

**Title:** The Worcester riots of November 1831  
**Author(s):** Professor Steve Poole (UWE), Dr Roger Ball (UWE), Professor John Drury (University of Sussex)  
**Year:** 2023  
**DOI:** (to follow when published)  
**Edition:** Working Paper Version “WPV1/riot1831Worcester/220523”  
**Available at:** <https://riot1831.com/case-study/>

This is a working paper which may be updated before the project ends (29/02/2024). As it is subject to change, it is currently under © University of the West of England and all rights are reserved. Please contact the authors for any copyright permissions. Please note that upon completion of the project, all papers will be released under a CC-BY licence.

This work was supported by the ESRC [grant number ES/T00293X/1].

**Acknowledgements and thanks:**

The Riot 1831 Team would like to thank the following individuals, groups and institutions who helped with this research:

Jane Askew  
Daniel Ruddock  
Pat Hughes  
Stamford Cartwright  
Carolyn Clarke  
Worcester Research Workshop Participants, 30 April 2022  
Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service  
Go Explore, Worcester  
Worcester Museum Curators  
Bristol Archives

## The Worcester Riots of November 1831

### Contents

Figures.....	1
Tables.....	1
Abbreviations.....	1
1 Electoral history and local governance.....	2
2 Worcester as a Reform city.....	4
3 I Predict a Riot.....	9
4 The riot.....	14
5 Court cases, a second minor riot, and the aftermath.....	19
6 The targets.....	23
7 The rioters.....	25

### Figures

Figure 1: Leaflet announcing the formation of the Worcester Political Union (December 1830) .....	6
Figure 2: Reform related protests, disturbances and Political Unions in Worcestershire and environs October-November 1831.....	10
Figure 3: Worcestershire Yeomanry and regular army deployments in early November 1831.....	12
Figure 4: Schematic map of central Worcester showing assumed and actual targets of rioters .....	16

### Tables

Table 1: Targets of the Worcester rioters in November 1831.....	24
Table 2: Prosopography of a sample of arrestees and their family members from the Worcester riots of 5-7 November 1831.....	30

### Abbreviations

BA	Bristol Archives
BPU	Birmingham Political Union
HO	Home Office
MP	Member of Parliament
N/K	Not Known
PU	Political Union
TNA	The National Archive
WAAS	Worcester Archive and Archaeology Service
WPU	Worcester Political Union

## 1 Electoral history and local governance

Early nineteenth century Worcester was a chartered city and county, governed by an unelected Corporation of 24 'capital citizens and councillors'. The Corporation was a strictly Anglican institution in practice, Dissenters never being admitted. There was also a Recorder, a man 'learned in law', and elected by the Council men. He, the six aldermen and the mayor were magistrates within the borough and could also sit at the city court of quarter session, although the Recorder – the 7<sup>th</sup> earl of Coventry - rarely visited the City in person. The city courts were empowered to try all cases committed within the city jurisdiction except those affecting 'life and limb'. As we will see, the city's 1831 rioters all appear to have been charged summarily at the city's petty sessions, a strategy that limited the punishments available on conviction (many were simply bound over) but enabled the Corporation to control and conclude all cases within a few days of the riot. It was a stark contrast to the ways in which legal reparations were handled elsewhere. Regular policing, such as it was, remained the responsibility of four sergeants at mace and four mayor's officers.<sup>1</sup>

The city enjoyed a steadily expanding Freeman franchise. Freedoms were traditionally conferred by birth or apprenticeship, but could also be purchased from the Corporation, whether by or on behalf of the applicant or, occasionally, be granted as gifts without payment. However, although freedom entitled citizens to trade in the city, it did not automatically confer voting rights as well. This required payment of an additional fee to the Corporation, and Freeman could either pay it themselves or have it bought for them by contesting candidates in exchange for promises of fidelity at the polling booth.<sup>2</sup> Like many other Freeman franchises, Worcester's voters covered quite a broad demographic and they were by no means all of the middling sort. When the election of 1774 was subjected to a parliamentary select committee of enquiry into corrupt practices (chiefly bribery), several labourers as well as artisans and professional men were examined. A 'labouring man' named John Web, for instance recounted that one candidate's agent had persuaded him to cast his votes in a way he knew would displease his master in return for a two guinea bribe and appointment as a Constable for the duration of the polling. 'The stupidity of this witness was inconceivable', observed his questioners.<sup>3</sup>

In common with some other Freeman constituencies, these lower-class voters were in considerable danger of losing the franchise under the terms of the Reform Bill as first drafted in 1831, for they were not necessarily either £10 householders or 40s freeholders. The problem was addressed by later amendments, and one of the MPs who pushed for that during Commons debates on the Bill was Worcester's George Robinson. Arguments had also to be produced by moderate reformers to convince working class supporters to continue in backing the Bill. So, as one of them put it at a Reform meeting in the city in March 1831, the Bill would:

allay animosity. It would assist to remove discontent. The people would be satisfied that under its operation they were really represented and that they had at last obtained, through the medium of their representatives, honestly chosen, an utterance for their sentiments on all questions, whether of taxation or other matters affecting their interests, coupled with the assurance that those sentiments would be met with that regard and attention to which they were entitled.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Commissioners on Municipal Corporations (1835).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Salmon, 'Worcester 1820-1832', in D. R. Fisher (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1820-1832* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford Journal* 10 February 1776.

<sup>4</sup> *Worcester Herald* 9 March 1831.

The Corporation's political interests were broadly defined by those of the Recorder and the Cathedral/clergy and were thus staunchly Tory and Anglican. In the previous century, to reduce electoral expenditure and to discourage popular disorder, the Corporation had sometimes endeavoured to prevent contests at election times by supporting single candidatures from both the Whigs and Tories, guaranteeing each Party a share in the representation without the inconvenience of a poll.<sup>5</sup>

Contests then were not always triggered by factional party interests but by what the newspaper press was apt to call 'the Old Independent Interest of the City, uninfluenced by any particular system of politics'.<sup>6</sup> However, the Corporation's influence in parliament was reduced in 1826. At the election that year, the intervention of a third (independent) disruptor, George Robinson, was followed by the withdrawal of the Tory candidate. The Corporation now found itself in the unusual position of needing to engineer a contest to salvage representation for its own political interests. They persuaded Richard Griffiths, a Tory-minded 'independent freeman' to enter his name at the last minute, but he was unsuccessful. Consequently, from 1826 until the end of the reform crisis, both of Worcester's parliamentary representatives, Robinson and the sitting Member, Thomas Davies, voted with the Whigs. The 1826 campaign produced a significant expansion in the city franchise, some 125 new Freemen being admitted into the suffrage in the first three days of polling alone.<sup>7</sup>

This trend continued as the Corporation struggled to win Robinson's seat back for the Tories but as public momentum grew for reform, their efforts bore little fruit. Consequently, no Tory candidates could be found either in 1830 or 1831, despite late attempts to produce 'independent' challengers in Col. Sir Willoughby Cotton in 1830 and Lord Southampton's brother, Henry Fitzroy in 1831. In both elections then, Davies and Robinson were returned unopposed, the former now declaring himself 'the uncompromising enemy of corruption and abuse and a zealous supporter of retrenchment and reform', while Robinson promised to oppose sinecures, corruption, high expenditure and high taxation without referring directly to reform at all. Both emphasised their independent status and distanced themselves from party politics.<sup>8</sup> Fitzroy came within a whisker of accepting the Tory nomination to force a contest in 1831, but when he introduced himself on the balcony of the Hop Pole as 'a moderate reformer but opposed to the Bill... yells and hootings drowned his voice' and, discouraged, he withdrew the following day.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of non-contests like this, some 848 new Freemen were created during election periods between 1820 and 1831, so that on the eve of the reform Act's passing there were around 3,000 freemen eligible to vote in the city out of a total population of 18,590. About a third of those eligible to vote were non-resident.<sup>10</sup>

The County representation was also edging towards support for reform. The seats were shared between Tory and Whig members until the 1831 election when both went to the reforming Whigs. The Tory was Col. Henry Beauchamp Lygon (Earl Beauchamp), a sitting member since 1816 and consistent opponent of reform. He happily presented and supported an anti-reform petition from the county magistrates in 1830 and argued that the reform Bill was 'violent in principle' and 'hazardous to our well-balanced constitution'. So, at the general election in May 1831, Lygon and the sitting Whig, Thomas Henry Foley, were joined by a third candidate, another reforming Whig, Frederick Spencer, a Captain in the Royal Navy. There was some crowd trouble in the early stages, Lygon and his supporters

---

<sup>5</sup> Salmon, 'Worcester 1820-1832'.

<sup>6</sup> *Perthshire Courier* 22 October 1812.

<sup>7</sup> *Worcester Journal* 15 June 1826.

<sup>8</sup> *Worcester Journal* 31 July 1830.

<sup>9</sup> *Worcester Journal* 5 May 1831.

<sup>10</sup> Salmon, 'Worcester 1820-1832'.

being physically attacked in the Worcester corn market by ‘some of the lowest of the rabble’ as the Tories canvassed for votes. Forced to retreat into a nearby inn until rescued by a party of constables, Lygon’s committee tried to make the most of it by publicising the ‘personal outrage’ he had suffered at the hands of an ‘infuriated mob’ in the *Worcester Journal*. ‘Neither Col Lygon nor his friends will be intimidated by such conduct’, they promised. Spencer was sufficiently embarrassed to issue a rebuttal, instructing his supporters to keep the peace. For their part, the reformers claimed provocation by one of Lygon’s attorneys who allegedly threw vitriol at them from an upstairs window of the Crown. They responded by breaking the Inn’s windows then turned their attention to Lygon’s committee rooms opposite the *Star and Garter* and broke those windows as well. After about a week of polling, Lygon could see he was going to lose, so he withdrew.<sup>11</sup>

Raucous and sometimes violent crowd actions were part of the traditional rituals of election-time in early nineteenth century Worcester. In particular they were centred on the ‘chairing’ of victorious candidates, where the incumbent MP would be paraded by his supporters on an elaborate throne. Chairings were colourful, noisy, and ritualistic expressions of political victory, routed territorially through the principal streets of the town, and as such, potentially antagonistic to supporters of defeated candidates. This made chairings as likely to produce disorderly violence as social consensus and fighting was not uncommon. At Worcester, by a long-standing tradition, this led to the ritualised, collective activity of ‘chair-breaking’ where the disenfranchised crowd would intervene in the chairing procession in an attempt to overturn the throne, throw out the politician and then smash it to pieces. These traditions were still operating in Worcester in the 1830s, despite attempts by the authorities to avoid or suppress them.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Worcester as a Reform city

Public support for parliamentary reform had been growing at Worcester for at least 18 months before rioting erupted in November 1831, but it did so in tandem with a raft of other demands as economic recession tightened over the winter of 1829-30. Some, including the Birmingham-based Richard Spooner, were anxious not to confuse political and economic reform. Spooner was Charles Wetherell’s brother-in-law, a partner in Thomas Atwood’s banking business at Birmingham, an MP for the pocket borough of Boroughbridge (later for Birmingham and North Worcestershire) and by 1830 an Anglican Tory at heart but still prepared to endorse moderate political reform as one means of ending the recession. As the *Gentleman’s Magazine* diplomatically put it, ‘It was probably the financial rather than the political views of Mr Spooner that induced him to devote himself to the work of legislation’.<sup>13</sup>

In February 1830, he was present at the founding meeting of the Worcester Agricultural Association, at which resolutions were proposed calling for parliamentary action against economic distress, retrenchment and a reform of the old poor law. But when some delegates proposed adding parliamentary reform to the list as well, there were objections. Reform was a separate matter, argued Spooner and the proper place to broach it was at a County Meeting.<sup>14</sup> The High Sherriff was therefore applied to and a County Meeting fixed at the Guildhall in March. It was not advertised as a Reform

---

<sup>11</sup> *Worcester Journal* 7, 14 May 1831; Philip Salmon, ‘Henry Beauchamp Lygon’, in D. R. Fisher (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1820-1832* (CUP, 2009). See also T. Holt, ‘The Worcestershire Election of 1831: A Contemporary View’, *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 14 (1994), 241-3.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Worcester and ‘chairing’ rituals see Poole, S. “Chairing and Chair-Breaking” Eighteenth-Century Political Participation & Electoral Culture. Retrieved from: <https://ecppecc.ncl.ac.uk/features/chairing-and-chair-breaking/>.

<sup>13</sup> From Spooner’s obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, February 1865, 240-3; Martin Casey, ‘Richard Spooner, 1783-1864’, in Fisher, *History of Parliament*.

<sup>14</sup> *Worcester Herald* 20 February 1830.

meeting, but since it was understood that resolutions would be framed proposing solutions to recession and distress, reform was the elephant in the room throughout. Colonel Lygon clearly sensed it, urging his audience from the outset not to be taken in by the ‘phantom panacea’ of parliamentary reform. Spooner and Charles Hanford, on the other hand, clarified their position as ‘moderate’ reformers, while the Rev. Henry Berry aligned himself with the radicals. A moderate reform petition was accordingly proposed and Lygon was pressed to support it as a member for the County. The colonel archly agreed to do so, provided he could see anything in the Bill to ‘put a sovereign in the pocket or a fowl in the pot of any poor man’. In the event, although he agreed to present it to the Lords, he offered it no support at all, and it was left on the table in the Commons because neither Davies nor Robinson were comfortable with a clause calling for currency reform. This clause was probably added by Richard Spooner.<sup>15</sup>

If the city’s reform movement had a cautious appearance in these early days, it grew a more radical wing in November with the formation of a Political Union (PU). About 100 people enrolled at the PU’s inaugural meeting at the *Union Inn*, Union Street, in the Blockhouse, a recently developed residential area to the East of the city, each subscribing a penny a week. There were 190 within a fortnight. Arriving less than a year after the founding of Thomas Attwood’s Birmingham Union, Worcester’s PU was one of the earliest in the country. The original intention was to apply to become a branch of the Birmingham PU, but when Attwood assured them that formal affiliation was probably unlawful, they settled for independence.<sup>16</sup> A set of rules and a first public address were quickly drawn up and published in the *Herald*, more radical in tone than previous local declarations, and more radical in sentiment than anything the Whigs would later adopt in Lord Grey’s Reform Bill. They would support a measure of reform, they said, ‘as may ensure a real and effectual representation of the labouring and middle classes of the people’. Yet beyond a demand for the ballot and a more equitable system of taxation, the PU fought shy of specifics. They castigated corruption and quoted approvingly Pitt the Younger’s maxim of 1791: ‘It is the right of every commoner of this realm to have a vote in the election of the Representative who is to give his consent to the making of laws by which he is to be bound’. Nevertheless, despite the allusion to a broad base of (male) voters, the Worcester PU steered clear of the old radical commitment to universal manhood suffrage and annual parliaments. By January 1831, the WPU was meeting weekly at Mr Edmunds’s rooms, 51 High Street, with a Mr Coates in the chair and drawing up a first petition for reform. By September the Union had opened its own rooms in Bull Entry, close to the Guildhall.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> *Worcester Journal* 4 March 1830; 4 April 1830. Worcester radicals’ support for currency reform – a call for paper money – may be seen as an indication of the regional influence of Thomas Attwood and the Birmingham Political Union, who believed economic distress was at least partly a consequence of the restrictive Bank Act of 1819. See Henry Miller, ‘Radicals, Tories or Monomaniacs? The Birmingham Currency reformers in the House of Commons, 1832-1867’, *Parliamentary History* 31, 3 (2012), 354-377. Richard Spooner became an MP for Birmingham in 1844 and then North Warwickshire in 1847.

<sup>16</sup> *Worcester Herald* 27 November, 4 December 1830; *Worcester Journal* 2 December 1830.

<sup>17</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12, 18 December 1830; 15 January, 24 September 1831.

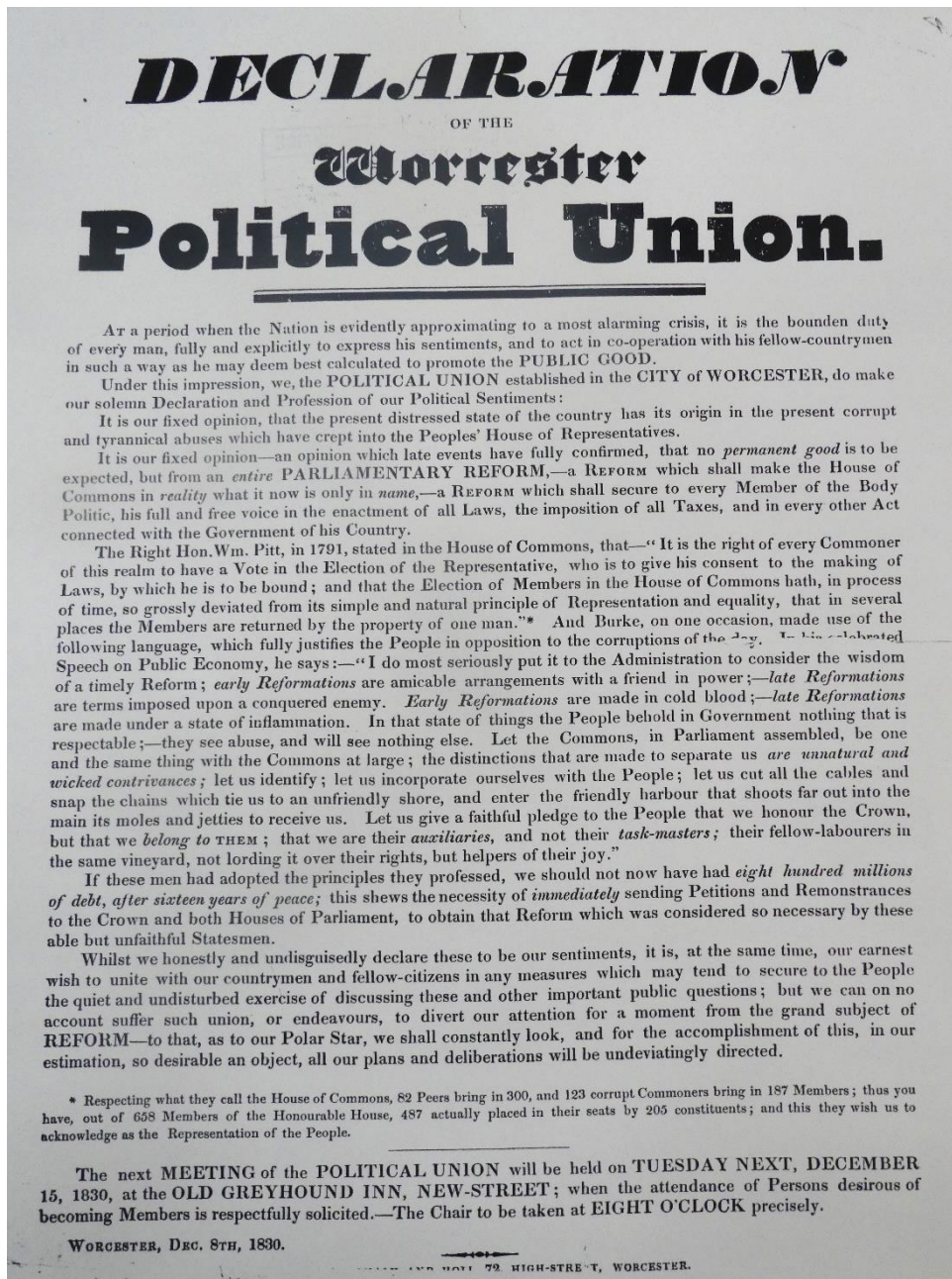


Figure 1: Leaflet announcing the formation of the Worcester Political Union (December 1830)<sup>18</sup>

Worcester's close alliance with the Birmingham Union continued, with BPU co-founder and secretary Thomas Clutton Salt offering advice on the wording of two complimentary petitions, one to the Lords and one to the Commons. Reform was now cast in terms that would reduce the power of the 'boroughmongering aristocracy' and 'give a more equitable and extensive suffrage to the productive classes of the kingdom', with renewed emphasis on the ballot. They were left to lie in several places around the city, then despatched to London with some 2,330 signatures attached. The radical MP Henry Hunt presented the Commons petition.<sup>19</sup> However, by March the content of the government's reform Bill was well enough known and so the Union quickly followed its first petitions with another

<sup>18</sup> BA Records of J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., printers and publishers, Personal papers of Isaac Arrowsmith Ref. 40145/Per/IA/3(d).

<sup>19</sup> *Worcester Herald* 22, 29 January, 5, 12 February, 5 March 1831; *Worcester Journal* 27 January 1831.

to the Commons and an Address to the King, pledging support for so 'liberal and extensive' a measure and urging the King to use his influence to get it passed.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Worcester's wider and more moderate reform movement called on the Mayor, Harvey Berrow Tymbs, to summon a Common Hall meeting<sup>21</sup>. Tymbs, a staunch Tory anti-reformer and the owner of *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, declined but offered them the Guildhall in a private capacity.<sup>22</sup> This drew criticism from Spooner that his refusal arose from 'a mistaken notion of duty', and from another reformer Allen that it was further evidence of the Corporation's 'expiring loyalty' to the throne. An address to the King and a petition to the Commons were drawn up in support of the Bill and the sitting borough MPs Davies and Robinson were asked to present them. One or two calls from members of the PU to ask Henry Hunt to present them were hissed down.<sup>23</sup> This meeting was followed a few days later by a County Meeting, convened at Worcester by the Sheriff, and passing very similar resolutions.<sup>24</sup>

The PU maintained a critical distance from the city's two members of parliament, happy to applaud when they voted with the ministry, but quick to interrogate them if they wavered in their support. In the summer of 1831, the Union wrote to Robinson, requesting him to be clearer about his position. The MP told them he wouldn't be drawn into unequivocal support for a Whig Party line because he was an independent member, but he remained supportive for the time being. Next, they chided Davies for proposing amendments to the Bill and he, like Robinson, fired back with a declaration of independence. He was not a member of the government, he reminded them, and was only trying to strengthen the Bill. The Union's concern was that amendments would cause further delays in the house and would be seized upon by the opposition to hold matters up and increase division. The Union sent a fresh petition to ministers, urging them to expedite the Bill's passage or risk losing it, but government was anxious not to be seen stifling the right of debate and the slow pace continued.<sup>25</sup>

Late in September, as the critical vote in the Lords on the Bill's second reading edged nearer, the Union produced another petition, urging them to pass it, while the moderates sent the mayor another request for a Common Hall. Tymbs reiterated his earlier response, refusing to comply but offering them the Guildhall for private use. This they accepted, 1600-1800 people cramming into the building, and some uncharacteristically strong language emerged from the meeting. Rejecting the Bill now would be 'the death warrant of their order', declared Turner. He branded the Tories an 'oligarchy', and the Party responsible for the Peterloo massacre, an atrocity which would never have happened if only reform had been granted.<sup>26</sup> Earlier that week, existing divisions between the pro-reformers and the Corporation were exacerbated when summonses were issued from the Guildhall to the members of the Corporation calling for a meeting of the chamber to 'petition against the Reform Bill'. The

---

<sup>20</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 March 1831.

<sup>21</sup> That is, an official meeting of the town.

<sup>22</sup> *Berrow's Worcester Journal: History of the newspaper* Chapter 5: *Mayoral Conflict*. Retrieved from: <https://www.worcesternews.co.uk/bj/chapter5/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Worcester Herald* 9 March 1832. Speakers were Saunders (chair), Allen, Henry Deighton, Thomas Scott; Daniel George; Richard Spooner, Timings, Dr Corbett, George Brooke, Greening, Wensley, Williams, Thompson and R. Gillam.

<sup>24</sup> T. C. Turberville, *Worcestershire in the Nineteenth Century: a Complete Digest of Facts Occurring in the County Since the Commencement of the Year 1800* (London 1852).

<sup>25</sup> *Worcester Herald* 2 April, 30 July 1831; *Worcester Journal* 14 April, 4 August 1831.

<sup>26</sup> 38 members of the Corporation were required to be quorate. *Worcester Herald* 24 September, 1 October 1831. Speakers at this meeting were Saunders (chair), Scott, Merryweather Turner, Curwood, Acton, Brooke, Smith, Blackwell, John Bishop, and Capt. Wilson.



meeting, which took place the day before that of the WPU event, was a failure as only 25 members attended, making it effectively non-quorate.<sup>27</sup>

In October, once the Lords' rejection was known, the PU 'immediately' tabled addresses to both parliament and the King. It was now up to the monarch, they declared, to 'preserve the country from anarchy, confusion and all the horrors of a civil commotion'. Meanwhile, they would press their members to:

abstain from everything calculated to increase the present agitated feelings of society and to hold themselves in readiness, should the Committee see it prudent to call upon them, without the obligation of an oath, to protect the due prerogative of the King, the lives and property of our fellow citizens, and the peace and good order of the city.

The King, asserted the Union, must now 'make common cause with a devoted and affectionate people against the wicked and unjust machinations of a tyrannical and oppressive oligarchy'. Meanwhile, two parishes, All Saints and St Michael's, muffled their bells and convened meetings of their own, pledging popular support to the throne, while the Tories drew in their horns and cancelled the dinner at the *Hop Pole* hotel on Foregate Street they had organised in honour of Colonel Lygon, the long-serving former MP for the County. 'In the present state of public feeling', they considered, 'a dinner of this description might, by possibility, excite the minds of the populace and lead to a breach of the peace'.<sup>28</sup> Days later (Friday 14<sup>th</sup>) a third public meeting was convened at the Guildhall by the moderates, this time pressing the King to support the Whigs' resolve to force the Bill through by flooding the Lords with new peers.<sup>29</sup> The chair, John Curwood, also drew attention to a 'counter petition' that had been sent by some members of the Corporation on behalf of the 'Mayor Aldermen, and citizens' of Worcester. Curwood slated the document claiming that only 14 members of this 'self-elected select body' had signed it, and thus hardly representative of the city.<sup>30</sup>

Although there were some dissenting pro-reform voices amongst the Anglican clergy in the city, notably the ex-rector of the parish of Acton Beauchamp, Rev. Henry Berry, this was not reflected in the upper echelons.<sup>31</sup> The newly appointed Bishop of Worcester, Dr Robert Carr, whose patron had been King George IV until his death, had previously held the bishopric of Chichester. Carr was a regular attendee in the House of Lords and had followed the Tory-Anglican line in voting against the Roman Catholic Relief Bill in 1829. In October 1831 he attempted to avoid the controversy over the Second Reform Bill, along with five other bishops, by not being present in the Chamber for the debates and thus effectively abstaining, a tactic Carr repeated in 1832.<sup>32</sup> However, this failure to be explicit about

<sup>27</sup> *Worcester Herald* 01 October 1831.

<sup>28</sup> *Worcester Journal* 13, 20 October 1831; *Worcester Herald* 15 October 1831.

<sup>29</sup> *Worcester Journal* 20 October 1831. Speakers at this meeting were Curwood (chair), Merryweather Turner, Brooke, Thomas Partridge, J.D. Wensley, Allen, White, D. George and C. Greening.

<sup>30</sup> *Worcester Herald* 22 October 1831.

<sup>31</sup> Acton Beauchamp is about 10 miles west of Worcester. Berry resigned from his position as Rector in 1828 and appears to have been without tenure during the period of the reform crisis. 'Henry Berry (CCEd Person ID 130842)', The Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540–1835. Retrieved from: <http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk>.

<sup>32</sup> The other five who abstained by absence were the Bishops of London, Ely, Chester, Hereford and St. David's. The Archbishop of York was present for the debates and apparently moderately pro-reform but withdrew from the chamber to avoid voting for the bill and publicly dissenting from the anti-reform Archbishop of Canterbury. *Morning Post* 10 October 1831; *North Wales Chronicle* 25 October 1831; Bickley, A. C., and H. C. G. Matthew. "Carr, Robert James (1774–1841), bishop of Worcester." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Retrieved from: <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4755>.

his position on the Reform Bill did not mean that he was insulated from the widespread anger surrounding the actions of the 'Lords Spiritual'. Indeed, the words *Judas Iscariot, Bishop of Worcester* were chalked on the Cathedral and ominous warnings were made in the press about the proposed entrance of the bishop on the same day as the controversial dinner to honour the anti-reform politician Colonel Lygon.<sup>33</sup>

### 3 I Predict a Riot...

We come now to the critical days between the October outbreaks of pro-Reform disorder in many parts of the country, including the serious conflagrations at Nottingham and Bristol, and the riot at Worcester on 5 November. The public response to the defeat of the Second Reform Bill in Worcestershire and its immediate environs was varied (see Figure 2). In Birmingham which had a well-established Political Union there were a series of organised protests. However, this did not mean that there was no violent response. When the news of the defeat of the Bill arrived late in afternoon on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October there was a large crowd waiting at the newspaper offices to meet the arrival of the express mail coach from London. The BPU leapt into action that evening, flyposting bills that called for calm and warned:

What then have the people to fear? Nothing, unless their own violence should rashly lead to anarchy, and place difficulties in the way of the King and of his Ministers. Therefore there must be no violence.<sup>34</sup>

However, on the Monday evening a pro-reform crowd paraded around Birmingham city centre selectively smashing the windows of business premises. The following night at a public meeting of the BPU at the *Globe Tavern* leaders, Thomas Attwood and George Edmonds, spent several hours pleading with the large crowd thronging the streets outside not to engage in further damage to private property. Their attempt to calm the situation seems to have been successful, as a series of peaceful public protests organised by the BPU followed in the city, with the largest on 17 October when it is estimated that from 50,000 to 150,000 people took part.<sup>35</sup> Outside of Birmingham there were mass protest meetings in Evesham (12 October), Dudley (19 October), Kidderminster (7 November) and Halesowen (9 November). In Redditch on Guy Fawkes night (5 November) a crowd paraded an effigy of the Bishop of Worcester and then consigned it to the flames.<sup>36</sup>

The only locale near to Worcester that saw reform-related rioting was the Gloucestershire town of Tewkesbury which lies on the southern border of Worcestershire (see Figure 2). Tewkesbury was similar to Worcester in that it had a largely anti-reform, self-elected corporation and a divided, if not majority pro-reform electorate. However, despite attempts by reformers to set up the Tewkesbury Independent Union to campaign for two reforming MPs for the borough, there was no Political Union as such. Trouble began on 13 October when an annual meeting of the Corporation at the Town Hall was disrupted by a crowd throwing 'mud and stones' and the traditional civic procession was cancelled due to fears of further disorder. Later that evening the Corporation dinner was also abandoned after a crowd occupied the venue and ate the banquet. Elements of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards were rushed from Gloucester to disperse the protesters. The local anti-reform MP John Dowdeswell, who had been

<sup>33</sup> *The Sun* 19 October 1831.

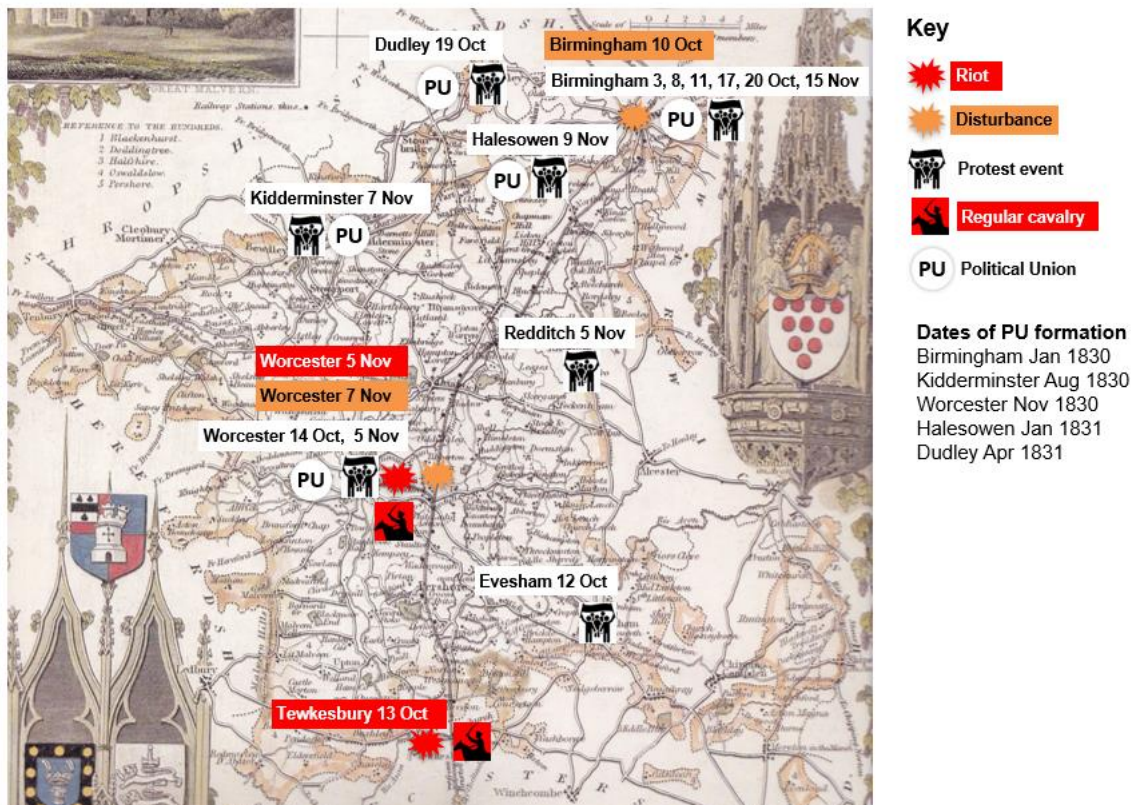
<sup>34</sup> *The Times* 10 October 1831.

<sup>35</sup> Ball, R. *The defeat of the Second Reform Bill in October 1831 – An overview of public responses (part 3 – Black flags and dumb peals: the spread of news of the defeat)* Riot1831, 21 Oct 2021. Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/2021/10/public-responses-part-3/>.

<sup>36</sup> For more on reform-related effigy burning see Ball et al, 'Episcopal treason and plot': effigy burning in the autumn 1831 reform protests. *Riot 1831*. Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/2021/11/episcopal-treason-and-plot-effigy-burning-in-the-autumn-1831-reform-protests/>

publicly supported by Worcester based Lord of the Manors, Baronet of the Court Leet, banker and magistrate Sir Anthony Lechmere, had his house attacked.<sup>37</sup> Fears of a repeat of the Tewkesbury riot in Worcester were being openly expressed in the national media in mid-October. *The Sun* reported:

You will have heard of the ludicrous affair at Tewkesbury, how the Anti-reform corporation were locked up, and their dinner devoured ... by the people. It is much feared that there may be some riot of the kind on Friday next [21 October], if the dinner to Colonel Lygon, our ex-County member [MP] is persevered with.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 2: Reform related protests, disturbances and Political Unions in Worcestershire and environs October-November 1831<sup>39</sup>**

If the pieces were all in place for riot to break out in Worcester by the time of the Lords' rejection on 8 October, why did the city remain peaceful for a full month? Could it be that the presence of two distinctive and well-organised pro-reform organisations, each representing firm public support for the Bill and a fairly broad demographic, helped to diffuse violent reactions by offering strong constitutional leadership? It may have seemed to many that Worcester was already a 'reform city', a place where respectable progressive politics were in the ascendancy and the antiquated Corporation

<sup>37</sup> *The Times* 17 October 1831; *Monmouthshire Merlin* 15 October 1831; "Tewkesbury 1820-1832" *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820-1832*, ed. D.R. Fisher (Cambridge University Press, 2009) Retrieved from: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/constituencies/tewkesbury>.

<sup>38</sup> *The Sun* 19 October 1831.

<sup>39</sup> This schematic map was constructed from data gathered in Ball, R. *The defeat of the Second Reform Bill in October 1831 – An overview of public responses (part 1 – the overall survey)* Riot1831, 6 Oct 2021. Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/2021/10/an-overview-of-public-responses/>.

on the back foot and threatening little in terms of effective resistance to the modernising spirit of the times. Whatever the answer to questions like these, the Corporation and its allies were apprehensive of approaching trouble and began preparing for it at a relatively early stage.

The incumbent mayor Henry Clifton began enquiring about the availability and readiness of both the Worcestershire Yeomanry and the county militia on 15 October, should they be needed.<sup>40</sup> His most pressing concern was that the High Sheriff had agreed to a fresh call for a pro-reform county meeting at Worcester on the afternoon of 5 November. The annual bacchanalia of bonfire night that year fell on a Saturday and its coincidence with a large public meeting was worrying. He feared it might be:

observed in a manner unusual amongst us (such as burning Bishops in effigy etc) and by other demonstrations of popular feeling which may lead to worse acts of outrage and breaches of the peace which it may not be in the power of myself or my brother magistrates to prevent or control.

He advised the Home Secretary (Lord Melbourne) that he would enrol special constables to keep the peace but feared it may not be enough.<sup>41</sup> A correspondent for the *Times* believed the 'respectable inhabitants had had misgivings on the subject for a few days past, from seeing a great number of strangers, some of them well-dressed, lounging about in the streets'.<sup>42</sup>

Others too were alerting central government to the danger. The county magistrate, John Williams, for example, was equally concerned about the County Meeting. He was confident enough of its respectability, and had 'no doubt the speakers will be of that class least likely to use language of an inflammatory nature', but:

the circumstance of its happening on a Saturday, the Market day, when the City is much crowded, and it being the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, it might not, improbably, during the present excitement, lead to some disposition to riot amongst the lower orders. I have heard of nothing preparatory on the part of these people, but a report that they intend to make a bonfire and burn upon it the effigies of the Bishop of Worcester and Guy Fawkes and if matters go no further, then I am sure the Mayor and City Authorities will not interfere with any nonsense of this kind. But should it lead to any acts of riot, I beg to inform your Lordship I am not aware we have any military force in the neighbourhood to aid the civil power if required.

Williams was wary of reliance on the county Yeomanry since 'one of the troops... consists in great part of Worcester People, and fear, in case of emergency it might be altogether prudent to bring such into contact with their friends and neighbours'.<sup>43</sup>

The potential for absence or refusal to take orders amongst the Yeomanry was backed up by reports in the press in October that 'many of the [Worcestershire] yeoman have sent their resignations to the Earl of Plymouth, their Commander, in dread of some provoked riot'.<sup>44</sup> The Earl of Plymouth, who had voted against the Second Reform Bill in the Lords, had already had his mansion in Berkeley Square in London targeted by pro-reform crowds.<sup>45</sup> In November it was reported that the Earl was ordering 'a

<sup>40</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.60, Henry Clifton to Captain Sir Offley Wakeman, Worcestershire Yeomanry, 15 Oct 1831.

<sup>41</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.45, Henry Clifton to Lord Melbourne, 1 Nov 1831 (with attachments).

<sup>42</sup> *The Times* 8 November 1831.

<sup>43</sup> TNA HO52/15 f.48, John Williams to Lord Melbourne, 1 Nov 1831 John Williams to Melbourne.

<sup>44</sup> *The Sun* 19 October 1831.

<sup>45</sup> Ball, R. *The defeat of the Second Reform Bill in October 1831 – An overview of public responses (part 2 – In the metropolis)* Riot1831, 06 Oct 2021. Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/2021/10/overview-part-2/>.

large quantity of iron... to barricade his doors and windows', presumably for his country seat at Hewell Grane near Tardibigge in west Worcestershire.<sup>46</sup> Hewell Grange (see Figure 3) doubled as the Headquarters of the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry though the Earl was often absent, staying instead in his hunting lodge and stud farm at Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, more than 70 miles from Worcester.<sup>47</sup> This distance clearly presented difficulties for response-time and 'command and control' of the Yeomanry units in Worcestershire.

Another problem Williams and Clifton would have been aware of concerned the re-formation of the Yeomanry. The last of the Napoleonic era Worcestershire Yeomanry units were disbanded in 1827 and only officially reconstituted in May 1831. Despite the fact that the ten or so new cavalry troops claimed they could field a combined complement of over 600 men along with light artillery, they clearly lacked significant training and perhaps experience amongst the younger privates.<sup>48</sup> Clifton and Williams may also have feared the Yeomanry units lacked discipline and had little knowledge of how to handle crowds in confined urban spaces, let alone the fact that their commander was already a public target of pro-reform crowds. It is thus no surprise that they plumped for some experienced regular troops, stationed nearby to Worcester, as their preferred option.

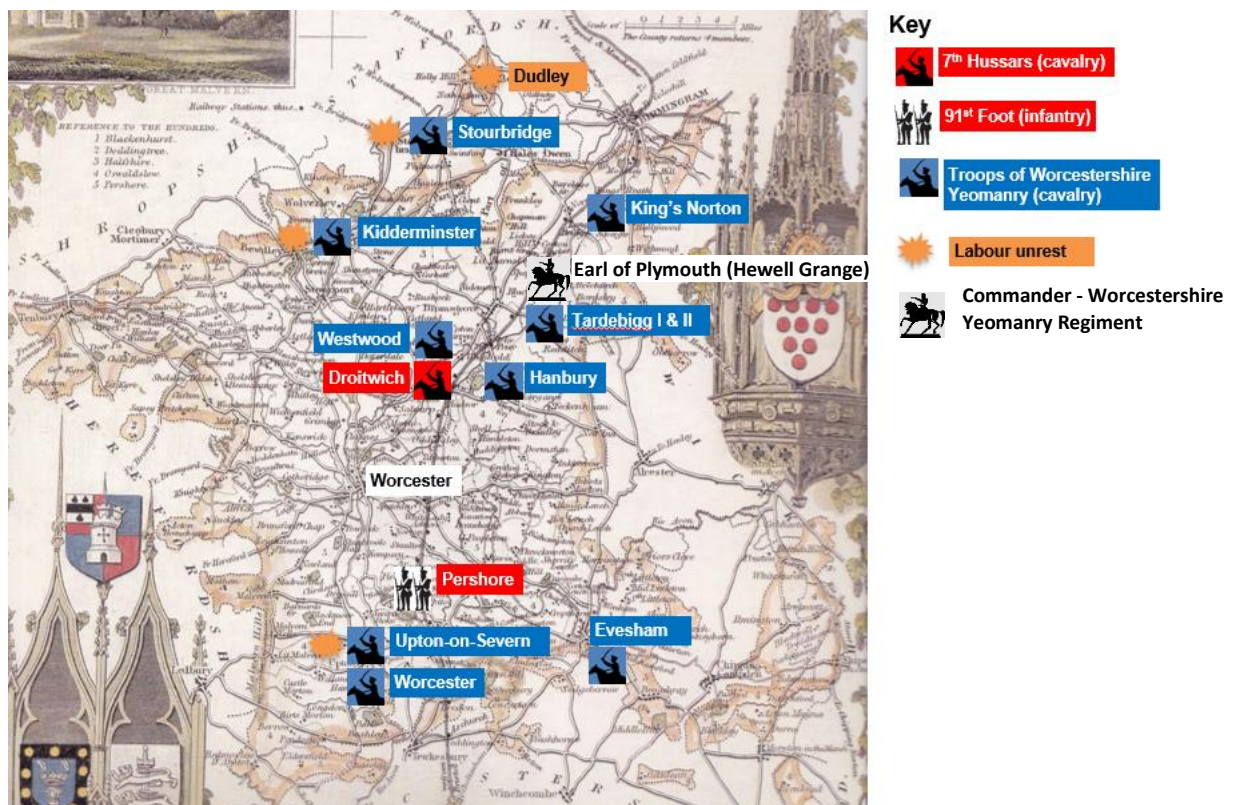


Figure 3: Worcestershire Yeomanry and regular army deployments in early November 1831<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Chester Courant* 22 November 1831.

<sup>47</sup> During the riots in Worcester, the Earl of Plymouth twice had to travel overnight from Melton Mowbray; Captain W. Emmot, Adjutant, *Regimental Diary 1831-1841 Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry* Transcribed by Owen T. Jones, Ref. Y79 p. 7; *The Spectator* 21 April 1832.

<sup>48</sup> *Memoranda relative to the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry, now the Queen's Own* (London: S. and J. Bentley, Wilson, and Fley, 1843) p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Memoranda relative to the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry*, pp. 1-2.

Clifton's preparations cannot have gone unnoticed in the district. By 1 November, just one day after decisive military action brought three days of destructive rioting to an end in Bristol, Melbourne had despatched a troop of the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars from Kidderminster to Droitwich and a detachment of 100 men from the 91<sup>st</sup> Argyllshire Regiment of Foot from Woodstock in Oxfordshire to Pershore (see Figure 3). Their commanding officers had orders to assist Clifton at Worcester as and when required but in the meantime to keep a low profile and not enter the city. Neither Clifton nor Melbourne wanted to provoke trouble by parading soldiers on the local streets, but a party of 40 militia were nevertheless ordered to the County Gaol where a large number of industrial workers, imprisoned for riot during a dispute at Kidderminster, were serving sentences.<sup>50</sup>

The decision to requisition regular troops rather than rely on the Worcestershire Yeomanry cavalry was provident, as in early November a series of festering industrial disputes on the borders of Worcestershire developed into collective violence (see Figure 3). On Friday 4 November disturbances led by 'boatmen' in Upton-upon-Severn in the south of the county required two troops of Yeomanry to be mustered and deployed. The local Yeomanry unit from Upton was joined by the Worcester troop commanded by Captain Sir Offley Wakeman. Three days later, unrest in Stourbridge in the north led to the deployment of the local yeomanry troop. This pattern continued through November with colliers, furnacemen and nailers involved in violent strikes in Dudley and the surrounding towns of Stourbridge, Oldbury, Halesowen and Kidderminster. Most of the troops of the Worcester Yeomanry Regiment were deployed in this area by early December.<sup>51</sup>

In Worcester on 3 November, posters began to appear around the streets, appraising people that, 'with a view to the preservation of the public peace', the magistrates would be swearing in special constables on the following day. 'Many of the inhabitants laughed at these preparations as pusillanimous', reported *the Times*,<sup>52</sup> but not the *Worcester Herald*. Reflecting upon the unease hanging over the town, the paper believed Clifton's precautions were sensible. As a consequence, serious trouble would surely be avoided, especially now that the PU had appealed publicly for calm. On the same day, the WPU had penned a public address, acknowledging the 'unparalleled atrocity' of the Bristol riots and urging its members to support the civil power in maintaining the peace at Worcester, for 'the great cause of reform is to be promoted and advanced only by union and concord'. When the *Herald* hit the streets on the morning of 5 November, a sensationally phrased advert on the second page informed its readers that if they wanted to know what had happened in Bristol, 'full and interesting particulars of these dreadful occurrences' were available to anyone with a few pence to spend on *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, due to arrive by express on the 4 o'clock mail coach.<sup>53</sup> By the time evening fell, the possibilities of further disorder will surely have been hanging heavily in the air.

Clifton and his fellow magistrates were probably feeling fairly confident by the time the County Meeting began that afternoon. They had managed to swear in about 500 special constables and in the morning he set about organising them into four groups, each with a captain, and divided between the places he considered the most likely targets if rioting broke out: the Guildhall, the city and county

---

<sup>50</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.45, Henry Clifton to Lord Melbourne, 1 Nov 1831 (with attachments). For the militia see *The Globe* 8 November 1831.

<sup>51</sup> Emmot, *Regimental Diary 1831-1841; Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry: Copies of Press Extracts 1795-1831* Transcribed by Thomas Wilkinson, Ref. Y80.

<sup>52</sup> *The Times* 8 November 1831.

<sup>53</sup> *Worcester Herald* 5 November 1831.

gaols and the Bishop's Palace (see Figure 4). Ninety-one of them were given new, freshly painted staffs and each had a card for his hat with a letter on it denoting his station.<sup>54</sup>

The High Sheriff, Osman Ricardo, kicked off the packed County Meeting in the Guildhall at Noon with an appeal for calm, and Sir Edmund Blount 'begged to impress upon the meeting the necessity of tranquillity and forbearance, as nothing would give their enemies so much delight as riot and confusion'. He 'trusted the Anti-reformers would not be allowed to succeed in driving the present meeting to acts of violence'. But however much speakers tried to distance themselves and the reform movement from violent intent, the previous week's rioting at Bristol cast an unavoidable shadow. Most were keen to blame it on the stubborn behaviour of their opponents. 'Would the disturbances that had taken place at Nottingham, Derby and Bristol have taken place if the Reform Bill had been carried?', demanded Davies to a chorus of 'loud cheers and cries of "no, no!"'. He was unequivocal. 'There was now amongst the vast population of the country a determination to carry this question and it would and must be carried'. But it was left to John Richards to conjure the most portentous and gloomy predictions for the future if the impasse in the Lords continued. The wider consequences were unthinkable:

What might the Tories not lose by their opposition to the wishes of the people? Would they wish to see the altar of a much-loved country laid waste? Would they wish to see the public peace invaded and the palace and the cottage levelled to the ground? Did they wish to see the domestic hearth turned into a charnel house? If they did, they would continue their opposition to the Bill (tremendous cheering). What might they not expect from the rising of an injured people (cheers)? But he would exhort the present meeting to support to the utmost his Majesty's ministers, to behave peaceably, orderly but firmly, and they might be assured the great object they had in view might be attained.<sup>55</sup>

The County meeting ended peacefully at 4.00pm with 'three groans for the Corporation' and the city remained calm until the evening.<sup>56</sup> 'With the exception of a few more of the lower orders in the streets, standing about in groups, there was nothing to indicate anything like a riot', noted a correspondent for *The Times*.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4 The riot

Sometime after 10.00pm a small fire broke out at the house of Henry Woakes in High Street (Location 1 Figure 4), whether accidentally or by malicious design nobody seemed certain. The *Herald* believed it was accidental.<sup>58</sup> Either way, it inevitably attracted a crowd while efforts were made to extinguish the flames and in the *Journal's* opinion at least, it became the catalyst for disorder. In fact, according to that paper, the fire engine's hoses had been deliberately cut to increase the confusion. Until about 11.30pm disorder was limited to small bands parading the streets, hissing and booing anti-reformers, but it escalated as more people arrived and numbers swelled to 200 or more.<sup>59</sup> Initially, according to

---

<sup>54</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.55, Charles Sidebottom (Clerk of Worcester) to Lord Melbourne, 5 Nov 1831; WAAS Ref. 496.5 BA9360/Cab 9/Box 6/8-10, Treasurer's Accounts 1831; *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831; *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

<sup>55</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

<sup>56</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831..

<sup>57</sup> *The Times*, 7 November 1831.

<sup>58</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

<sup>59</sup> *Morning Post* 8 November 1831. This report was filed at 5am the following morning and appears to have been written by an eye witness.

the *Times*, it was just boys showing 'some signs of mischief; as it grew dark however, men began to join them and a number of strangers were observed among the crowd'.<sup>60</sup> A small group went into Foregate Street where they broke the windows of Thomas France, a Tory solicitor and the Under Sheriff (Location 4 Figure 4), and the banker Sir Anthony Lechmere (Location 3 Figure 4), a noted supporter of Colonel Lygon, who lost about 70 panes of glass. Two more houses were then attacked and more windows broken, Kendall's shop in Foregate Street (Location 11 Figure 4) and Hartin's linen drapery at the Cross (Location 12 Figure 4).<sup>61</sup> William Hartin, according to *the Herald* was hurt when a stone thrown at his windows hit him on the head.

Reports were quickly sent to Clifton who was sitting up with his constables at the Guildhall (Location 2 Figure 4) but, reluctant to take any action that might provoke more serious rioting, he delayed sending them out until it was clear the crowd were not going to disperse of their own accord. At around 11.00pm then, the Guildhall constables were ordered into action against the crowd.<sup>62</sup> According to the *Herald*, church bells were rung to summon them, but this also brought more people onto the streets and increased the size of the crowd.<sup>63</sup> There followed 'various conflicts' during which a few arrests were made, one man forcibly rescued from custody, and several constables left with broken heads. Two rioters were captured and lodged in the city gaol (Location 5 Figure 4). As the beaten constables withdrew, the crowd gathered outside the Guildhall, some of them attempting to pull up railings as weapons.<sup>64</sup> Clifton went out to remonstrate with them himself at which spokesmen emerged from the crowd and a negotiation took place. If the mayor would agree to release the two prisoners in the city gaol, the crowd would disperse. Surprisingly, Clifton agreed to their terms and marched off to the gaol to do so, surrounded by a 'cheering' crowd. But instead of going home, the crowd now demanded a further release of prisoners. Clifton was clearly losing control of the situation. He refused, ordered the crowd to go home, returned to the Guildhall and, at 11.30pm, sent for the Hussars from Droitwich.<sup>65</sup>

This will not have alarmed the crowd unduly. Although nearer than the infantry at Pershore more than nine miles away, the Hussars were still six miles from Worcester and would not be arriving any time soon even at a brisk gallop. They arrived nearly two hours later at 1.15am to find the crowd still assembled outside the Guildhall but seemingly inactive. They drew up 'at a smart trot' and there seems to have been a stand-off for the next 45 minutes while insults and occasional missiles were hurled at them. Clifton finally read the Riot Act from the top of the Guildhall steps at 2.00am. The stand-off continued for more than an hour until someone threw a stone at the mayor, hitting him on the head. At that, he ordered the Hussars to clear the streets. They 'formed a line across the High Street, driving the mob before them' reported the *Journal*. Swords were certainly drawn and used in this operation, for 'one or two of the most obstinate rioters received sabre cuts, though not very severe ones.' Various reports suggest that one man was cut across the face and another in the arm, one had his hat cut through and another was wounded in the breast. *The Times* was amused by 'a

---

<sup>60</sup> *The Times* 7 November 1831. In fact, *The Times* correspondent estimated the number of 'strangers' alone to be 200 by 11.30, 'itinerant thimble and pea men and low thieves'.

<sup>61</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

<sup>62</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

<sup>63</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

<sup>64</sup> *Morning Post* 8 November 1831.

<sup>65</sup> Clifton's action in releasing prisoners under pressure caused consternation in respectable circles at Worcester and at least one resident sent a letter to central government demanding a full enquiry into his behaviour: TNA HO 40/29 f.298, nd, anonymous letter to Melbourne; *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831; *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.



countryman' who was 'nearly frightened to death by the blood from a trifling sword wound in the fleshy part of the chest'.<sup>66</sup>

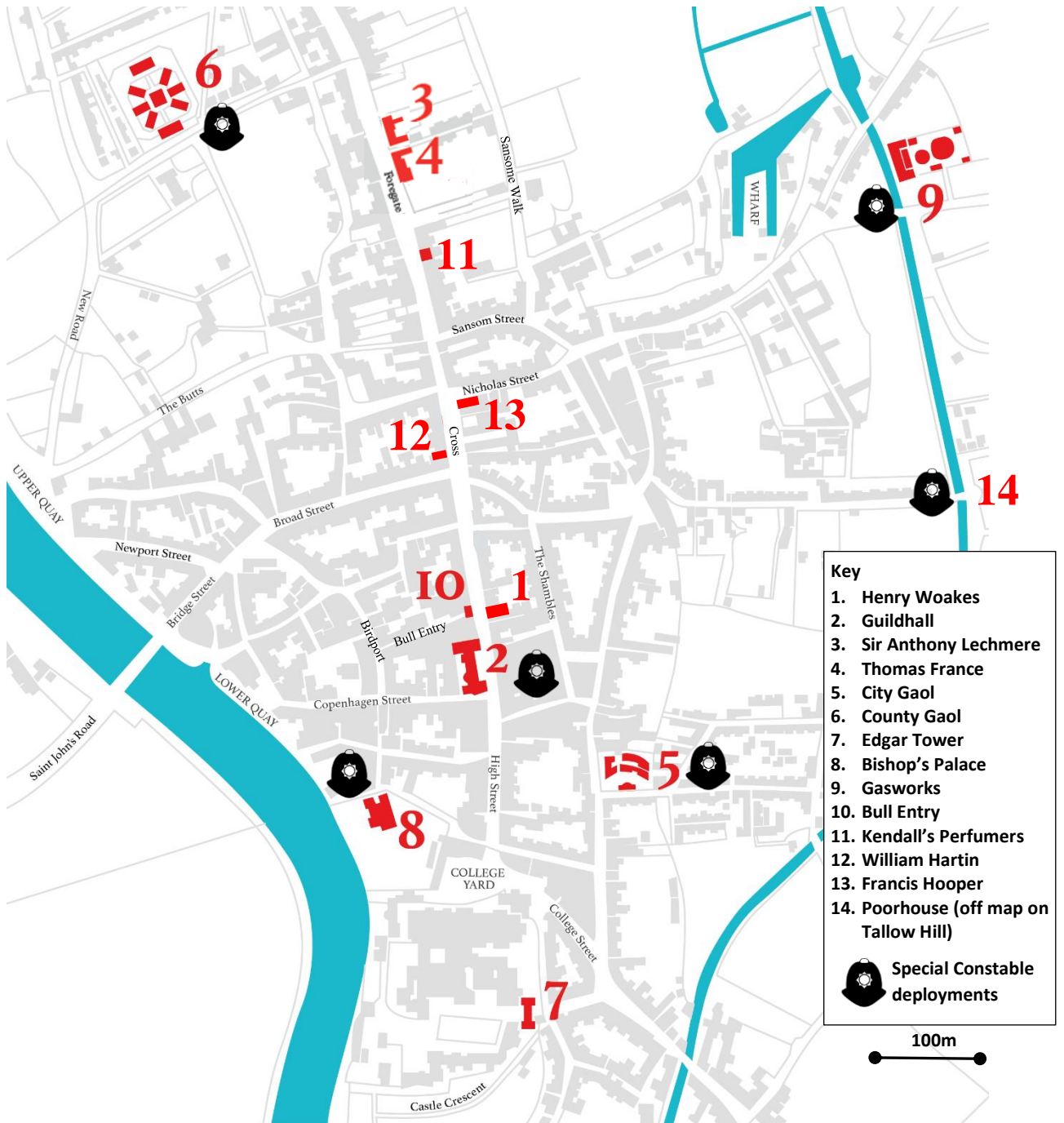


Figure 4: Schematic map of central Worcester showing assumed and actual targets of rioters<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Public Ledger* 8 November 1831; *The Globe* 8 November 1831; *The Times* 8 November 1831.

<sup>67</sup> This vectorised map is based upon the 1832 version by Crisp. WAAS X899:357 BA 3901/2 [c. 1832] Worcester City and Suburbs By Crisp, Charles.

It isn't clear that anyone had actually been 'rioting' at the point the military were introduced, but there was certainly some resistance now. 'Some stones and brickbats were thrown', reported the *Journal*, 'but the threat of firing put a stop to this'. There were women as well as men in the crowd:

Females were observed to be very vociferous in insulting the soldiers; among the persons who offered these insults were the inmates of Bull Entry, but one of the soldiers dashed down the steps with his horse, and set them scarpering.<sup>68</sup>

This incident was much talked about in the aftermath for the derring-do of the soldier concerned and the rough reputation of the locale, and newspapers across the country syndicated the story for several weeks. Bull Entry (Location 10 Figure 4), where the Political Union had been meeting in September, was a sunken passageway close to the Guildhall and linking High Street with Birdport. Often used by the Corporation as a base for a charity soup kitchen for the relief of the poor, it had strong associations with the labouring poor and a notorious reputation for lawlessness.<sup>69</sup> As the *English Chronicle* recounted the tale, the crowd were at the foot of the steps, pelting the Hussars with stones:

This was a stronghold to them, for it could only be approached by descending a flight of six stone steps; and many women as well as men stoutly defended it with missiles. After the rioters, however, were dislodged from every other quarter, the necessity of taking that position *by storm* became apparent. Two of the troopers were ordered to fire down the court. One of them, however, humanely preferred charging it. His horse declined the experiment of descending the steps and a loud 'Hurrah' from within marked the trooper's retreat. The soldier then said to his horse, 'you must do it, Bob', and at the same moment applied the spur. Bob answered to the summons, went down the steps with the safety of a cat or a dog and was immediately followed by another. This act so surprised the rioters that a most ridiculous scene of confusion followed – women and men screaming and tumbling over each other and *sauve qui peut* being the only principle of action.<sup>70</sup>

Fighting at Bull Entry and other entries around High Street and the Shambles was also commented upon by the *Herald*:

Here, many females (not a few of whom were in the throng throughout), had stationed themselves, and abused the soldiers and the fellows who fled before them as 'cowards'. Several brickbats were thrown at the soldiers from the Bull Entry... Many of the rioters sought refuge in the Butchers' Shambles but in vain; the Hussars pursued them even into these labyrinths and captured several who were sheltering under the bulks etc.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

<sup>69</sup> For the Bull Entry soup kitchen see *Worcester Herald* 21 May 1836, and *Worcester Journal* 4 January 1838. For references to 'houses of ill fame' in the Entry see *Worcester Journal* 19 June 1828, 1 February 1838. Of an Irish woman taken up for drunkenness and begging that year, a newspaper notes that 'it would appear that her character was low enough as even the lodging houses in Bull Entry and other parts of that classic neighbourhood would have none of her': *Worcester Journal* 8 March 1838. Bull Entry was largely knocked down and rebuilt during slum clearance in 1848. WAAS 496.5 BA9360/U5/49 Minutes of Council Meeting, 19 December 1848.

<sup>70</sup> *English Chronicle* 8 November 1831

<sup>71</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831. When the country butchers returned to the Shambles in the week following the riot, they were apparently annoyed to find that their blocks had all been removed from the stalls

Some gathered in Foregate Street with the rumoured intention of launching an attack on the County Gaol (Location 6 Figure 4), but according to some accounts they were deterred by reports that it was well protected by militia and constables. They went instead to Cripps's wine shop in Broad Street where they demanded money and drink but he got rid of them by declaring himself a fellow reformer.<sup>72</sup> Allegedly, rioters then went off in groups of 30 to 40, assaulting and robbing anyone who opposed them. This brought them back into conflict with Cripps who, in his capacity as special constable, tried to disperse them with the help of Clarke, an iron monger. Cripps was badly beaten, according to the *English Chronicle*, and robbed as well.<sup>73</sup>

Smaller outbreaks occurred in other parts of the town however. Alderman Hooper's house was attacked (Location 13 Figure 4), Alderman Ballard was pelted with mud,<sup>74</sup> and there were attempts to gain entry to the Cathedral precincts and College Green via the gates of Edgar Tower (Location 7 Figure 4). An advance was made towards the Bishops' Palace (Location 8 Figure 4) but the constables stationed there were able to hold them back. There was some concern that attacks might be made on the gas works (Location 9 Figure 4) and the poorhouse on Tallow Hill (Location 14 Figure 4) so smaller numbers of constables were posted to protect them, but they were not needed.<sup>75</sup>

By 3.30am, the Hussars, assisted by the various bands of constables had cleared the streets and all was quiet. The Hussars returned to the Guildhall, formed up outside, and were rewarded with beer. So, when the company of 91<sup>st</sup> Infantry arrived at about that time after a forced march from Pershore, there was little left for them to do. It hadn't started well in any case. The beating of drums to call them from their beds had attracted attention in Pershore and they'd been hooted and jeered by 'a crowd of vagabonds' who followed them down the road.<sup>76</sup> Clifton and his fellow magistrates remained in post at the Guildhall alongside their constables until daylight at 7.00am.<sup>77</sup> A total of 30 arrests had been made while the military were engaged in dispersing the crowd, nine from 'the country' (or 'strangers', as the press would put it) but the majority from Worcester.

Sunday 6 November was quiet. The Earl of Plymouth arrived and went to the Guildhall to offer his services to Clifton as commanding officer for the Worcestershire Yeomanry. The mayor, it will be remembered, had already expressed his misgivings about sending poorly trained local cavalry into action against people in their own county and since he still had Hussars, infantry and militia on hand to combat any resumption of rioting, he politely declined the offer.<sup>78</sup> The special constables were to be retained for several more nights at the Guildhall and the 91<sup>st</sup> Foot were to be tasked with nightly patrols of the city streets. The prisoners taken up on Saturday night, meanwhile, were left to cool their heels (and work the treadmill) at the city gaol until Monday when magistrates gathered to examine them. Clifton sent a brief message to the Home Office, apprising Lord Melbourne of the previous night's rioting in the vaguest terms and playing it down in the process. 'Very little mischief in breaking windows etc occurred previous to the interference of the military in clearing the streets', he assured the Home Secretary, but 'I believe that incalculable mischief would have been done but for the

---

and used to build barricades against the Hussars. They retrieved them, much damaged and covered in dirt: *Worcester Herald* 19 November 1831.

<sup>72</sup> Cripps' shop is not marked on Figure 4 because it is not clear from the sources where it was on Broad Street. See Table 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Worcester Herald*, 12 November 1831; *English Chronicle* 8 November 1831.

<sup>74</sup> The location of the attack on Alderman Ballard is unclear hence it is not marked on Figure 4. *Morning Post* 8 November 1831; *Caledonian Mercury* 12 November 1831.

<sup>75</sup> *English Chronicle* 8 November 1831.

<sup>76</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

<sup>77</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

<sup>78</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

intervention of the troops, whose good and orderly conduct is beyond all praise'.<sup>79</sup> The magistrate Charles Ridout was similarly perfunctory:

I regret to inform you that a riot took place here last night between 11 and 12 o'clock and some windows were broken. The Riot Act was read by the Chief Magistrate, and the soldiers, who had previously been ordered to Droitwich, were called in. They arrived between 1 and 2 and by 5 the whole town was quiet. I understand one or two of the rioters are wounded. I question much if it was the intention of the mob to do ought more than break a few windows.<sup>80</sup>

## 5 Court cases, a second minor riot, and the aftermath

By the time the mayor and magistrates assembled on the morning of Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November to begin examining the prisoners, they had already decided to charge them summarily wherever possible. In comparison to the legal proceedings that followed every other urban reform riot that year, this was highly unusual. It gave magistrates an opportunity to deal more quickly with offences and, effectively, to draw a line under the disturbances so that they might not linger so long in the public memory, but it also placed stringent limits on the charges they could levy and the punishments they could inflict. Conveying the prisoners in small batches to and from the city gaol could hardly be done surreptitiously however, and a noisy and hostile crowd of men, women and children quickly grew in front of the Guildhall. Clifton was obliged to order an escort of infantry to prevent any rescue attempts, but the crowd remained all afternoon and into the evening. After dark, stones were thrown, and the Guildhall windows were broken but although Clifton had 40 foot soldiers protecting the building he was reluctant to introduce them. Finally, the constables were sent out to tackle the crowd and they succeeded in clearing the street. A section of the crowd retreated to Sansome Walk and began pulling up iron railings from the park boundary. These were not used and there was no further trouble, although the *Herald* felt that 'there was more of evident concert in this meditated enterprise than was indicated in any other proceeding during the tumults'.<sup>81</sup>

After examination, the prisoners were either immediately discharged with a warning to stay out of trouble in future or, almost as speedily, put before the city petty sessions on charges of riot and breach of the peace, or in the case of two young men, Macready and Rea, going 'equipped for rioting'.<sup>82</sup> Although women had been reported as active among the rioters in the fighting around Bull Entry, the prisoners were exclusively male and the majority lived locally. They included one man of 65, one of 35 and another of 26, but 'the remainder were all lads', noted the *Journal*, 'and some mere boys under 20 years of age'.<sup>83</sup> Among those from out of town were three young men from Fladbury (Pershore), who, hearing the 91<sup>st</sup> Foot beating to arms, followed them, 'to see the riots'. Magistrates' interest was peaked when matches, tinder and gunpowder were found in their pockets, but their claims to be innocent bonfire night revellers were accepted and they were released.<sup>84</sup> Cases were heard

---

<sup>79</sup> HO52/15 f.56, Henry Clifton to Lord Melbourne, 6 Nov 1831.

<sup>80</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.63, Charles Ridout to Melbourne, 6 November 1831.

<sup>81</sup> *Worcester Herald* 12 November 1831.

<sup>82</sup> No case papers have survived for the trials of the Worcester rioters. All cases were decided without the intervention of a jury and, like all summarily conducted petty sessional proceedings, will have been brief. We are reliant on the newspaper press for details of the evidence produced against them, but little was reported. However, records of the binding over orders against several prisoners have survived amongst the quarter session indictment rolls: WAAS, 496.5/9360 CAB1/box14. See this source for Macready and Rea, going 'equipped for rioting'. One had a brickbat in his possession when taken into custody.

<sup>83</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

<sup>84</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

throughout the week, culminating with the final three, against William Biddle, George Harbour and John Peyton, on Friday 11<sup>th</sup>. These three prisoners were arrested later than the others, after being named in evidence given during the Thursday hearings as being amongst the crowd pulling up railings in Sansome Walk on Monday. Biddle, it was reported, was 'a sort of captain of the gang'.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the relatively high number of prisoners awaiting trial (30 in all), magistrates demonstrated little appetite for inflicting heavy punishment on any of them. The cases of Macready and Rea, noted above, are indicative. Both were undoubtedly active in the crowd; Rea was carrying a brickbat of some kind when arrested while Macready 'disregarded for some time the utmost entreaties of the Mayor to leave the front of the Guildhall'. These were minor offences and both men were discharged because Clifton considered the four days already spent in gaol awaiting trial had made them sufficiently contrite.<sup>86</sup> Nineteen were simply discharged after examination, the majority of them bound over to keep the peace for six months, but three released outright because no evidence was produced against them. Of the seven convicted, one was bound over, one released with an admonishment, one fined 5 shillings, two fined 2 shillings and the other two sentenced to a month's hard labour in the city gaol, not for riot but as rogues and vagabonds under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. These were James Egan, an Irishman from Kilkenny, and George Smith, a pedlar from Witley, both of whom were singled out as ringleaders and Egan for assaulting a constable in Foregate Street. The *Journal* delighted in their discomfort: 'Within two hours after their committal, they had been stripped, clad in the prison garb, and they were taking their rounds on the treadmill'.<sup>87</sup>

In the event, Egan and Smith were joined in prison by the three against whom fines had been recorded, Biddle (the Monday night 'captain'), Harbour and Peyton, but only because they couldn't pay. Biddle was sent for two months hard labour and the other two for 14 days. This made Biddle the most severely punished of all the prisoners.<sup>88</sup> Among the seven men convicted was the bricklayer, Francis Holland, one of the two rioters captured and then released by the mayor during his negotiations with the crowd on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Holland, it was alleged, had been seen in the crowd a second time in Foregate Street that night, much the worse for drink and still disorderly long after the Riot Act had been read. Although ordered to be bound over, Holland spent more than a week in gaol with the other five because he couldn't at first produce sureties for his good behaviour. His father eventually stepped up to assist and he was released on 19<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>89</sup>

The relatively light treatment meted out to the Worcester rioters was not lost on the editor of the *Herald*:

The whole of the delinquents have certainly reason to be thankful to the magistrates for the mercy and lenity with which their cases were considered and treated. Many of them, by their lawless and disgraceful conduct, had rendered themselves amenable to the capital charge of felony and were subject to transportation for fourteen years. We hope the forbearance they met with will not be lost upon them in their future behaviour, and that they, and others equally guilty, who escaped detection, will not hereafter disregard the scriptural admonition, *follow not a multitude to do evil*.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Worcester Journal* 17 November 1831.

<sup>86</sup> *Worcester Journal* 17 November 1831.

<sup>87</sup> *Worcester Journal* 17 November 1831. Great Witley is about 9 miles north west of Worcester.

<sup>88</sup> *Worcester Journal* 17 November 1831; *Worcester Herald* 19 November 1831.

<sup>89</sup> *Worcester Journal* 17 November 1831; *Worcester Herald* 19 November 1831. For Holland's binding over order on 19 November see also WAAS, 496.5/9360 CAB1/box14.

<sup>90</sup> *Worcester Herald* 19 November 1831.

The paper will have been disappointed by the notice not taken of its advice by one of those discharged with a ticking off, the shoemaker George Elt. Elt was bound over a second time on 21<sup>st</sup> November for 'having used threatening language to one of the Special Constables' and was then committed to the quarter sessions in 1836 for stealing clothes in Kidderminster. He was acquitted but convicted a year later for a similar offence in Wolverhampton and gaoled for six months. In March 1839, Elt was convicted for a string of petty thefts and this time transported for seven years. He died in hospital in December 1840 after being incarcerated on the prison hulk the *Ganymede*.<sup>91</sup>

On 9 November, Clifton felt it was safe to allow the Hussars to be reposted to Kidderminster, Bromsgrove or Dudley where ongoing industrial action amongst metal workers, nail makers and colliers was stretching the ability of the civil power to maintain order. He was anxious to hold on to at least one company of the 91<sup>st</sup> Foot however since:

the removal of the military would be the first signal for acts of aggression on the part of the mob similar to those which have been unhappily witnessed by us all during the nights of Saturday and Monday last... situated as we are between the populous towns of Bristol and Birmingham and subjected to the perpetual incursions of the Rabble from both those places, as well as from Dudley and its vicinity...<sup>92</sup>

The only advantage offered by the Hussars in situations like this was that, as cavalry, they could be summoned quickly when needed. It was true that they had proved indispensable at Worcester on 5 November but cavalry are not best suited for street fighting in tightly packed towns, and Clifton's preference for the 91<sup>st</sup> was understandable. But equally, Worcester wasn't the only place competing for their services. Four county JPs struggling to maintain order in the industrial towns had already supported a petition from Dudley for more soldiers to be sent there, and it wasn't cavalry they wanted. As things stood, Dudley was defended only by the Yeomanry who, they argued:

although an efficient body, would be unable to act so promptly and vigorously amongst the collieries and ironworks as the regular foot soldiers... the Stourbridge troop of yeomanry cavalry is willing to assist us but we consider foot soldiers indispensable.<sup>93</sup>

The 91<sup>st</sup> had left Worcester by December and been replaced by a detachment of the 85<sup>th</sup>, although they too were ordered out at the end of the year. Clifton's concern was that industrial workers arrested for riot in the adjacent towns were now being sent in numbers to Worcester to be lodged in the county gaol while awaiting trial at the quarter session. A conspiracy amongst the prisoners to break out of the gaol had recently been discovered and Clifton believed the Worcester crowd was ready to assist them. He lobbied Melbourne to order the 85<sup>th</sup> to stay in the city for he was:

fully persuaded that a train is laid here which a single spark may at any time ignite and that the absence of the military will be the first signal for fresh acts of aggression on the part of the mob. It has not of late been an

---

<sup>91</sup> *Worcester Herald* 9 April 1836; *Worcester Journal* 24 November 1831, 30 June 1836; *Staffordshire Advertiser* 28 October 1837; *Worcester Chronicle* 21 March 1839; *Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849, Ganymede*, Register, 1837-1845 pp. 55-56.

<sup>92</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.69, Henry Clifton to Lord Melbourne, 9 November 1831.

<sup>93</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.67, four JPs from Dudley to Lord Melbourne, 8 November 1831. See also f.64, petition to Worcestershire and Staffordshire magistrates, 7 November 1831. See also TNA HO 52/15 f.99, James Lock to Lord Melbourne, 1 December 1831 in which a Dudley magistrate notes that 'cavalry are of little comparative use in this mining district'.

uncommon thing to hear the vagabonds in the streets declare in these or similar terms, “only let the red coats go and we will have our rewards.”<sup>94</sup>

So, despite dealing with the events of 5 and 7 November relatively well, Clifton and his fellow magistrates were far from complacent about the future. The reform crowd still posed a threat. The Bishop, Dr Carr, and the Dean too had left the city before the County Meeting on 5 November, to seek safety in the country, and were in no hurry to come back. Carr was ‘prevented from coming here in the exercise of his official duties by threats of the destruction of his property and of violence to his person’, lamented Clifton, and the Dean too, ‘from the apprehension of mischief’.<sup>95</sup> The city’s boisterous reform crowd were out in force again during the May Days crisis of 1832, causing Tymbs, one of the Aldermen, to alert the Home Office. There were ‘large bodies of persons going about with tar barrels, effigies of the Duke of Wellington etc.’ but once again the magistrates erred on the side of caution in dealing with it, for ‘It did not seem advisable to interfere in any authoritative way, lest by exasperating the populace, mischief might be occasioned’.<sup>96</sup>

Clifton’s preparations for the policing of the crowd on the evening of 5 November looked effective on paper. Constables and a few extra watchmen were recruited without difficulty, strategically distributed for the protection of key places around the city, and they turned out reliably when called upon. As back up, he had cavalry stationed at Droitwich and Infantry at Pershore – far enough distant not to intimidate local feeling yet close enough to be summoned if the constables were unable to cope with the crowd. He rejected the offer of help from the unpredictable yeomanry and seems not to have accepted assistance from the Political Union either, perhaps because relations between the Tory Corporation and the PU were strained and magistrates were disinclined to accept help from the opposition. The offer was made, nevertheless at around 11.00pm.<sup>97</sup> He laid on comestibles for his civil and military forces at some considerable expense. The Corporation paid for 22lb of beef and 45.5 gallons of ale for the entertainment of soldiers and constables alike, new and freshly painted batons for the constables and horse hire for Captain Bathurst of the Hussars.<sup>98</sup>

When the constables proved themselves no match for the crowd, Clifton bought some time, at some risk to his reputation, by negotiating the release of prisoners. He didn’t summon soldiers until he and the crowd had reached a critical impasse, and although the time it took the military to arrive could have proved disastrous, they successfully effected a dispersal, and probably without seriously injuring anyone. Constables were encouraged to arrest large numbers of rioters, effectively removing them from the sphere of influence, but, unlike the authorities in other riotous towns, magistrates showed no interest in punitive punishments in the aftermath. After all, relatively little damage was actually done beyond some window-breaking in a very limited number of private properties and at the Guildhall.

The Worcester riot was not brought about by a specific local grievance; neither in response to a corrupt election (as in the case of Blandford, Sherborne and Yeovil) or to the insensitive intervention of an unpopular local bigwig (as in the case of Bristol). There was no other damage caused to private or public property, no ransacking of offices as at Blandford and Yeovil, and no looting. It may be that the crowd would have dispersed of their own accord if the Hussars had not engaged them, but Clifton’s biggest concern may feasibly have been that, having successfully demanded the release of two prisoners at the city gaol, the crowd might try its strength against the County Gaol as well. It was

<sup>94</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.71, Clifton to Lord Melbourne, 28 Dec 1831.

<sup>95</sup> TNA HO 52/15 f.69, Henry Clifton to Lord Melbourne, 9 November 1831.

<sup>96</sup> TNA HO 52/20 f.149, Alderman Tymbs to Lord Melbourne, 18 May 1832.

<sup>97</sup> *Worcester Journal* 10 November 1831.

<sup>98</sup> WAAS 496.5 BA9360/Cab 9/Box 6/8-10, Treasurer’s Accounts 1831.

rumoured, at least, that they might. At Bristol, it was the shift from releasing rioters from Bridewell to laying siege to a major prison that dramatically changed the nature of the disturbance. As such, Clifton may have felt he had little option but to order dispersal by military force.

Worcester had a well organised reform movement including, but not restricted to, an active Political Union. We know little about the personnel or the activities of the PU beyond occasional newspaper reports or advertisements for public meetings and the organisation of petitions, but it is possible that the early and constant presence of the organisation provided local reformers with a legitimate channel through which to express support for the Bill. We might speculate then that the PU and its allies exerted a degree of influence over modes of popular action, perhaps making riot less likely and easier to terminate.

## 6 The targets

Table 1 provides a chronological list of the known targets of the rioters in Worcester on the evening and early morning of 5-6 November 1831. The data is presented along with some biographical information about the targets, including civic position, occupation and political affiliation.<sup>99</sup> The latter was determined, in the absence of data from 1831, from voting patterns in the 1835 and 1841 elections at the county and borough level, articles in the local media and other sources.

The first assumed target of the rioters was the tailor and drapers business of the Woakes family on High Street, very close to the Guildhall. However, the voting evidence suggests that the father Henry, at least, was pro-reform and neither he nor James held a significant civic position. The origins of the fire outside the shop were unknown and perhaps accidental so it will be discounted in this analysis. The following three targets, which were selected by the small crowd that gathered at the fire in High Street, were more than 500 metres away in Foregate Street. Between High Street and Foregate Street there were numerous potential targets for mere vandalism or looting, but they were ignored. The first target of the rioters, was the Tory under-sheriff and solicitor Thomas France, followed by the banker Sir Anthony Lechmere, Lord of the Manors and magistrate who was well known as an anti-reformer and supporter of Tory candidates in Worcester and elsewhere.<sup>100</sup> The crowd clearly spent some time damaging Lechmere's large town house as more than 70 panes of glass were broken. The third target in this group is less obvious, Kendall's perfumer, toy and cigar shop of which we know little of its proprietor. Similarly, as the crowd made its way back towards the Guildhall the windows of William Hartin's silk and haberdashery shop on the Cross were broken, injuring him. Hartin held no civic position and was a confirmed Whig voter, so there is little evidence to connect this attack to a reform agenda.

At this point the deployment of the special constables by Clifton shifted the crowd action to hand-to-hand fighting on High Street and eventually to negotiation over the release of prisoners from the nearby City Gaol. There then appears to be a considerable lull in the violence until the arrival of the Hussars at around 1.15pm, followed by a stand-off until Clifton was injured and ordered the Hussars

---

<sup>99</sup> The following sources were used to derive the biographical data: S. Lewis, *Worcestershire General and Commercial Directory for 1820*; *Bentley's History Guide and Alphabetical and Classified Directory of the Borough of Worcester* (Birmingham: Bull & Turner, 1840); *Pigots' Directory* (1835) Worcester pp. 666-676; *Worcester Journal*; *Worcester Herald*; *WAAS West Worcestershire Election Poll Book January 13 1835* Books 1-3; *WAAS Index to Worcester Polls 1835-1865*; *WAAS Chamber Order Book 1830-35* Ref. b496.5 BA9360/A14/Box 4/2; *WAAS Corporation of Worcester Book of Plans and references* (1824) Ref. b496.5 BA9360/C1/3; Salmon, 'Worcester 1820-1832'; Stooks Smith, Henry, *The Parliaments of England, from 1st George I to the Present Time*, Vol II: Oxfordshire to Wales Inclusive. (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1845) pp. 133-135.

<sup>100</sup> Lechmere was known as 'Lord of the Manors' because he held hereditary rights over several manors in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.



to disperse the crowd in High Street. Whilst these skirmishes were happening some rioters headed off to attack other targets. These included the failed plan to attack the County Gaol which apparently degenerated into an attempt to extort the wine and spirit merchant, John Gordon Cripps. Cripps was, however, able to deter the rioters by stating he was reformer (he was Whig voter in 1835) and they left en masse.

Name or owner [location]	Attacks on person (P) or property (H)	Date (1831) and time	Civic position	Occupation	Political affiliation (year of election)	Notes
Henry & James Woakes [42 High St.]	H	5 Nov ~10.00pm	None	Tailor and drapers	Henry was a Whig plumper <sup>101</sup> (1835)	Fire may have started by accident
Thomas France [22 Foregate St.]	H	5 Nov >10:00pm	Under-sheriff	Solicitor	Tory plumper (1841)	
Sir Anthony Lechmere [Foregate St.]	H	5 Nov >10:00pm	Lord of the Manors, Baronet of the Court Leet, magistrate	Banker	Tory and public supporter of anti-reform electoral candidates	Endorsed candidates in Worcester and Tewkesbury
Kendall [18 Foregate St.]	H	5 Nov >10.00pm	None	Perfumer, toy and cigar dealer	N/K	
William Hartin [31 Cross]	H	5 Nov >10.00pm	None	Silk mercer and haberdasher	Whig voter (1835, 1841)	Injured by stone thrown through window
Henry Clifton [Guildhall]	P	6 Nov ~3.00am	Mayor, High Alderman, Magistrate, corporation	Proctor <sup>102</sup>	Tory plumper (1835)	Injured by stone
John Gordon Cripps [54 High St. or Broad St.] <sup>103</sup>	H	6 Nov >3.00am	None	Grocer, tea, wine and spirit merchant	Whig (1835)	Convinced crowd to leave by claiming to be a reformer
Francis Hooper [7 Cross]	H	6 Nov >3.00am	Alderman, magistrate, corporation	Wine merchant and owner of Birmingham Fire Office (insurance)	Tory (1835), Tory plumper (1841)	
John S. Ballard [High St.]	P	6 Nov >3.00am	Alderman, magistrate, corporation, trustee of the Worcester turnpikes, Chair of the Worcester dispensary and auditor of the infirmary	Grocer, tea and wine merchant	N/K	Pelted with mud by crowd

**Table 1: Targets of the Worcester rioters in November 1831.**

The final attacks during the early hours of Sunday morning were aimed at the Aldermen and magistrates, Francis Hooper and John Ballard, and several buildings including the Cathedral precincts

<sup>101</sup> A plumper was a voter who only gave his vote to one candidate when it was possible to vote for two candidates. Typically, it represented loyalty to one party (Whig or Tory).

<sup>102</sup> A Proctor was, in this case, a qualified practitioner of law in ecclesiastical courts.

<sup>103</sup> It is unclear in the sources which address, 54 High Street (1835) or Broad Street (1831) is correct.

and College Green via the gates of Edgar Tower and the Bishop's Palace. Hooper and Ballard fulfil the reform related criteria, being members of the Corporation, and it is likely they were both Tory voting anti-reformers. As for the ecclesiastical buildings, they were clearly targeted because of the generalised anger against the actions of the 'Lord's Spiritual' in voting against the Second Reform Bill and, despite his attempts to avoid judgement, the failure of the new Bishop of Worcester to vote *for* the Bill.

The targeting of the properties of anti-reformers and in a few cases their person was clearly less selective in Worcester than in some other towns that experienced reform-related disturbances.<sup>104</sup> This may have been a consequence of the relative size of provincial towns and cities, Worcester being fairly large.<sup>105</sup> The consequent anonymity within Worcester may have led to failures in accurate targeting and less coherent action amongst the rioters. Despite this, the general trend amongst the targets was to attack the properties of prominent anti-reformers and the institutions which represented them.

## 7 The rioters

For several reasons analysis of the arrestees from the reform-related rioting in Worcester was not an easy task. Unlike comparable studies of smaller provincial towns in Dorset and Somerset<sup>106</sup>, in Worcester the population was considerably greater which created larger numbers of similar common names. To compound this problem, one of the consequences of trying the prisoners in the city courts rather than at the county quarter session or at the assize was that legal documentation is extremely sparse. There are no surviving depositions or examinations to draw upon and no court minute books for the city sessions in this period. Although a portion of the arrestees in Worcester were incarcerated, the relevant prison registers which typically provide direct identification of the subject and associated prosopographical information, are not available for the 1830s. Finally, there is a lack of maps of the city with detailed apportionments for the period of study hampering efforts to locate residency. As a result, much of the study of the arrestees and their relatives required back-tracking from census data derived in 1841 and the succeeding decades.<sup>107</sup> Where there was uncertainty about the identity of a particular subject it was decided to err on the side of caution and mark the categories as 'not known' (N/K).

Table 2 lists 30 arrestees and 4 family members who provided sureties for their relatives in the aftermath of the riots in Worcester in November 1831.<sup>108</sup> The prosopographical data derived from the

<sup>104</sup> See for example the reform-related riots in Dorset and Somerset in 1831: S. Poole et al, *The Blandford Forum riots of October 1831*, *The Yeovil Riots of October 1831* and R. Ball et al, *The Sherborne Riots of October 1831*. 1831 Riot. Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/category/case-studies/>.

<sup>105</sup> In 1831 the population of Worcester was about 3 or 4 times the size of Blandford Forum, Sherborne or Yeovil.

<sup>106</sup> See for example S. Poole et al, *The Blandford Forum riots of October 1831*, *The Yeovil Riots of October 1831* and R. Ball et al, *The Sherborne Riots of October 1831*. 1831 Riot. Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/category/case-studies/>.

<sup>107</sup> Prosopographical data that has been derived from sources after 1831 is denoted in Table 2 by square brackets.

<sup>108</sup> The following sources were used to derive the biographical data: S. Lewis, *Worcestershire General and Commercial Directory for 1820*; *Bentley's History Guide and Alphabetical and Classified Directory of the Borough of Worcester* (Birmingham: Bull & Turner, 1840); *Pigots' Directory* (1822); *Pigots' Directory* (1835) Worcester pp. 666-676; *Worcester Journal*; *Worcester Herald*; *London Evening Standard*; *WAAS West Worcestershire Election Poll Book January 13 1835* Books 1-3; *WAAS Index to Worcester Polls 1835-1865*; *Worcestershire, England, Electoral Registers, 1837-1974, Western Division, 1870-1871; 1841-1881 census*; *Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, Worcester 1600-1812*, *St Helen Register of Bishop Transcripts 1701-1812*, *Bedwardine Register of Bishop Transcripts 1703-1810*; *Church of England Marriages and Banns, Worcestershire, 1754-1935*, *Bedwardine, Register of Bishop Transcripts 1815-1839*; *Worcestershire Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1812-1918*, *St Peter the Great, Register of Bishop Transcripts 1818-1918*, *Evesham, All Saints Register of Bishop*

sources is summarised in the table and allows limited characterisation of the crowd. All of the arrestees were male and of the 25 with known ages, they ranged from 14 to 36 years with a median of 20 years. Most (15) of the 19 subjects we have data on concerning marital status were single, which correlates with the relatively young median age.

For the 28 subjects which we have information on their place of residence in 1831, 24 (86 percent) were from the city of Worcester or its immediate environs. The exceptions were the three men from Fladbury (about ten miles distant) and one from Birmingham. This was in the main a 'Worcester crowd' despite the allusions amongst some commentators to 'strangers' or 'men from the country'. This bias toward residents of Worcester was reflected in their birthplaces, with the majority (24) of the 26 arrestees with this data born in the county. The known exceptions, the 'vagrant' James Egan and painter and glazier Robert Hasket(t), were both Irish.

As for the class composition of the arrestees, the majority of those with known occupations (24) were artisans (8), factory workers (8) or labourers (3). The importance of the gloving, shoemaking and textile industries in Worcester (and perhaps their recent decline due to the relaxation of import tariffs and regulation) was reflected in the large number of the sample (11) that were involved in these particular activities. The research data also demonstrated how these industries involved whole families from young children through to ageing relatives via factory and 'putting out' work, and thus created significant collective financial precarity dependent upon market conditions.

Of the 23 arrestees for which there is unambiguous data on voting in the 1835 election, only 5 appeared on the electoral role as eligible freeholders, demonstrating that a clear majority were not enfranchised by the 1832 reform act. This also points to a lack of property ownership amongst most of the sample. The one subject that appears to confound this trend is George Grainger who the evidence suggests was the son of Thomas and Mary Grainger, owners of a shop on Foregate and a porcelain factory at St Martin's gate. With the death of his father in 1839 George took over the business, successfully expanding and diversifying its products and processes.<sup>109</sup> Thomas and George were both eligible to vote in the 1835 election with the former voting for both of the Whig candidates.

Finally, it is interesting to note that those members of the sample with criminal pasts prior to 1831 are sparse, with only two definite candidates, John Peyton and Joseph Ingles, the former acquitted of stealing in 1830 and the latter fined for being drunk a year later.<sup>110</sup> Others in the sample had more serious criminal *futures*, George Elt as has been noted and William Williams and John Sheen who, the evidence suggests, were transported after several offences for stealing a sheep (1834) and geese (1842) respectively. Despite these exceptions this was not a crowd of 'criminals', in fact quite the opposite.

To summarise, assuming the sample is representative, the crowds of 5-7 November 1831 in Worcester were in the main disenfranchised, young, single, working-class men born and living in the city or its environs and without significant criminal pasts.

---

Transcripts 1813-1899, St John Bedwardine Register of Bishop Transcripts 1813-1878, St Clements, Register of Bishop Transcripts, 1813-1874, St Pauls Register of Bishop Transcripts 1845-1859; England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975; Home Office HO 18: Criminal Registers, England And Wales, 1805-1892 (1834); Home Office HO 19: Registers Of Criminal Petitions (1834); Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849 - *Leviathan* Register 1801-1836, *Ganymede* Register 1837-1845.

<sup>109</sup> *Grainger's Worcester Porcelain*, Museum of Royal Worcester. Retrieved from:

<https://www.museumofroyalworcester.org/discover-learn/research/factories/graingers-worcester-porcelain/>.

<sup>110</sup> Criminal histories were sought from newspapers for the ten year period 1821-1831.

ID	Name	Age (1831)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status/no. children	Voting right (1835)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Date and incident in riot	Sentence	Notes
1	James Egan	27	'Vagabond'	Kilkenny, Ireland	N/K	N/K	No	None	5 Nov: Assaulted a Special Constable on Foregate Street	Imprisoned for 1 month with hard labour for being a rogue and vagabond under 1824 Vagrancy Act	Named as a 'ringleader'
2	George Smith	N/K	Pedlar	Great Witley, Worcestershire	N/K	N/K	N/K	None	5 Nov	Imprisoned for 1 month with hard labour for being a rogue and vagabond under 1824 Vagrancy Act	Named as a 'ringleader'
3	William Biddle	[21]	N/K	Inkberrow, Worcestershire	Worcester	N/K	No	None	7 Nov: Broke fencing for weapons on Sansome Walk	Fined £5 or 2 months hard labour (served latter)	Named as Captain of the 'gang'
4	George Harbour (Harber)	[14-18]	[Fur cutter?]	Evesham, Worcestershire	Worcester	Single	No	None	7 Nov: Broke fencing for weapons on Sansome Walk	Fined 40s. or 14 days hard labour (served latter)	Named as member of the 'gang'. Father a bricklayer.
5	John Peyton (Payton)	[19]	[Leather dyer]	Worcester	Worcester	Single	Yes	1830: acquitted of stealing	7 Nov: Broke fencing for weapons on Sansome Walk	Fined 40s. or 14 days hard labour (served latter)	Named as member of the 'gang'
6	Francis Holland	[30]	Bricklayer	Worcestershire	Dolday, Worcester	N/K	Yes	None	5 Nov: Involved in fighting with Special Constables outside Guildhall	Bound over for £50 for 12 months	Arrested and then released after negotiation, seen a second time drunk and disorderly
7	George Grainger (Granger)	[19]	N/K	Worcester	Foregate, Worcester	Single	Yes	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	Probably the son of Thomas and Mary Grainger the porcelain manufacturers
8	Joseph Ingles	[21]	[Carpenter]	[Claines, Worcester]	Fernhill, Worcester	Single	No	1831: fined 8s. 6d. for being drunk	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	

ID	Name	Age (1831)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status/no. children	Voting right (1835)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Date and incident in riot	Sentence	Notes
9	Thomas Price	N/K	N/K	N/K	Worcester	N/K	N/K	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
10	Charles Ballinger	N/K	Baker	N/K	Worcester	N/K	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
11	Thomas Nurdin (Nerdin, Nirdin, Nurdon, Nardin)	[18]	N/K	[St John Bedwardine, Worcester]	Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	Father a labourer
12	Thomas Beach	[36]	Glover [Tailor]	St Clement, Worcester	Worcester	Married/0	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	Marries 1825, dies 1837
13	James Beach	[20]	[Cordwainer]	[Worcestershire]	Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
14	Robert Hasket(t)	[30]	Painter [and Glazier]	Ireland	10, High Street, Birmingham	Married/1	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
15	George Elt	[19]	Cordwainer	Worcestershire	St Helens, Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	7 Nov: Bound over for £10 for 6 months. 21 Nov: Bound over for £20 for 12 months	Taken back into custody for having used threatening language against a special constable. Transported for 7 years in 1839 and died in 1840.
16	Joseph Walker	[18]	Lace Weaver [Glover]	[St Clement, Worcester]	Worcester	Single	N/K	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
17	Alexander Davis	[22]	Labourer	Worcester	Bull Entry, Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
18	Henry Nicholls	[25]	Iron founder [Labourer]	Martley, Worcestershire	Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
19	Thomas Tyler	[20]	Cordwainer	Worcestershire	Fernhill Heath, Worcester	Married/3	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	
20	Thomas Evans	N/K	N/K	N/K	Worcester	N/K	N/K	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	

ID	Name	Age (1831)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status/no. children	Voting right (1835)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Date and incident in riot	Sentence	Notes
21	John Sheen	N/K	Skinner	N/K	Worcester	N/K	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	May have been transported for 14 years in 1834
22	David Vipond (Vippond, Vippant, Tovey)	[21]	Carpenter	Worcester	Friar's Alley, Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 for 6 months	Changes name to Tovey later in life
23	William Williams	[18]	N/K	[Hanley Castle, Worcestershire]	Worcester	Single	N/K	None	N/K	Discharged	May have been transported for 7 years in 1842
24	Joseph Smith	[20]	[Leather worker]	Worcester	Worcester	Married/1	N/K	None	N/K	Discharged	
25	Benjamin Ganderton	[15]	[Baker]	Worcestershire	Worcester	Single	No	None	N/K	Discharged	
26	Jonathan McCready	[20]	[Glover]	Worcestershire	Worcester	Single	No	None	Nov 5-6: Refused to leave the Guildhall area	Released with admonishment	Released on own security
27	Robert Rea	[19]	Glover	Worcester	Park Place, Worcester	Single	Yes	None	Nov 5-6: Arrested with a brickbat.	Released with admonishment	Released on father's (William) security
28	William Smith	[25]	Yeoman	Worcestershire	Fladbury, Worcestershire	N/K	N/K	None	Nov 6: Heard military had marched from Pershore, so they came to "see the riots"	Released with admonishment	Believed to have been engaging with fireworks celebration in Worcester
29	William Green	[20]	Yeoman	Worcestershire	Fladbury, Worcestershire	N/K	Yes	None	Nov 6: Heard military had marched from Pershore, so they came to "see the riots"	Released with admonishment	Believed to have been engaging with fireworks celebration in Worcester
30	Charles Milton (Mitton)	[25]	Yeoman [Cordwainer]	Fladbury, Worcestershire	Fladbury, Worcestershire	N/K	No	None	Nov 6: Heard military had marched from Pershore, so they came to "see the riots"	Released with admonishment	Believed to have been engaging with fireworks celebration in Worcester, was in possession of matches, power flask and tinder box
<b>Subjects below this section provided sureties for their relatives</b>											
31	William Holland	[50]	Bricklayer [Labourer]	N/K	Worcester	Married	No	None	N/K	Bound over for £25 if Francis reoffends	Father of Francis and James Holland

ID	Name	Age (1831)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status/no. children	Voting right (1835)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Date and incident in riot	Sentence	Notes
32	James Holland	[35]	Bricklayer [Builder]	Worcestershire	Worcester	Married/6	Yes	None	N/K	Bound over for £25 if Francis Holland reoffends	Brother of Francis Holland, son of William Holland
33	John Elt	[17]	Cordwainer	Worcestershire	Worcester	Single	Yes	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 should George Elt reoffends	Brother of George Elt
34	William Rea	[45]	Glover	Worcester	Worcester	Married/4	N/K	None	N/K	Bound over for £10 if Robert Rea reoffends	Father of Robert Rea

**Table 2: Prosopography of a sample of arrestees and family members from the Worcester riots of 5-7 November 1831**