitt, Windham, and the bishop of Rochester were burned by "some of the lowest Order of People."⁷³ In the same month, the Norwich group told the London Corresponding Society that the Nottingham Society had re-formed as the Nottingham Corresponding Society and that "the cause of reform proceeded rapidly there . . . The late election proved how much that city was against the present system of corruption."⁷⁴ The elections in Derby and Nottingham were also instrumental in the foundation shortly after of the Melbourne Corresponding Society, which reported to the London Corresponding Society in November that it continued slowly expanding.⁷⁵

II

This revival contributed to a feeling of confidence among reformers in early 1797, a period of economic and political crisis caused by fears of French invasion that led to

⁶⁸ Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution, 1789–99* (Basingstoke, 2000), 215. As well as *Speeches of John Home Tooke*, see J. S. Jordan, *The Westminster Election in the year 1796* [. . .] (London, 1796); J. S. Jordan, ed., *Jordan's Complete Collection of all the Addresses and Speeches* [. . .] (London, 1796); J. Smith, *Westminster Election: Speeches* [. . .] *Addressed to the Electors of the City of Westminster* [. . .] (1796); John Thelwall's *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, published on the elections in June, July, and August 1796.

⁶⁹ *Citizen Thelwall: Fraternity and Unanimity to the Friends of Freedom* (London, 1795); Thale, *Selections*, xxiii–xiv. Membership peaked at three thousand in July–December 1795, but there were fifteen hundred to two thousand paid-up members in January–June 1796, far higher than the two hundred and fifty to three hundred between July 1794 and June 1795.

⁷⁰ Letter from Rochester, 18 June 1796, and letter from Maidstone, 6 September 1796, Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fols. 67, 125.

⁷¹ *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, July, 1796, 64.

⁷² *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, July, 1796, 64; Letter from Norwich, September 6[?] 1796, Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fol. 122.

⁷³ William Stevenson Notebook, entry for 24 November 1796, COL 5/20, Norfolk Record Office.

⁷⁴ Thale, *Selections*, 376.

⁷⁵ Thale, *Selections*, 374; *The proceedings at a general meeting of the Nottingham Corresponding Society, held in the market place, on the 31st of July, 1797* [. . .] (1797); Letter from Melbourne, 30 July, and letter from Melbourne, 18 August 1797, Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27815, fols. 101, 168.

bank runs in February and dislocations caused by the Banking Restriction Act in May. The disruptions were followed by a naval mutiny in Spithead, largely over poor conditions, and then a much more serious and political one at the Nore. The London Corresponding Society had been discussing organizing a mass meeting to petition against the government, possibly as early as December, and in March it advertised this intention and called for other societies to join. The meetings were scheduled for 31 July, with Norwich planning to participate, and although the society's meeting in St. Pancras was interrupted by magistrates, Nottingham's Corresponding Society met unmolested by the town's sympathetic corporation.⁷⁶ Meanwhile the strategy of radicalizing the Foxites evident during the general election continued, with the society remaining cooperative but refusing to accept anything less than a commitment to universal suffrage and annual elections. The Foxite secession from Parliament later in the year, followed by Fox's gesture in a speech in October that he supported "discussion" of universal suffrage, was viewed by the society as a partial victory.⁷⁷ This galvanization should not be overstated, however. While Place's depiction of the 1796–97 period as disastrous is wrong, the society's membership did stagnate in 1798, and the organization was encumbered by financial burdens. In response, some reformers turned to insurrectionism, with links evident between them, the United Irishmen, and even perhaps some Foxites.⁷⁸ Alongside its sibling societies outside London, the society was banned by the government in 1799 in a raft of legislation that also led to mass arrests.

Appreciation of the Jacobin role in the 1796 general election significantly alters our understanding of the supposedly Jacobin 1802 general election, a description widely promulgated by anti-Jacobins at the time before being adopted by historians.⁷⁹ The election, held after the Treaty of Amiens secured a brief peace with Napoleon's France, was notable for victories by three reformers over incumbent MPs who had been supporters of the government. In Norwich, Windham was replaced with William Smith, a unitarian Foxite sympathetic to the Revolution, while in Nottingham, Coke was replaced with Joseph Birch, a Preston merchant. The most prominent victory was Sir Francis Burdett's contest in Middlesex, the county constituency within which the boroughs of Westminster and the City of London were located, where his success built upon several years' agitation against the "Bastille," Colbath Fields prison, its governor, and the constituency's Pittite MP, the banker William Mainwaring.⁸⁰ According to J. Ann Hone's argument in particular, the 1802 Middlesex election was a crucial precursor for the breakthrough of the 1807 Westminster election and an important moment in the shift from the insurrectionism evident in

⁷⁶ Thale, *Selections*, 394–95, 399–404; *Proceedings at a general meeting* [. . .] 2–3; Bailey, *Annals of Nottinghamshire*, 4:170.

⁷⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 11 October 1797 ("discussion"); W. Hamilton Reid, *Memoirs of the Life of John Horne Tooke* [. . .] (London, 1813), 136–37; Undated letter, and letter to the Rt. Honorable CJ Fox, Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society, Francis Place Papers, Add. MS 27815, fols. 130–31, 186–87; Thale, *Selections*, 365; *Courier*, 19 May 1797; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 32; Mitchell, *Fox*, 141–45.

⁷⁸ Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 44–82.

⁷⁹ Hone, 133; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 492–93; John Bowles, *Thoughts on the Late General Election as Demonstrative of the Progress of Jacobinism* (London, 1802).

⁸⁰ Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London, 1790–c. 1845* (Canberra, 2010), 49–82.

the London Corresponding Society's final years to constitutionalism.⁸¹ In no account has the 1802 general election been integrally associated with the significant and coordinated interventions in the 1796 general election, despite the clear links between the two. As this section outlines, the 1802 general election was an opportunity for many of the same men and women active in 1796 to continue to attack the government for its corruption, abuses of liberty, and economic record, now in a much firmer electoral alliance with the Whigs. Despite this organizational and political continuity, there was a notable shift in the relative dominance of these Jacobins and their Whig and patrician partners, with the popular reformers playing a considerably more subservient role that required the abandonment of much of the political culture evident in 1796.

As the 1802 elections indicate, the outlawing of the Jacobin societies in 1799 had not killed off their members' agitation. Veterans of the London Corresponding Society remained central to various campaigns across London and politicized the 1800–01 food crisis caused by bad harvests and the collapse of international trade, while there is evidence of the posthumous existence of local chapters of the society. In Nottingham, where there were also food riots in September 1800, spy reports and confiscated correspondence indicated widespread discontent and attempts to buy guns and subvert local troops before an anticipated rising. The Nottingham Corresponding Society's inaugural address and rules were also distributed during the food protests.⁸² It is therefore unsurprising that many of the participants in the 1796 contests directly participated in those in 1802. In Middlesex, John Frost, John Gale Jones, and Paul LaMaitre were among the former members of the London Corresponding Society who supported Burdett, along with barrister Robert Fergusson and attorney and former member of the Society of Constitutional Information John Augustus Bonney, who had been acquitted in the 1794 trials and was also involved in Tooke's contest in 1796. Frost himself stood in the tiny and usually uncontested borough of East Grinstead in Essex.⁸³ Henry Addington, the prime minister since 1801, considered these "exertions for Burdett" as evidence of "the revival of corresponding societies,"⁸⁴ an opinion shared by the *Times*, which, along with William Cobbett, also perceived a national Jacobin revival during the election, with Cobbett particularly singling out Middlesex, Norwich, and Nottingham.⁸⁵ In Nottingham, Birch's supporters were identified as the same "set of Tom Paine's men" who had asked Peter Crompton to stand in 1796.⁸⁶ Another account described Birch's supporters as "the lower classes, together with the Democratic party and the Corporation."⁸⁷ In Norwich, Smith was personally unknown but had been invited

⁸¹ Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 145–46.

⁸² Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History, 1688–1832* (London, 1997), 258; Golby letter to "Brothers & Sisters," 7 September 1800, TNA, HO 42/51, part 2, fol. 201; Deposition of Thomas Anders, TNA, HO 42/55; Letter from Ralph Fletcher of Bolton, TNA, HO 42/62, fol. 238; Thompson, "Hunting the Jacobin Fox," 116.

⁸³ *Considerations on the Late Elections for Westminster and Middlesex* (London, 1802), 48; *Times*, 13 July 1802.

⁸⁴ Francis Bickley, ed., *The Diaries of Sylvester Douglas (Lord Glenberrie)*, vol. 1 (London, 1928), 320.

⁸⁵ *Times*, 25 June, 21 July 1802; *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 24 July 1802.

⁸⁶ Thomas Creevey to Dr. James Currie, 10 July 1802, 920/CUR/10, Liverpool Record Office, Liverpool.

⁸⁷ *Norfolk Chronicle*, 24 July 1802.

by the circle that had supported Gurney in 1796. This group included not just the Gurney family but also Opie and Alderson, who collaborated with Smith's wife in running a canvass in London.⁸⁸ After the election, Windham dismissed the campaign as the "triumph . . . of Jacobin politics."⁸⁹

In each case, the contests possessed a similar tenor to their predecessors in 1796, with the campaigns focused on local distress caused by the corruption of the government. In Middlesex, Mainwaring's personal responsibility for the abuses in Coldbath Fields were the centerpiece of Burdett's campaign, which proceeded under the slogan of "No Bastille."⁹⁰ At the hustings, Burdett's seconder, William Breton, who in 1792 was a committee member of the Society of the Friends of the People, used his speech to attack the plotting "against the liberties, and for the oppression of the subject" by the "wicked and accursed parliament" elected in 1796.⁹¹ Burdett's speeches similarly utilized the Coldbath issue as the anchor point for a wider critique of the repression of the previous decade and the war's justification and economic legacy; the *Annual Register* for 1803 described his language as being "of the constitutional and corresponding associations, and of the Tookes, the Hardys, the Thelwalls."⁹² In Norwich, Smith's campaign attacked the war and heavy taxation as the cause of the "decay" of the city's "manufactures almost to annihilation," to the point that the poor were near starvation.⁹³ Although Smith affirmed his attachment to "the Constitution of this Country," like Breton and Burdett, he described himself "an enemy of those abuses and that corruption by which it has been deformed and endangered."⁹⁴ In Nottingham, Birch's campaign also appealed to "the lower orders of the people, who had suffered very severely during the war" and so "were naturally led to attribute their privations to the measures of the late Parliament, and particularly to Mr. Coke."⁹⁵ The rioting that occurred on the final day of polling, in which many of Birch's supporters intimidated Coke's voters and attacked his committee rooms, was seen as revenge for the anti-Jacobin violence of 1794.⁹⁶

In many respects, however, there were important divergences between the 1802 elections and those in 1796. The repression of 1799 had denied these reformers the ability to electioneer with the same level of ambition. Outside of Middlesex, Norwich, and Nottingham, the members of the defunct corresponding societies were unable to bring contests. After the revival in 1796, the Maidstone and Rochester corresponding societies had terminated by 1798, and made no showing in the

⁸⁸ Frances Smith to William Smith, [? July 1802], William Smith MSS, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/218; Amelie Opie to T. W. Smith, 29 October 1812, William Smith MSS, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/305.

⁸⁹ *The Poll for Members of Parliament for the City of Norwich* [. . .] (Norwich, 1802), 78. See also letter from Windham 7 July 1802, Thomas Grenville Papers, BL, Add. MS. 41854, fol. 315; letter from Smith 19 October 1806, Holland House Papers, BL, Add. MS 51573, fol. 195.

⁹⁰ *Report of the Proceedings during the late Contested Election for the County of Middlesex* (London, 1802), 26.

⁹¹ *Report of the Proceedings*, 19.

⁹² *Annual Register* [. . .] for the Year 1802 (London, 1803), 185. For Burdett's language, see *Report of the Proceedings*, 31, 45, 48–49, 54, 56, 60–61, 63, 67–69.

⁹³ *Poll for Members, Norwich, 1802*, xi.

⁹⁴ *Poll for Members, Norwich, 1802*, xii.

⁹⁵ Sutton, *Date Book*, 255.

⁹⁶ Letter from Henry Sedley to Duke of Portland, 12 July 1802, Pl/C 54/32, University of Nottingham Library, Manuscripts and Special Collection; *Morning Chronicle*, 16 July 1802.

1802 elections. Southwark's reformers struggled to mount an opposition after George Tierney refused to secede with the Foxites and instead joined Addington. According to Lord Holland, Tierney consequently "lost the support of the violent party to whom he owed his seat."⁹⁷ Those Tierney dubbed "the *remnant of the Jacobin Party*" turned to supporting a third candidate, who quickly withdrew.⁹⁸ In the City, the Foxite Combe was again returned but the candidates supported by the former members of the London Corresponding Society around Hardy fared poorly.⁹⁹ There was clear potential for a challenge in Westminster, where an auctioneer, John Graham, stood as an independent and explicitly appealed to "the middle rank of society."¹⁰⁰ However, he received no support, and no other prospective candidate was discussed, likely because Tooke now thought highly of Fox, who was supporting Burdett.¹⁰¹ As this rapprochement indicates, the coalescing of the Jacobin or "Democratical" parties and the Foxites was now much firmer and more formal than in 1796. While Smith was an acknowledged Foxite, and Birch was the candidate of the Whig Corporation, Burdett was nominated by H. C. Combe and openly supported by the Duchess of Devonshire, Fox, and Lord Holland, who canvassed in the colors of both Burdett and George Byng, the Whig MP for Middlesex's other seat.¹⁰²

As part of this convergence, Jacobin politics and organization was subsumed into Whiggism. Distancing from Jacobinism by candidates became especially visible in the by-elections in Nottingham in 1803, called because in 1802 the Whig sheriffs had illegally reopened the poll to allow Birch to stand, and in Middlesex in 1804, because a select committee found that both Burdett and Mainwaring had committed illegal acts. Both men lost, although Burdett would successfully petition the result in 1805.¹⁰³ Birch's processions carried Crompton's flag from 1796 amid a sea of solid Whig-orange flags and banners that paid tribute to Birch and Fox, and to Byng, who had arrived in the town to support Birch. Birch may have still been supported by insurrectionaries and clandestine activists, with one spy report describing travels around London with a "very violent Jacobin" from Nottingham connected to secret societies in the metropolis who "lamented Birch's being thrown out," and claiming that Birch's election headquarters were also the lodgings of a United Irishman.¹⁰⁴ Birch nevertheless expressed surprise in one of his speeches that "this jargon about Loyalty and Jacobinism should be still be kept up and attended to."¹⁰⁵ He now reformulated his appeals to a broad lower-class constituency by describing the election as "nothing more than a contest between the rich and the poor" and by explicitly

⁹⁷ Lord Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party during My Time*, vol. 1 (London, 1852), 93.

⁹⁸ *Norfolk Chronicle*, 17 July 1802. See also *Times*, 25 and 26 June 1802; *Morning Post*, 8 and 9 July 1802.

⁹⁹ *Times*, 29 June; 6, 7, 10, 16 July 1802; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 132.

¹⁰⁰ *Times*, 6 July 1802. See also *Times*, 7–10 and 12–16 July 1802.

¹⁰¹ Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party*, 180.

¹⁰² *Morning Chronicle*, 17 July 1802; *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 17 July 1802; Bowles, *Thoughts*, 11; *Considerations on the Late Election*, 48.

¹⁰³ Henry Hunt, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt*, vol. 2 (London, 1967), 139; A. Aspinall, ed., *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 4, *January 1802 to December 1807* (Cambridge, 1967), 158.

¹⁰⁴ Examination of John Mellish, TNA, PC 1/3583, fols. 3 and 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Coke and Birch: The Paper War Carried on at the Nottingham Election, 1803* [. . .] (Nottingham, [1803?]), 253.

presenting himself as the candidate of the “working class.”¹⁰⁶ This attempt was likely intended to appeal to a new constituency that had formed in the town since the food riots of September 1800, when lower-class rioters were reportedly a “Union of parties their being no Scrats [loyalists] nor painites nor Such Song as God save the King to be heard.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in the 1802 election, many of Coke’s “former supporters were now highly exasperated against him, and throughout his canvass, on his way to and from the polling-booth, he was several times unjustly and grossly insulted.”¹⁰⁸ Birch did achieve a strong majority among lower-class voters, securing 615 votes from the framework knitters, compared to 454 for Coke.¹⁰⁹

In his first speech at the 1804 by-election, Burdett refused to “disclaim the friends who upon the last election honoured me with their support”—most likely a reference to his formal agents Bonney and Frost.¹¹⁰ Like Birch, he was careful to allude to support for reform, arguing that his mission was “vindicating the oppressed” by “using every endeavour in my power to restore the rights and liberties of my country.”¹¹¹ His campaign, now against Mainwaring’s son, opposed the family’s corruption of the constituency, which was considered part of the broader corruption of the constitution by a clique of financiers and politicians who supported Pitt, whose second administration had been formed in May. Nevertheless, and again like Birch, he was keen to distinguish himself from the charge that he or his supporters were Jacobins. At the hustings he avowed “Whig principles” and his long-term support for the “Whig Interest,” which caused Windham to incorrectly suppose a break between Burdett and the former members of the London Corresponding Society.¹¹² The Whigs cultivated this notion: Burdett was nominated by Peter Moore, the Whig MP for Coventry, while prominent Whigs again openly canvassed for him. In his speeches, Burdett explicitly rejected the charge of Jacobinism.¹¹³ The previously anti-Jacobin William Cobbett now supported Burdett, having come to view the Pittite clique of financiers such as the Mainwarings as grave a threat to the constitution as Bonaparte, and the former Jacobin “Burdettites” as newfound moderates—the evidence their flags, “on which ‘No Bastille’ was exchanged for ‘Burdett and Independence.’”¹¹⁴ Burdett was keen to obscure the participation of many more former members of the Society of Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society than Bonney and Frost alone: according to the spy John Moody, a former member of the London Corresponding Society who

¹⁰⁶ *Paper War*, at 252; for Birch’s references to “working class,” see *Paper War*, 21, 274, 276.

¹⁰⁷ Golby letter to “Brothers & Sisters,” 7 September 1800, TNA, HO 42/51, fol. 201.

¹⁰⁸ Sutton, *Date Book*, 255.

¹⁰⁹ *A Complete Alphabetical List of the [...] Burgess & Freeholders Who Polled at the Late Nottingham Election [...] (Nottingham, 1803)*, appendix.

¹¹⁰ *A Full Report of the Speeches of Sir Francis Burdett at the Late Election* (London, 1804), 2. For a defense of Bonney and Frost, see *Full Report*, xviii.

¹¹¹ *Full Report*, 46.

¹¹² *Full Report*, 45. For Windham, see William Windham, *The Windham Papers*, vol. 2 (London, 1913), 235.

¹¹³ John Bernard Trotter, *Memoirs of the Latter Years of Charles James Fox* (London, 1811), 43–44; *Full Report*, 46.

¹¹⁴ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 8 September 1804. See also *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 25 August and 1, 8, 29 September 1804, and his letter to Windham: *The Life and Letters of William Cobbett in England and America*, vol. 1 (London, 1913), 226, for Cobbett’s evolving thought on Burdett.

was the secretary of Tooke's 1796 election committee and worked for Burdett in 1802 and 1804, these "Correspondists" were kept "in the background" when the Whigs visited Burdett's home in 1804.¹¹⁵ This circumspection was far removed from the period when these same "Correspondists" had pursued an independent program and confidently held to a policy of only cooperating with the Foxites in order to draw them closer to this program.

Unlike in 1796, former members of the London Corresponding Society during and after 1802 were largely instrumentalized as a means of appealing to lower-class electors, often in illegal and expensive means funded by Burdett's immense wealth. It appears that a feeling of defeat drove these veterans to this course, as Moody claimed that the rise of Napoleon had disillusioned them and made their politics more pragmatic. As Cobbett's case suggests, the replacement of anti-Jacobinism with opposition to Napoleon's tyranny allowed them to reengage with politics, albeit on clearly delineated terms.¹¹⁶ The shift in their status from independent activists in 1796 to employees within a professionalized electoral machinery funded by Burdett is illustrated by John Frost's itemized claim for £2,958 of wages and expenses for his election work, most of which Burdett refused to pay.¹¹⁷ While Frost gave speeches alongside legal work, Moody was tasked with distributing tracts, many of them inflammatory, attacking the Mainwaring family, while in 1802 Thomas Evans, the insurrectionary former member of the London Corresponding Society, was paid to draw information from the prisoners in Coldbath and probably also to heckle Mainwaring.¹¹⁸ These tactics evolved into performing explicitly illegal acts that needed to be distanced from Burdett. When a victory seemed possible late in the 1802 election, these men arranged the purchase and selling of shares in a mill in order to fabricate hundreds of voters alongside the direct payment of several perjured voters, who lied about their identities or eligibility in order to vote for Burdett. One of the attempted perjuries was by Richard Tidd, who may have been radicalized by living in Nottingham in the 1790s; in 1820, he would be executed for his part in the Cato Street Conspiracy.¹¹⁹ Burdett's electoral corruption was reprised on a substantially larger scale from the outset of the by-election in 1804, when Moody was tasked with running a network of former members of the London Corresponding Society, "some to Bribe & Treat," while "our Hero & his avowed Agent are to be as pure and unspotted

¹¹⁵ For unknown reasons Burdett had a copy of this letter: Letter of "Notary" (John Moody), 18 July 1804, MS Eng. Hist. b200, fol. 22, Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as Bod.) Moody is listed as Tooke's secretary in the pamphlet "At a Meeting of the Committee for Promoting the Election of John Horne Tooke," BL, Add MS 27837, fol. 68; see also Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 64.

¹¹⁶ Letter of "Notary" (John Moody), 18 January 1804, TNA, HO 42/78, fols. 148–49, at 148; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 98, 137–38.

¹¹⁷ Claim of John Frost within *Litigation with John Frost, 1806–1808*, Bod., MS Eng. Hist. b200, fol. 58.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Moser to John King, 4 August 1804, TNA, HO 42/77, fols. 186–88; *Full Report*, 78; MacCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 16–17; *Report of the Proceedings during the Late Contested Election for the County of Middlesex* (London, 1802), 34.

¹¹⁹ *Report from the Select Committee, who were Appointed to Try and Determine the Merits of the Several Petitions, Complaining of an Undue Election and Return for the County of Middlesex* [. . .], House of Commons Papers 171 (1803–1804), 133; *Copy of the Poll, for the Election* [. . .] *for the County of Middlesex* [. . .] (London, 1802), 40; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 August 1802; Hunt, *Memoirs*, 2:139; *Examiner* (London), 28 May 1820.

as Caesar's wife."¹²⁰ Hundreds of perjured votes were manufactured in Burdett's committee rooms; it was estimated that Burdett had spent £94,000 "out of his own pocket" during the two elections.¹²¹ This situation was not unique to Middlesex. Windham publicly complained of "those Arts" of bribery utilized by Smith.¹²² He also told Granville the 1802 election was "a mixed triumph of Jacobinism & money, neither being sufficient alone, nor both together."¹²³ Windham claimed that Smith's expenditure was so heavy he was forced to spend £8,000, "double or triple" his expectation from previous contests.¹²⁴ Smith himself spent illegally until 1826, when he publicly renounced corruption. By his own admission, in 1806 he struggled with electoral expenditure, since he "should not know where or how to stop."¹²⁵

The use of patrician wealth for illegal acts was a distinction between the 1802 and 1796 general elections. Burdett was likely influenced by his mentor, Tooke. In 1790, Tooke stood in explicit opposition to Fox and Pitt's use of corruption, but despite this, he admitted many years later to spending "between three and four thousand pounds" after the election, personally rewarding those who voted for him.¹²⁶ This practice was considered by the courts as late as 1785 as essentially bribery and so was not publicized at the time.¹²⁷ Before this, Tooke had been an agent first for Fox and then the Pittite candidates in the excessively corrupt and violent Westminster elections of the 1780s.¹²⁸ In 1769, he was one of hundreds controversially made honorary freemen of Bedford by the Wilkeite Sir Robert Bernard (between 1770 and 1774 the MP for Westminster) so that he could control the constituency, and as Bernard's estate and election agent, he controlled these electors.¹²⁹ In 1776, his friend Thomas Brand Hollis, who later became a founding member of the Society of Constitutional Information, was convicted of bribery and imprisoned for

¹²⁰ Letter of "Notary" (John Moody), 18 July 1804, Bod., MS Eng. Hist. b200, fol. 22. See also M. W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and His Times, 1770–1844*, vol. 1 (London, 1931), 149;

¹²¹ Hunt, *Memoirs*, 2:139. For more on the corruption and events of the election generally, see Bowles, *Letter to the Electors*, 9–10; threatening letter sent to Richard Taylor, letter from Mainwaring to Hawkesbury 9 August 1803, TNA, HO /42/77, fols. 190, 192; Report on the election, 14 August 1804, Report of 15 August 1804, TNA HO 42/79, fols. 136, 246–53; *Times*, 21 and 22 December 1804, 13 July 1805.

¹²² *Poll for Members, Norwich, 1802*, 78.

¹²³ Letter from William Windham, 7 July 1802, Thomas Grenville Papers, BL, Add. MS 41854, fol. 315.

¹²⁴ Windham to unknown, "Dec. 06," William Windham Correspondence, BL, Add. MS 37885, fol. 11.

¹²⁵ Letter from William Smith, 19 October 1806, Holland House Papers, BL, Add MS 51573, fol. 202. For Smith, his elections, and corruption, see William Smith to Joanna Smith, 25 December 1826, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/143; Amelie Opie to T. W. Smith, 29 October 1812, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/305; Jewson, *Jacobin City*, 110; Richard W. Davis, *Dissent in Politics, 1780–1830: The Political Life of William Smith MP* (London, 1971), 121.

¹²⁶ James Paull, *A Refutation of the Calumnies of John Horne Tooke* [...] (London, 1807), 23–25, at 25. For Tooke's anti-corruption rhetoric in 1790 see John Horne Tooke, *To the Electors of Westminster* (London, 1790).

¹²⁷ Alexander Luders, *Reports of the Proceedings in Committees of the House of Commons upon Controverted Elections* [...], vol. 1 (London, 1785), 35; *Times*, 31 March 1790.

¹²⁸ James Hartley, *History of the Westminster Election* [...] (London, 1785), 163–64, 198–99, 201; Philip Henry Stanhope, *The Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt* (London, 1879), 164–66, 200–2.

¹²⁹ J. H. Wiffen, *Historical Memoirs of the House of Russell, from the Time of the Norman Conquest*, vol. 2 (London, 1833), 579; Letters between John Horne Tooke and Sir William Bernard, M12/2, Huntingdonshire Archives, Huntingdon.

attempting to spend £1,000 purchasing a rotten borough.¹³⁰ In Parliament, Sir William Wake, Bernard's MP for Bedford between 1774 and 1784, defended these measures by arguing that they were necessities required to combat the oligarchic and aristocratic usurpation of the constitution. The insight was a revealing one into how the emphasis in reformist and Whig constitutionalist thought on the necessity of the balancing of the constitution between commons, aristocracy, and the monarch justified illegal actions at elections for these reformers.¹³¹ Burdett was similarly pragmatic, first entering Parliament by buying a rotten borough in 1796, and Tooke himself later accepted a rotten borough in 1802.¹³²

This pragmatic attitude illustrates how matters of political organization can have intellectual implications. It also disrupts too neat a categorization of radical continuity during this period. The London Corresponding Society did not share this tolerance of the use of corruption at elections as a means of balancing the constitution but openly rejected it.¹³³ Tooke's attack on electoral corruption at the 1790 election had a formative influence on many, with Thelwall spontaneously deciding to canvass for him without any compensation.¹³⁴ In 1796, Tooke's committee of mainly London Corresponding Society members spent £660 on purely legal costs while emphasizing his opposition to illegal acts.¹³⁵ The Jacobins of 1796 resolved only to support candidates unwilling to spend illegally, and the contests in the City, Derby, Nottingham, Kent, and Norwich were all singled out in the *Monthly Magazine* as being "without the usual and sordid accompaniment of bribes, treats, or promises."¹³⁶ Crompton stood under a purple flag with the mottos "Honest and unbought votes" and "The Freeman's Standard."¹³⁷ In Norwich, Gurney was pledged as a candidate free of "dishonourable expence," whose votes would be "*unbought* and *unsolicited*."¹³⁸ In Southwark, Tierney "and the Friends of Freedom [stood] without a shilling of expence, without shew, without cockades, flages, or open houses, without spreading the disorders of drunkenness, or bribing the Electors."¹³⁹ A decade later, this contest

¹³⁰ *Chester Chronicle*, 20 June 1776; John Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis, Esq.* (London, 1808), 11–12.

¹³¹ John Almon, *The Parliamentary Register* [. . .], vol. 1 (London, 1785), 445. For the importance of the Neo-Harrington idea of a balanced constitution to constitutionalist radicals, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1989), 104–47; J. R. Dinwiddie, *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780–1850* (London, 1992), 109–24; John Brewer, "English Radicalism in the Age of George III," in *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Princeton, 1990), 323–67.

¹³² Patterson, *Burdett and His Times*, 1:38–39; Countess of Minto, ed., *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto* [. . .], vol. 3 (London, 1874), 201; *Morning Chronicle*, 14 July 1818.

¹³³ *The London Corresponding Society to the Nation at Large* [. . .] (London, 1791); *Address of the London Corresponding Society to the Societies of Great Britain* [. . .] (London, 1793); *The Address published by the London Corresponding Society at the General Meeting held at the Globe Tavern, Strand* [. . .] (London, 1794).

¹³⁴ Thelwall, *Life of Thelwall*, 72, 74; *Morning Chronicle*, 24 November 1794.

¹³⁵ Paull, *Refutation*, 24; Collections of newspaper cuttings and other papers relating to elections at Westminster and other political events, from 1771 to 1838, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27837, fols. 59–72.

¹³⁶ *Monthly Magazine*, June 1796, 418.

¹³⁷ *Complete Alphabetical List*, appendix.

¹³⁸ *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, July 1796. See also John Thelwall, *The Rights of Nature against the Usurpation of the Establishments* [. . .] (Norwich, 1796), 26–27; W. H. Bidwell, *Annals of an East Anglian Bank* (London, 1900), 43–45.

¹³⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, 26 May 1796.

was still remembered, as Tierney predicted it would be, as an inspiration.¹⁴⁰ The lack of expense was not out of parsimony. For Paine, the unencumbered use of reason at elections guaranteed virtuous government and was therefore so damaging to the interests of the aristocracy that it was “necessary to buy the reason up,” unlike the exemplary free and fair French elections of 1789.¹⁴¹ In a pamphlet written just before the general election, Thelwall described how questions of government must be decided by “*Sovereign Reason*, the collective reason of the SOVEREIGN PEOPLE . . . the concentrated opinion of mankind.”¹⁴² Since the “multitude have no interest in reasoning wrong,” only external inducement and restraint could undermine such universal will.¹⁴³ Similarly, in August 1797 the Norwich Patriotic Society published a Paineite pamphlet arguing that for Parliament to be “the expression of the general will,” the franchise “ought to reside in the public at large” without any hindrance whatsoever.¹⁴⁴ Along these lines, the London Corresponding Society called for “unbiased and unbought elections” as one of its core demands from its earliest days; the resulting “Honest Parliament” would serve the public good by being indivisible from this collective and unencumbered use of reason.¹⁴⁵

The 1796 general election therefore provided proof that such conduct could be expected of electors, including the poor. Afterward, Thelwall described a manufacturer in Nottingham who, despite opposing the war and the government, voted against Crompton to appease his creditors. He compared this with the “sans-cullotism” of a poor man who voted “from [his] heart” for Crompton against his employer’s wishes.¹⁴⁶ Thelwall argued that the action proved that virtuous conduct was not dependent upon wealth, and that it would be commonplace if Britons were able to exercise agency at elections. For Dinmore, the poor Norwich electors sought such agency, as even “the men who were *forced*, BY OPPRESSIVE MASTERS, to vote for Windham, with *tears* wished us success.”¹⁴⁷ The 1796 contests were therefore significant because the oppositions at these elections demonstrated genuine popular sentiment in the face of inducement and coercion.¹⁴⁸ By resisting these measures, these contests combated one of the most lasting effects of corruption, a demoralization that undermined the use of reason and with it public virtue. As Thelwall argued in the *Tribune*, “the system of open prostitution and corruption” at elections “produces in the hearts and characters of the people . . . the degeneracy of morals and manners.”¹⁴⁹ It was no coincidence that the vice and misfortune in his mentor William Godwin’s novel *Caleb Williams* was ultimately derived from a corrupt and coercive election, and this

¹⁴⁰ S. F. Waddington, *Three Letters to [. . .] George Tierney* (London, 1806), 5–7; *The Reasoner* (London, 1808), 403. Tierney predicted this in his hustings speech on 25 May: *Morning Chronicle*, 26 May 1796.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (Oxford, 2008), 191. See also 141–42 for the discussion of French elections.

¹⁴² John Thelwall, *Sober Reflections on the Seditious and Inflammatory Letter of Edmund Burke [. . .]* (London, 1796), 112.

¹⁴³ Thelwall, *Sober Reflections*, 114.

¹⁴⁴ *An Address from the Patriotic Society of Norwich to the Inhabitants of that City* (Norwich, 1797), 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Address from the London Corresponding Society to the Inhabitants of Great Britain on the Subject of a Parliamentary Reform* (London, 1792), reprinted in Thale, *Selections*, 18–19, at 18.

¹⁴⁶ Thelwall, *Rights of Nature*, 26–27, at 27.

¹⁴⁷ *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society*, July 1796, 64.

¹⁴⁸ Phillips, *Electoral Behaviour*, 79.

¹⁴⁹ John Thelwall, *Tribune, a periodical publication [. . .]*, vol. 2 (London, 1796), 386–87, at 386.

formed part of a broader belief of Jacobin reformers that the prerequisite of a stable constitution was a morally and politically improved people, a legacy of which was Place's lifelong contempt for electoral corruption and his intense dislike of Tooke.¹⁵⁰

III

The coalitions between radical reformers and Whigs in the elections between 1802 and 1804 therefore illustrate a commitment to the electioneering begun in 1796 and the development of a constitutionalist language linking economic distress to political corruption that left open the possibility of reform. There are also clear and important discontinuities within this electoral culture. This final section outlines how the period of the 1806 and 1807 general elections saw a break between the Whigs and the veterans of the London Corresponding Society, who now reverted to the Jacobin culture and methods of 1796 to return an independent reforming candidate in the breakthrough 1807 election.

In Nottingham in 1806, Birch returned as a candidate and extolled the “spirit of enlightened and pure Whiggism” while presenting himself as protecting the independence of the freemen against the grasping local oligarchs.¹⁵¹ He once again sought reformist and working-class voters by attacking the morality of the war against the French Republic and criticizing the national debt and high taxation as ruinous to the “industrious poor.”¹⁵² Although he lost, he received 1,190 plumpers. He also vocally committed himself to electoral purity, which convinced Crompton to stand down as a prospective candidate, although it was claimed he spent heavily regardless.¹⁵³ Birch remained the candidate of the Whig Corporation, which was improperly asserting itself over Parliamentary elections.¹⁵⁴ In contrast, Crompton stood in the town in the 1807 general election as an independent reformer, complaining in his opening address about the corruption utilized by the Tories in 1806 and proposing annual elections as the solution. In the event, the hostile *Nottingham Review* described his contest as “feeble and pitiful,” and he apparently struggled to find electors, which was later attributed to his refusal to bribe or treat voters.¹⁵⁵ His polling of 635 votes, 302 behind the winner of the second seat, is nevertheless indicative of a cohesive reforming body separate from the Whigs, albeit not strong enough to win without them. These reformers celebrated the news of Burdett's victory in Westminster a month later with public dinners, processions, music, and fireworks.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile in Norwich, prior to the 1806 general election, Smith

¹⁵⁰ William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Oxford, 2013), 360–61; Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (Oxford, 2009); Claeys, *Politics of English Jacobinism*, xxxvii; History of general politics; 1714–1784; and of Westminster politics; 1790–1792, Francis Place Papers, BL, MS 27849, fol. 120; History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, MS 27850, fols. 17–20, 107.

¹⁵¹ *An Alphabetical List of the Burgesses and Freeholders Who Polled* [. . .] *for the Election of two Burgesses to Represent the Town of Nottingham* [. . .] (Nottingham, 1806), 8, 10, 12, 14, at 8.

¹⁵² *Alphabetical List*, 12.

¹⁵³ *Alphabetical List*, 12. For suggestions of expense, see the letters of James Abercromby, cited in Thorne, *History of Parliament*, 2:318–19.

¹⁵⁴ *Nottingham Journal*, 8, 15 November 1806; Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham*, 145–46.

¹⁵⁵ *Nottingham Journal*, 2 May 1807. See *Nottingham Journal*, 22 May 1807, for the claim that his loss was because of his refusal to bribe.

¹⁵⁶ Sutton, *Date Book*, 280.

noted that “the vindication of our principles” and “temper of the times” that had animated the 1802 contest had dissipated, and he ultimately lost his seat due to an unexpected contest over the Norwich Paving Bill.¹⁵⁷ He remained a reformer on the radical wing of the Whig party, and after his return for Norwich in 1807 cooperated with Burdett and the Westminster radicals, although he came under vocal criticism in the city for his support of the war in Spain and the attack on Copenhagen.¹⁵⁸

The legacies of the 1796 general election in Norwich and Nottingham were effective coalitions of reformers and Whigs. In London, the inverse occurred. By March 1804, Burdett had run out of funds and refused to consider selling any more land, as he knew he would spend all his ready money.¹⁵⁹ When his victory in the 1804 by-election was overturned for its corruption, a subscription was organized to pay for a petition to Parliament, which led to the creation of the Middlesex Freeholders’ Club.¹⁶⁰ As the club’s stated aims were to coordinate the fighting of Burdett’s elections through subscriptions and without illegal acts, it represented the first effort to return to the methods of 1796, and it included a number of former members of the London Corresponding Society and Society of Constitutional Information who had been active in that general election.¹⁶¹ After Burdett was reinstated in 1805, Mainwaring’s supporters again petitioned Parliament detailing his corruption, which the Burdettites decided they could not afford to contest.¹⁶² All of this activity was compounded by Burdett’s break with the Whigs after Fox’s entry into coalition with Grenville in 1805, and this renegeing of the electoral coalitions active since 1796 disgusted not just reformers but also some Whig electors.¹⁶³ By the time of the general election in October 1806, Burdett decided to contest Middlesex and denounced the Grenville coalition, but coming so soon after Fox’s death in September, his attack on Grenville offended many Whig leaders, leading to Byng opposing Burdett rather than staying neutral.¹⁶⁴ Opposed by two candidates and restricted by his lack of money and the commitment of the Middlesex Freeholders’ Club to electoral purity, Burdett decided to publicly oppose the use of corruption, to the amusement of the *Morning Chronicle*.¹⁶⁵ He came last in the poll with a vote substantially lower than in the previous elections.

¹⁵⁷ Letter of Smith, 19 October 1806, Holland House Papers, BL, Add. MS 51573, fol. 195. For recollections of the 1802 election within the Smith family, see William Smith to Joanna Smith, 25 December 1826, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/143; Amelie Opie to T. W. Smith, 29 October 1812, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/305.

¹⁵⁸ *A Letter Addressed to Wm. Smith, Esq., M.P. for Norwich Shewing That His Political Conduct Has Rendered Him No Longer Deserving the Support of His Constituents* (Norwich, 1809).

¹⁵⁹ Patterson, *Burdett and His Times*, 1:154–55.

¹⁶⁰ Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 144; *Declaration and Regulations of the Middlesex Freeholders’ Club* (London, 1804).

¹⁶¹ *Declaration and Regulations of the Middlesex Freeholders’ Club*, 4; *History of the Middlesex and Westminster Elections in November 1806* (1807), 291–311; J. Ann Hone, “William Hone (1780–1842), Publisher and Bookseller: An Approach to Early 19th Century London Radicalism,” *Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1974): 55–70, at 58.

¹⁶² *Morning Chronicle*, 6 April 1805.

¹⁶³ Patterson, *Burdett and His Times*, 1:181; History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party*, 1:180–81; 920 ROS/2090, Liverpool Record Office; Patterson, *Burdett and His Times*, 1:182–91.

¹⁶⁵ “To the Freeholders Club of Middlesex,” Bod., MS Eng. Hist. b200, fol. 27; *Morning Chronicle*, 31 October 1806.

This defeat and the collapse of Burdett's finances opened the door for his supporters to revert to methods more similar to the 1796 contest. The origins of the 1807 Westminster contest are well known, but neglect of the 1796 general election has led to its novelty being seriously overstated.¹⁶⁶ During the 1806 general election, several former members of the London Corresponding Society began organizing a committee to support the nabob and moderate radical James Paull's candidacy in Westminster. This group included William Adams, a figure in the Middlesex Freeholders' Club, and two veterans of Tooke's 1796 contest, Paul LeMaitre and George Puller. The Whig candidate, Richard Sheridan, ultimately won, but his conduct alienated lower-class electors already angry about the coalition, including his own supporters.¹⁶⁷ In the aftermath, and after an acrimonious dispute and duel with Burdett, Paull was abandoned by the committee. Place and Adams then visited Burdett at Tooke's home to discuss his standing for Westminster, with Burdett, injured in the duel and still struggling financially, refusing unless he spent no money and performed no electioneering.¹⁶⁸ His terms were accepted, and Paull's "Westminster Committee" was reassembled behind Burdett for the 1807 general election, with the addition of two more veterans of Tooke's 1796 committee, Samuel Brooks and William Friend, and two more former members of the London Corresponding Society, James Powell and John Ridley.¹⁶⁹ For the committee, Burdett's refusal to actively participate was fortuitous, as it facilitated the desire first evident in the Middlesex Freeholders' Club to break with the compromise of 1802 and Burdett's expensive electioneering. The return to the language and principles of virtue, reason, and electoral purity was given further momentum by the 1806 by-election, when Place reported that along with his friends he felt "indignation" at the "disgraceful scene" of food being thrown to the crowd and beer flowing into the gutter after the Whig Lord Percy's victory.¹⁷⁰ In the 1806 general election a month later, these men found Paull distasteful, not only because he was controlling and erratic but also because he insisted on utilizing corrupt practices and spent £6,000, an assessment his own brother agreed with.¹⁷¹ With Burdett's non-interference in 1807, they could now operate independently and with initiative, taking no instruction or money from their candidate and organizing along the principles and political culture of 1796: cheap and legal electioneering, secured by popular participation.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Place documents the contest, BL, Add. MS 27850. See also Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 504–14; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 133–46; Main, "Radical Westminster, 1807–1820"; Baer, *Rise and Fall*, 12–21.

¹⁶⁷ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 25–26, 40–41; Baer, *Rise and Fall*, 21.

¹⁶⁸ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 47.

¹⁶⁹ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 55, 64, 68.

¹⁷⁰ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 19–20, at 20.

¹⁷¹ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 25, 65; John Horne Tooke, *A Warning to the Electors of Westminster* [. . .] (London, 1807); Letter of William Paul, 13 May 1809, Bod., MS Eng. Hist. b200, fols. 152–53.

¹⁷² History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 71.

Unlike in Middlesex, this committee started the election by pooling £50 of their money.¹⁷³ In the following days, a canvass put together by volunteers attracted subscriptions and pledges by electors. Place claimed this as his idea and even went so far as suggest that Paull's committee was defeated because it possessed no men "experienced in Westminster elections."¹⁷⁴ In fact, Place knew that Puller and LeMaitre were veterans of 1796, experienced in precisely such a system.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, in 1807 two of the four men who organized the subscription, Puller and Brooks, had been involved in the 1796 contest, while another, Adams, did the same for the Middlesex Freeholders' Club.¹⁷⁶ In a letter to William Cobbett in the election's opening stages, LeMaitre outlined how his experience of 1796 fed into the contest, and a year later, John Bone, a former member of the London Corresponding Society, described how the 1796 Southwark election "laid the basis" for Burdett's victory.¹⁷⁷ The complete abandonment of the methods of 1802–1804 is strikingly illustrated by the fact that the 1796 Westminster election cost £660, a similar amount to the £780 spent in 1807, whereas in the profligate 1804 Middlesex by-election, Burdett spent £630 on furniture for Frost's office alone.¹⁷⁸ The election of 1807 owed to 1796 not only the initial creation of the core constituency of "Radical Westminster" by the splitting of Fox's electoral base but also the blueprint of how to organize and conduct the contest. This direction was not just a rejection of aristocratic influence but also an assertion of the ideal of elections as the public and collective use of reason that had animated these reformers in 1796, and remained with the Godwinite Place for the rest of his life.¹⁷⁹ It did not, however, signal the defeat of the style of patrician radicalism that Burdett utilized between 1802 and 1804 but instead inaugurated a period of conflict between what was developing as two distinct political traditions within nineteenth-century radicalism. After encouragement from Tooke, Burdett immediately sought to establish independence from his committee, many of whom expected control over their MP.¹⁸⁰ In the following years, conflicts grew, and by 1810, during a particularly acrimonious dispute, Burdett told William Smith, "I have no Committee," before replacing them altogether in 1812 with what became known among critics as a "cabal" of middle-class Whigs.¹⁸¹

¹⁷³ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 66–67, 71, 73.

¹⁷⁴ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 25. For similar statements by Place, see History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 21, 26.

¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Place even praised LeMaitre on the same page that he claimed Paull's committee had no men experienced in Westminster elections; History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 25.

¹⁷⁶ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 71.

¹⁷⁷ *Reasoner*, 403. For Lemaitre, see *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 16 May 1807.

¹⁷⁸ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 507; Claim of John Frost, Litigation with John Frost, 1806–1808, Bod., MS Eng. Hist. b200, fol. 58.

¹⁷⁹ History of general politics; 1714–1784; and of Westminster politics; 1790–1792, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27849, fols. 163–64; Baer, *Rise and Fall*, 18–22; Corfield and Green, "Westminster Man," 173–74.

¹⁸⁰ History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fol. 87.

¹⁸¹ Francis Burdett to William Smith, 29 June 1810, William Smith Papers, Cambridge University Library, Add 7621/131. For the "cabal," see Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 216. For Place's interpretation

IV

As the first general election in which plebeian reformers intervened as part of a well-defined national political network that sought to link local grievances to a coherent political program and strategy, 1796 was a major departure from older and more parochial forms of popular engagement that have been emphasized as the primary characteristic of elections in the unreformed Parliament.¹⁸² This argument supports accounts that see this Jacobin reform movement as a significant, and novel, political moment: as Mark Philp has argued, the dissemination of Painite and democratic literature convinced some of the class of what Hardy called “tradesmen, shopkeepers and mechanics”¹⁸³ that they possessed the right to engage in politics, and as I have demonstrated, this conviction was extended, with lasting significance, to electoral politics as well.¹⁸⁴ This view underlines the extent of the ambition of many of the reforming groups affiliated with the London Corresponding Society even in the difficult political atmosphere of 1796, when there were challenges by reformers in far more constituencies than in the 1802, 1806, or 1807 general elections. The Jacobin organizations had clearly not begun their decline by this point and were still capable of a major agitation that in many locations revived their fortunes. Because of these contests, the decline, when it did come between 1797 and 1799, was not totally destructive, since these reformers were now well versed in a legal form of political agitation that facilitated continued political action and in many locations had created distinct constituencies of popular reformers. The 1796 general election thereby provided a reservoir of experience that cushioned the damage caused by the dissolution of the Jacobin societies. The birth of the national popular radical movement in the decade after 1807 was only possible because of 1796.

These interventions also contributed lasting innovations to the electoral culture of this coalescing movement, with the rejection of high expenditure and the formation of popular election committees funded by subscription and supported by voluntary canvassers and agitators. This was an important break within the tradition of popular constitutionalism, and with that a challenge to electoral histories that downplay the critique of corruption in the unreformed Parliament as an exaggeration by radicals in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁵ The critique advanced in the 1790s was not merely of direct bribery but also all forms of influence and coercion, legal or not, that prevented elections from returning a Parliament genuinely representative of popular will as discerned through the free use of reason. This critique is therefore of major significance

of the 1810 dispute, see History of general and Westminster politics; 1803–1818, Francis Place Papers, BL, Add. MS 27850, fols. 239–41; John Belcham, “Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform,” *English Historical Review* 39, no. 369 (1978): 739–73, at 743.

¹⁸² O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 224–316; Frank O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780–1860,” *Past and Present*, no. 135 (1992): 79–115; Rosemary Sweet, “Freeman and Independence in English Borough Politics, c.1770–1830,” *Past and Present*, no. 161 (1998): 84–115; H. T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1994), 13–55.

¹⁸³ Thomas Hardy, *Memoir of Thomas Hardy, Founder of, and Secretary To, the London Corresponding Society* [. . .] (London, 1832), 100.

¹⁸⁴ Philp, “The Fragmented Ideology of Reform,” 73–74.

¹⁸⁵ Weinstein, “Popular Constitutionalism and the London Corresponding Society,” 41; O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties*, 160–61; Philips, *Electoral Behaviour*, 73–81.

to our understanding of popular political thought and illustrates a direct application of the broader social and moral concerns of Jacobinism during this period to agitation more broadly.¹⁸⁶ After the revival of this style of electioneering in 1807, it became an integral but overlooked aspect of the popular radicalism that developed nationwide thereafter. Immediately after the Westminster victory, a group of Bristol reformers, among them Henry Hunt, adopted “purity of election,” with Hunt standing for the city on these principles in 1812. Electoral purity and the London Corresponding Society’s program of universal suffrage and annual elections became a core part of Hunt’s contest against Burdett in the Westminster election in 1818, following the final schism between Burdett and his most radical supporters. In this, Hunt was backed not only by a new generation of Painites and Spencian Jacobins but also prominently by Gale Jones and Lemaitre.¹⁸⁷ In the same year, Peter Crompton stood for election in Preston, a borough with a franchise close to universal male suffrage, resolving to “render the town of Preston as remarkable in the annals of Electioneering Independence, as the city of Westminster.”¹⁸⁸ Hunt first stood in Preston in 1820 on these same principles and would be returned in 1831, and it was through him and William Cobbett’s victory in Oldham that “purity of election” was bequeathed to the Chartist era.¹⁸⁹ There is therefore a major strand of continuity leading from the corresponding societies of the 1790s to the radicals of later generations that complicates the notion of discontinuity between these two periods of reform agitation.¹⁹⁰ The 1802 general election was therefore not a uniquely Jacobin one, and neither were the contests in Middlesex or the 1807 victory in Westminster significant in isolation. They were instead part of a broader, longer, and evidently complex engagement by plebeian reformers in electioneering that began in 1796 and took a significantly different and more established form between 1802 and 1804, before being reasserted in 1807 as one of the lasting and most important legacies of Jacobinism.

¹⁸⁶ Claeys, *Politics of English Jacobinism*, xlv–lv.

¹⁸⁷ Westminster Election, 7th Day, TNA HO 42/177, fols. 13–16; *Speech of John Gale Jones to the Electors of Westminster in Support of Henry Hunt* (London, 1818); Hunt, *Memoirs*, 2:56–58; *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 3 January and 26 December 1818; John Belcham, “Orator” Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism (Oxford, 1985), 174.

¹⁸⁸ *A Complete Collection of Addresses, Squibs, Songs &c during the Late Contested Election for the Borough of Preston* (Preston, 1818), 7. See also Charles Hardwick, *History of the Borough of Preston and Its Environs* (Preston, 1857), 336–37.

¹⁸⁹ For Hunt in 1820, see newspaper clipping on Preston election, and “To the Public Spirited Electors of Preston,” Collections of newspaper cuttings and other papers, printed and MS, relating to elections at Westminster and other political events, from 1771 to 1838, Francis Place Papers, BL Add. MS 27843B, fols. 428, 429; *Manchester Observer*, 11 March 1820; *Manchester Mercury*, 29 February, 7 March 1820. For 1831, see *Preston Chronicle*, 8 and 31 January 1830. See also *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 20 and 27 May 1826. Malcolm Chase has outlined how Chartist electioneering was unusual for its lack of corruption in “Labour’s Candidates: Chartist Challenges at the Parliamentary Polls, 1839–1860,” *Labour History Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 64–89, at 74. See also Tom Scriven, “Chartism’s Electoral Strategy and the Bifurcation of Radicalism, 1837–1852,” *Labour History Review* 85, no. 2 (2020): 99–126.

¹⁹⁰ For a summary of opinion on this discontinuity, largely critical of Thompson, see Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories*, 33–34.