

**Title:** The Bath riot of October 1831  
**Author(s):** Professor Steve Poole (UWE), Dr Roger Ball (UWE), Professor John Drury (University of Sussex)  
**Year:** 2024  
**Available at:** <https://riot1831.com/case-study/>

This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

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  
Bath Research Workshop Participants, 25 February 2023  
Richard Meunier  
Anne Buchanan  
Bath Record Office  
Jim Riseley  
Victoria Art Gallery  
Mark Steeds  
Bath Public Library  
Somerset Heritage Centre

For all enquiries please contact: [riot1831@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:riot1831@uwe.ac.uk)

## The Bath riot of October 1831

### Contents

1	Introduction .....	2
2	Bath and reform in the nineteenth century.....	3
3	Class and Society in Late Georgian Bath .....	14
4	The Bath riot: Sunday 30 - Monday 31 October 1831 .....	17
5	The aftermath .....	25
6	Court cases .....	27
7	The rioters .....	28
8	Afterword .....	36

### Table of Figures

Figure 1: Portrait of John Allen and contemporary illustration of the Bath election riot of October 1812. ....	4
Figure 2: Radical posters in support of Henry Hunt's 1817 reform meeting in Orange Grove. ....	6
Figure 3: 'Reform and Reformation. or Which is which.' .....	11
Figure 4: Map of Bath c.1830. ....	15
Figure 5: 'Everything vile and offensive' .....	16
Figure 6: The 'White Hart' Inn, Bath (1869).....	20
Figure 7: Map of central Bath (c.1830) showing the extent of the rioting on 30 October 1831.....	23
Figure 8: Convict hulk, Bermuda.....	31
Figure 9: The proposed Bath 'Reform Column' in Laura Place .....	37

### Table of Tables

Table 1: Prosopographical data collected on arrestees from the Bath riot of 29 October 1831 .....	35
---	----

### Abbreviations

b.d.	Birth date
BRO	Bath Record Office
HO	Home Office
JP	Justice of the Peace (Magistrate)
M	Married
MP	Member of Parliament
n.d.	No date
NSRYC	North Somerset Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry
N/K	Not Known
PS	Petty Session
QS	Quarter Session
R	Reads
S	Single
SHC	Somerset Heritage Centre
TNA	The National Archive
TS	Treasury Solicitor
VAG	Victoria Art Gallery
W	Writes

## 1 Introduction

The origins of the Bath ‘reform riot’ of October 1831, to a degree at least, lay in the relationship with its larger neighbour, the port of Bristol. Less than three weeks before the riots in both cities, the new mayor of Bath, George Kitson, was inaugurated at the Guildhall. Along with ‘200 gentlemen’, the mayor of Bristol, Charles Pinney was invited to the celebratory dinner, at which Kitson alluded to the closeness of the relationship through the analogy of marriage.<sup>1</sup> Pinney replied that ‘the two cities would be nearly united as man and wife’ and then prophetically quipped ‘and if one ever happened to be in error, the other might read it a curtain lecture’.<sup>2</sup> After the disastrous ‘errors’ of the riots in their respective cities both mayors would be admonished for their conduct, though from outside rather than inside the ‘curtain’. And the supposed bond between the cities at a civic level would be undone by a ‘marriage’ between the ‘lower orders’ of each locale.

Only 12 miles apart by road, Bath and Bristol lay on the principal transport routes between London and the south west and Wales. Their proximity and growth in the eighteenth century, however, did not lead to direct economic similarities. Bristol’s claim to be the ‘metropolis of the west’, was founded on its role as an important provincial city and crucially the commanding part it played in overseas trade in the mid-century.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, over the same period, Bath with its newly built, elegant crescents and squares, became the leading fashionable resort for the nobility, gentry and famous. Ostensibly this was to sample the spa waters for reasons of health, although promiscuous partying, gambling, pornography and prostitution were no less enticing as attractions.<sup>4</sup> Bristol had its own spa at Hotwells and exported mineral water across the empire, but in social terms, its pump room and assembly rooms were no match for their counterparts at Bath. These differences were reflected in the movement of goods and labour between the cities.

As an important trading port with the Americas, Bristol was an entry point for plantation commodities such as tobacco, sugar, rum and coffee which remained largely luxury items in the eighteenth century, and thus ideal for the elites and their entourages who gathered for pleasure in Bath. The Avon navigation enabled easy transport of industrial and commercial goods between the two cities and the river was a busy economic conduit. Commodities such as coal, iron and meat from south Wales, along with Bristol-produced window glass, bottles, brass and other manufactured items passed along the Avon to Bath.<sup>5</sup> In return, Bath traders sent by barge beer from at least four breweries in the city and building stone quarried at Combe Down and Bathampton, on the city’s peripheries. The fashionable status of Bath’s iconic architecture led to use of the latter material for building in Clifton, the burgeoning suburb for the wealthy in Bristol which grew rapidly in the nineteenth century.

By 1830, river traffic had been augmented by the Kennet and Avon Canal, an initiative that enabled barges from Bristol to travel not only to Bath quay, but on to London. The roads between Bristol, Bath and London were of better quality than to the north or south in Gloucestershire or Somerset, and post

---

<sup>1</sup> The allusion to marriage came from the fact that Pinney had married in March 1831 a ‘fellow citizen’ of Bath, Frances Mary Still, of East Knoyle, Wiltshire. Baigent, Elizabeth, "Pinney, Charles (1793–1867), mayor of Bristol," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *Bristol Times and Mirror* 15 Oct 1831; A ‘curtain lecture’ was a private scolding or lecture by a wife to her husband which would have originally been given behind the curtains of the marital bed.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Minchinton, “Bristol—Metropolis of the West in the Eighteenth Century” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4 (1954) p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Blair Waddell “William Jay of Bath (1769-1853)” (PhD diss., University of Stirling, 2012), pp. 11-12; Janet Mary Chivers “‘A resonating void’: Strategies and responses to poverty, Bath, 1770-1835” (PhD diss., Bath Spa University, 2013), Chap. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Minchinton, “Bristol” pp. 77-78.

and passenger coaches left every hour from several locations in the centre of both cities in 1831.<sup>6</sup> The development of regular commercial traffic by river or road between the markets and producers encouraged Bristol artisans making luxury goods to access the niche market at Bath. This is reflected in the number of Bristol-born traders and artisans who came to live in Bath. An examination of the out voters from the poll book for the 1830 election in Bristol demonstrates that more than one hundred were living in Bath, most with their families.<sup>7</sup> Amongst the inevitable 'gentlemen' voters, there were numerous artisans; cabinetmakers, glaziers, tailors, confectioners, watchmakers and gardeners, all of whose labour would have been in demand because of the peculiarities of Bath as a city of leisure for the elite.<sup>8</sup>

From the perspective of the largely propertyless labouring classes, Bath was a major employer of domestic servants, especially women, doubtless including plenty of people from Bristol-based families. Industries within easy reach of workers from both cities included numerous coalmines in Kingswood and several pits in the north Somerset coal field. Midway between Bristol and Bath were the brass smelting towns of Saltford and Keynsham whilst the textile factories of the Twerton area in Bath and the paper mills at Bitton near Bristol provided further opportunities for employment. The fact that people clearly came and went, following these intercity labouring networks is revealed in the regularity with which magistrates in Bristol enforced removal orders on paupers without settlement claiming relief in Bath and vice versa. Working class interaction is also suggested by the participation of at least one organised Bristol trade in Bath's mammoth 1831 reform demonstration, the journeyman hatters of Oldland Common near Bristol.<sup>9</sup> It is very likely that many more trade unionists from Bristol attended this event.

Prior to the mass migration of the famine years of the 1840s there had been a significant Irish presence in Bath. The majority of these migrants came from County Cork, Dublin, and Waterford, often via south Wales ports such as Swansea and Newport, eventually arriving in Bristol, before moving off to find employment in Bath. They worked as labourers, hawkers or servants and among the Irish who had been resident in Bath for some years there grew up a more 'respectable' community of lodging-house keepers, publicans and craftsmen. Bath was also unusual for having a predominantly female population in the period. It has been argued that this was a product of the large number of prosperous women visitors to the Spa town, who often became residents, creating an increasing requirement for female servants.<sup>10</sup> This was reflected in the strongly female Irish presence in the city. Young Irish women came in search of jobs as domestic servants, and many went on to work in the exclusive Royal Crescent.<sup>11</sup> The transient nature of these migrant Irish communities meant that familial and social links were dynamic and often extended from Bath, via Bristol and south Wales to the south of Ireland.

## 2 Bath and reform in the nineteenth century

As an urban centre with a rapidly escalating population (around 51,000 by 1831) and a parliamentary franchise restricted to the 30 common councilmen and aldermen of the city Corporation, reform

---

<sup>6</sup> TNA TS 11/415 (former ref. 1261) Treasury Solicitor and HM Procurator General, Papers: Bristol riots: Bristol special commission and King's Bench.

<sup>7</sup> *The Bristol Poll Book* (Bristol: Phillip Rose, 1830): 175-178.

<sup>8</sup> See also Waddell, "William Jay" p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Bath Herald* 15 October 1831.

<sup>10</sup> Chivers quotes a ratio of 1.59 for females to males in Bath in 1801. Chivers "Bath, 1770-1835" p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Graham Davis, "Irish Migration to Nineteenth-Century Britain," *North Irish Roots* 17, no. 1 (2006) p. 28, 31; Davis Graham, "Social decline and slum conditions: Irish migrants in Bath's history," *Bath History* Volume VIII (2000) p. 141.

sentiment was unsurprisingly strong in Bath.<sup>12</sup> The Corporation has been described as ‘a self-perpetuating oligarchy’ in that ‘there was no set retirement age and a majority of Council members remained in post until they died’.<sup>13</sup> A self-electing body which featured generations of the same families, it comprised a series of civic posts, Councilman, Constable, Bailiff, Alderman, Mayor and Magistrate which could be undemocratically accrued through a lifetime. In 1831 the body was dominated by surgeons, attorneys, apothecaries, businessmen and bankers and ‘looked ever more anachronistic in the light of Bath’s enormous Georgian expansion and a twelvefold increase in its population [since the Tudor period].’<sup>14</sup>

Reform sentiment had been growing visibly since at least 1812 when John Allen, a wealthy freeman of the city, offered himself and Samuel Colleton Graves as ‘unofficial’ candidates in that year’s general election, a piece of improvised theatre inspired by Henry Hunt’s simultaneous but legitimate candidacy at Bristol. Allen, a radically minded associate of both Hunt and Cobbett, presented himself as a champion of the freemen who, it was alleged, had legally enjoyed the franchise until the granting of the Elizabethan charter in 1590 which restricted all voting rights to the Corporate body.



Figure 1: Portrait of John Allen and contemporary illustration of the Bath election riot of October 1812.<sup>15</sup>

As John Wade’s *Black Book* put it, ‘In the course of time, the body so chosen to represent the citizens assumed a prescriptive right to the exercise of their delegated powers, independent of the suffrages

<sup>12</sup> R. S. Neale, *Bath 1680-1850, A Social History, or A Valley of Pleasure, Yet a Sink of Iniquity* (Routledge, 1981), p. 44, Table 2.1.

<sup>13</sup> Trevor Fawcett, “Bath City Council Members 1700-1835” History of Bath Research Group: Fawcett Papers (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://historyofbath.org/fawcettpapers/fawcettpapers>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. These occupations were derived from a survey of those serving as Councilmen, Constables, Bailiffs, Aldermen, the Mayor and Magistrates in the Corporation in 1831.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *A View of Bath: Historical, Political and Chronological etc.* (Bath, 1813).

of their fellow townsmen'.<sup>16</sup> Since the later years of the eighteenth century, the Freemen had been battling with the Corporation over the right to develop the High Common, a sizeable tract of land on the city's periphery, on which they enjoyed grazing rights but little else.<sup>17</sup> Allen's intervention at the 1812 election provoked an outbreak of rioting, window breaking at the Guildhall, and a clutch of arrests when the Corporation sent constables out to take Allen prisoner and disperse his crowd.<sup>18</sup> He continued as an irritant to local elites during the revival of popular reform campaigns in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1816 he criticised the then captain of the North Somerset Yeomanry, R. B. Thornhill for the heavy-handed introduction of his troop to disperse a food riot in Frome.<sup>19</sup>

Bath had by this time formed a Hampden Club and a Union Society, an organisation formed to forge closer links between political reformers and the trades societies. We know quite a lot about these initiatives thanks to the energetic and alarmist letter writing of a self-appointed Tory informer to the Home Office, William Lloyd Caldecot over the winter of 1816-17.<sup>20</sup> Hunt himself addressed a mass meeting of 12-15,000 people calling for universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments and the ballot in the Orange Grove in 1817, where local speakers too weighed into the 'usurping, self-elected' Corporation. The mayor, who had already indicated the opposition of the Corporation by refusing a request for the use of the Guildhall, did his best to dissuade attendance by enrolling some 400 constables, summoning the city's 300 sedan chairmen ('stout men on whom the mayor can depend – the chairmen are on the spot in considerable numbers and speed in different parts of the town'), and calling in the North Somerset Yeomanry and two troops of 23rd Lancers, but there was no disorder.<sup>21</sup> A petition with 8,000 signatures was forwarded from Bath to a national convention of Hunt's Hampden Clubs in London in the ensuing weeks, making its case plainly enough:

These 30 persons constitute more or less not only the local magistracy, but also the Commissioners of Police, the Commissioners of Taxes, the Proprietors of Newspapers, the Governors of Public Charities, and have moreover the donation of ecclesiastical emoluments and plurality of livings. Thus it is obvious that we are unrepresented.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> John Wade (ed.), *The Extraordinary Black Book: An Exposition of Abuses in Church and State...* (London, 1832 edition), pp. 469-71.

<sup>17</sup> For further detail on this dispute see Christopher Hibbert, *A View of Bath: Historical, Political and Chronological etc.* (Bath 1813), pp. 14-17 and Rev. C. W. Shickle, *Bath Council Minute Books*, 4, 1783-1834 (unpub. Typescript, Bath Library), entries dated 28 March and 10 July 1812, 9 January 1813 and 14 February 1817. The Common stretched across land now covered by part of the Royal Victoria Park and the Approach Golf Course.

<sup>18</sup> Anon, *An Impartial Statement of the Facts Arising out of the Proceedings of the Mock Election at Bath...* by an Inhabitant and Eyewitness (Bath, 1812). In addition to the charges of riot against five crowd members, Allen pursued a case for assault against one of the constables, Kitson, on the grounds that he had no warrant. For correspondence on these cases see BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 41 (1813).

<sup>19</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 24 July (for Thornhill's furious response), 9 October 1816.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, TNA HO 42/156, Caldecott to Sidmouth, 5 December 1816 and HO 42/163, Caldecot to Sidmouth, 10 April 1817.

<sup>21</sup> Cassius (J. Arnold), *A Letter to the Mayor of Bath on his Late Refusal to Convene a General Meeting of the Inhabitants of that City to petition the House of Commons for Parliamentary Reform* (Bristol, 1817).

<sup>22</sup> Bath Public Library, *The Resolutions and Petition of the Freeholders, Householders and Inhabitants of the City of Bath and its Vicinity... Held in the Orange Grove on Monday January 6<sup>th</sup> 1817* (Bath Broadsides and Posters); *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 8 January 1817. For the Bath meeting see also *Memoirs of Henry Hunt Esq., Written by Himself in His Majesty's Gaol at Ilchester* (1822: Dodo Press edition), vol. 3, pp. 222-3, and John Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism* (1985: Breviary Stuff edition, 2012), pp. 50-51. For the reference to the chairmen see Devon Archives and Local Studies Service (South West Heritage Trust), Addington Papers, 152M/1817/042, J. Ford to Addington, 6 January 1817.



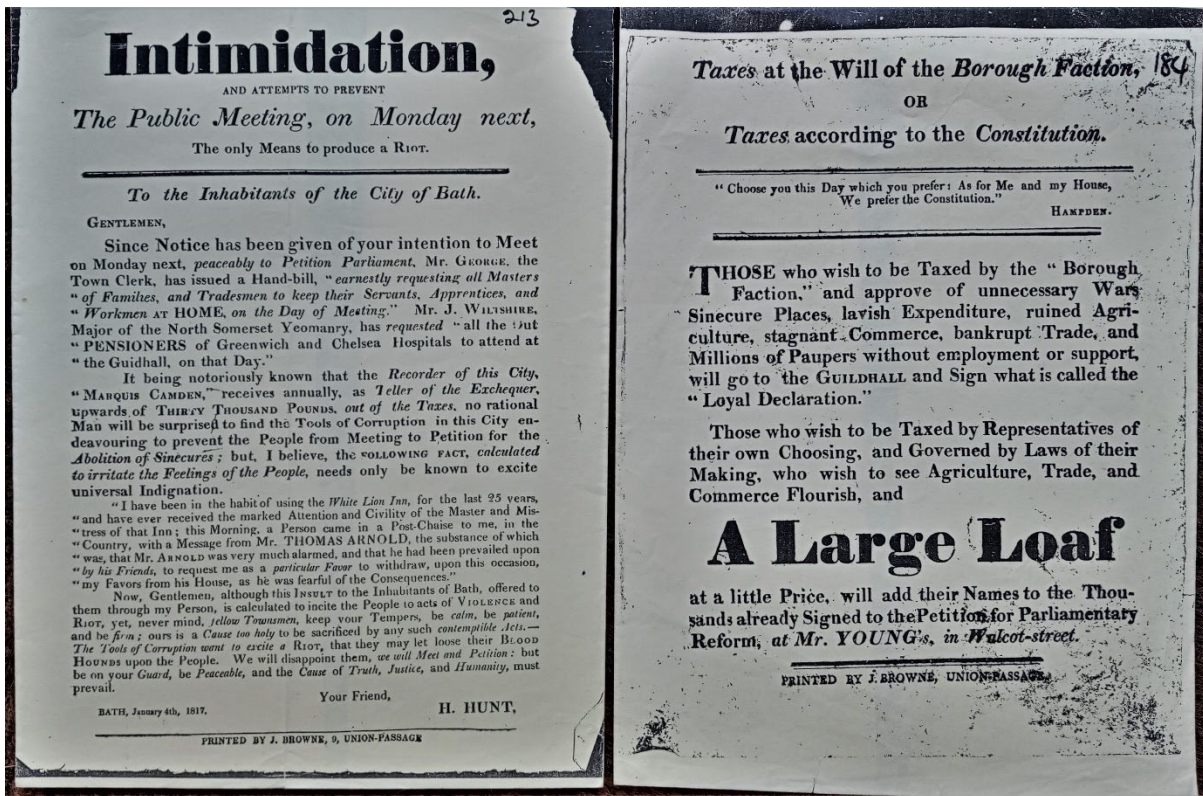


Figure 2: Radical posters in support of Henry Hunt's 1817 reform meeting in Orange Grove.<sup>23</sup>

Bath elections continued in the usual vein over the next twelve years and drew customary expressions of disdain from pro-reformers. Very occasionally a degree of disruption was produced however because although the Corporation's grip on the franchise was absolute, they did not actually choose the two sitting members. The first was chosen by the Marquess of Bath, who placed his own brother, Lord John Thynne, in the role in 1796. Thynne was an unequivocal Tory and an opponent of reform, and he remained a city MP until 1832, despite what the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* described as the 'general groans and hisses from the surrounding spectators', at each election.<sup>24</sup>

After 1826, the second seat rested firmly in the hands of the city Recorder, the Earl of Camden, another anti-reformer. Before that, things were less clear cut and Camden's control only partial. In 1801, local entrepreneur and Post Office pioneer John Palmer took the seat, despite John Berkely Burland, chairman of the county sessions, stepping in to force a contest in Camden's interest. In 1808, John Palmer passed the seat to his son Charles, who retained it at the elections of 1812, 1818 and 1820. In 1820, Camden was keen for his son, Lord Brecknock to take Palmer's seat from him but the boy was a year underage. A rumour began to circulate that Camden planned to get the Tory lawyer, Sir William Scott to put up against Palmer as a stopgap measure and then make way for Brecknock as soon as he reached adulthood. Palmer and the reformers were outraged at these shenanigans and in the end Camden thought better of it and held back. The *Gazette* called the whole affair 'a farce' and 'a mockery of election'.<sup>25</sup>

In 1826, Camden finally moved against Palmer; as expected, putting his son forward for the Corporation to nominate and elect. They could, of course, have defied him and stuck with Palmer had

<sup>23</sup> TNA HO 42/159 Domestic Correspondence, George III, 1817 Feb 01-1817 Feb 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 17 June 1818.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (Keele, 1996), p. 117; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 17, 23 June 1818; 15 March 1820.

they wished, but that's not what happened. Quite possibly, even Palmer's backers on the Corporation were becoming wary of his popularity with reformers who had begun to see him as a champion of electoral independence. Palmer recognised the threat but steadfastly refused to criticise his own assassins. Addressing a packed Guildhall on voting day, he complimented the Corporation on their impartiality:

In answer to an attack that was lately made upon you in the House of Commons wherein you were called a self-elected body returning mock representatives to that House, I stated my belief that you had given the only example of a close borough throughout the kingdom, independent of the Crown, the Minister and the Aristocracy, and of which, as its member, I could declare that I had not a single vote at my command but was solely indebted for my seat to the free will of the electors.

And with that, they proved him right and voted to return Thynne and Brecknock, albeit in the teeth of loud cheers from the public gallery at every vote cast for Palmer and a hiss for each of Brecknock's.<sup>26</sup>

Twice, in 1828 and 1829, Brecknock was obliged briefly to resign his seat after securing positions with the Admiralty, but on both occasions the Corporation renominated him. On the first, knowing that Brecknock would win, Palmer declined a contest. On the second, believing Brecknock's support to be slipping, he put himself forward and secured a nomination, but lost by two votes. Duly re-elected, Brecknock was chaired from the Guildhall through the Market Place to Broad Street and York House, heavily guarded against public disapproval by baton-wielding constables.<sup>27</sup>

By the time of the general election of 1830, Palmer had shrewdly reinvented himself as a mildly reform-minded Whig and it was in this capacity that he won re-election that year (by two votes), his victory over Brecknock an indication that tolerance for reform was finally making a mark even inside Bath Corporation. On the eve of the 1831 election, the city's representation was therefore split between the pro-reform Palmer and the Tory, Lord John Thynne. Rumours quickly circulated that the Corporation would return to backing Brecknock and Thynne to unseat Palmer who had now publicly confirmed his attachment to the Reform Bill. Meanwhile, in the public sphere, Parish meetings were organised to pledge pro-reform petitions for Palmer to present to parliament. 'The revolution in public opinion had indeed been great', announced John Allen at a meeting in the *White Lion*:

The time was not long past when all who attended a meeting for such purposes as they were now met would have been stigmatised as Jacobins, but now the case is altered, the tables are turned. Those who support the cause of reform are now the supporters of the King and his ministers – the friends of order and the promoters of their country's peace and prosperity.<sup>28</sup>

As the election campaign got under way in April, a pro-Reform meeting of 40-shilling county freeholders was held at the *White Hart*, and in May supporters of Edward Sandford, the Reform candidate for the County seat, met at the Masonic Hall in York Street.<sup>29</sup> In the event, the threats to unseat Palmer came to nothing. Brecknock withdrew at short notice and in the absence of another Tory candidate to replace him, Palmer was duly elected on a show of hands. In the *Bath Chronicle's* opinion, this was just as well, for if Palmer had indeed lost his seat,

---

<sup>26</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 15 June 1826.

<sup>27</sup> *London Evening Standard* 13 February 1828; Terry Jenkins, 'Bath 1820-1832' in D. R. Fisher (ed.), *The History of Parliament 1820-1832* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> *Bath Journal* 14 March; 26 September 1831.

<sup>29</sup> *Bath Journal* 9 May 1831.



popular discontent would most probably have manifested itself. During the night of Thursday, the walls of the city were abundantly chalked with "General Palmer or a Row!!" etc., and there can be no doubt that these symptoms of tumult would have been followed by grave consequences if the two noble lords had been selected.<sup>30</sup>

Both elected members were chaired through the streets in the customary way, Palmer to his house in Brock Street, pausing only for an opportunity to pledge his fidelity to the 'the Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill' before cheering crowds in Milsom Street. Thynne, by contrast, was forced to abandon his chairing after encountering opposition in the short stretch along Cheap Street from the Guildhall. He abandoned his chair outside the *White Hart* after missiles were thrown at him by 'the lowest rabble... one or two of which struck the noble Lord!'<sup>31</sup>

In September 1831, with the Second Reform Bill now on its way to the House of Lords, a host of well attended public meetings were held in the inner-city parishes of St Michael, St James and St Peter and Paul and in the suburbs of Walcot, Bathwick, Lyncombe and Widcombe.<sup>32</sup> These culminated on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> with a gathering at the Guildhall where 'the rush which took place, when the doors were thrown open, was tremendous, and in a few minutes every part of the Hall was completely crowded'.<sup>33</sup> The meetings were called to agree petitions politely urging the Lords to give the Bill 'speedy passage', though some orators suggested more belligerent approaches. John Allen, speaking at the St James parish meeting, said he had:

...for 40 years been looking forward to such a measure of reform as the present...As for the bill itself...by which 57 rotten boroughs were disenfranchised, he should be perfectly satisfied...we had for years groaned under an oppressive taxation, and it was to the removal of these intolerable burdens that he considered the Reform Bill the preliminary step. He should like to see the enormous expenses attendant upon 600 Admirals and 600 Generals cut down, and the country relieved from the misrule of an oligarchy and...nothing but this could save the nation from anarchy and confusion.<sup>34</sup>

Allen went on to draw a comparison with the years following the French revolution when loyalist calls for 'Church and King' had stigmatised those proposing reform as 'Jacobins and Levellers'. He claimed that 'the people's eyes were now open and they were no longer to be deluded by such means'. What Allen went on to propose they should do about it the *Bath Chronicle* was anxious to keep from its readers for 'having the fear of the Attorney-General duly before our eyes, we must decline publishing that portion of his observations'.

When news of the House of Lords' rejection of the Second Bill arrived in Bath late on the Saturday afternoon of 8<sup>th</sup> October it brought crowds onto the streets, 'anxiously conversing' in groups on the fate of the Bill. The *Chronicle* described the moment:

---

<sup>30</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 5 May 1831.

<sup>31</sup> Captain Rowland Mainwaring, R.N., *Annals of Bath from the Year 1800 to the Passing of the New Municipal Act* (Bath 1838), pp. 259-60.

<sup>32</sup> For example, the *Bath Herald* claimed that more than 1,000 people had attended the Walcot meeting forcing the organisers to move the meeting into the open air. *Bath Herald* 1 October 1831.

<sup>33</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 22, 29 September 1831; *Bath Herald* 1 October 1831.

<sup>34</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 29 September 1831.

A deep and solemn feeling, such as, in fact, we have never before witnessed, seemed to brood heavily over all classes of people, however they might differ in political thinking.<sup>35</sup>

Compounding the mood, the bells of St James's church rang a 'dumb' peal, and many shops were closed, particularly in the parish of Walcot, 'as if the families within were bowing beneath the stroke of some mortal affliction'. The following morning the city was posted with various broadsides which accused the anti-reform Lords of confronting the public and encouraged the latter to 'boldly assert their rights' and to pay no taxes.<sup>36</sup> Some of these broadsides may have emanated from the Walcot Street printshop of Samuel Bennett, a determined radical propagandist who had come to the attention of the Corporation a year earlier. In November 1830, Bennett was hauled before the mayor for publishing 'Englishmen Read!!!', a comprehensive list of peers and bishops together with 'the amount they receive from the labour of the people, per annum', a sum of £4,680,835 in total. 'Is it to be wondered at', he demanded,

that the productive poor are to be found starving on the highways, hanging and drowning themselves to get rid of a wretched existence, while UNPRODUCTIVE GENTLEMEN like the above are permitted to take so much from their hard earnings? If you have hitherto neglected to think for yourselves, begin to think NOW!

These were 'false and inflammatory' assertions, insisted the mayor, and he told Bennett the broadside would be forwarded to the Home Office for possible prosecution as a seditious libel. Bennett went straight home and composed a second broadside, 'To the Worshipful the Mayor of Bath', reiterating the right to free speech: 'I humbly conceive that the time has passed away when PUBLIC OPINION must tremble before the threatening aspect of judicial authority. And are we to be denied the privilege of thinking for ourselves? A nation of IDIOTS, forsooth?' Town Clerk Philip George did as he was bid and forwarded both broadsides to the Secretary of State, but no prosecution appears to have followed.<sup>37</sup>

By 1831, some of the more 'respectable' reformers had begun responding to these 'foolish ebullitions from the radical press', as the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* labelled them, by removing and defacing them and counter-posting. By noon on Monday 10 October:

...our walls and shop windows exhibited numerous and various placards and handbills calling upon the people immediately to be "up and doing;" but deprecating in the strongest terms any violent or illegal proceedings. Through this medium the people were assured that the ultimate success of the Reform cause mainly depended on the patience, peaceful demeanour, and persevering firmness of its supporters, by which alone their wishes could not fail of being accomplished.

The writer went on to claim that these interventions 'had a visible effect in calming the excited feelings of the populace'.<sup>38</sup> Despite these attempts to check the anger over the decision in the House of Lords most of the city would have been aware that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Bath and Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Thomas Thynne and the Bishop of Bath and Wells, George Henry Law, had both been present in the Lords and voted against the Reform Bill. Thomas Thynne was the brother of the anti-

<sup>35</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 13 October 1831.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to *Evening Mail* 12 October 1831; *Bristol Times and Mirror* 15 October 1831.

<sup>37</sup> TNA HO 52/11, ff. 281-3, Philip George to Robert Peel 3 November 1830, with enclosures, 'Englishmen Read!!!' and 'To the Worshipful the Mayor of Bath'

<sup>38</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 18 October 1831.

reform sitting MP for Bath, Lord John Thynne who had also voted against the Bill in the Commons in September.

On Monday 10<sup>th</sup>, rumours were circulating that street-meetings had already taken place in some areas of Bath, resolving not to pay taxes and that the ‘lower classes’ were planning a mass meeting on the High Common behind Marlborough Buildings, a traditional place of resort for the city Freeman.<sup>39</sup> It was claimed by one correspondent that this spurred more ‘respectable’ reformers to demand an ‘official’ reform meeting in order to prevent an autonomous meeting of the working classes.<sup>40</sup> This they did, though the first requisition calling upon the Mayor to hold an indoor public meeting was rejected by him, just as it had been in 1817, on the grounds that ‘the corporation never wished to interfere in politics, one way or the other’. This decision in combination with that of the High Sheriff of Somerset in refusing to sanction a county meeting despite a requisition signed by ‘500 respectable persons’ did not dissuade the reformers. Instead, they met again on the Monday evening and successfully requested permission from two magistrates to have a mass outdoor public meeting in Bath later that week.<sup>41</sup>

In the interim there were a series of incidents and further rumours which added to the tension in the city. A letter written in *The Courier* from Bristol claimed that in response to the rejection of the Reform Bill in the Lords:

The people of Bath hung out a red flag, dipped in blood, and would not allow the coaches for this city (Bristol) to pass through until they had decorated the coachmen and horses in black crepe.<sup>42</sup>

Although its veracity was derided by the *Bath Chronicle*, the pro-reform nature of Bath was being exposed in both the provincial and national press. In the House of Commons, Henry Hunt, who had campaigned in Bath in 1817 and had since been elected radical MP for Preston, claimed that an auctioneer in the city had been obliged to distribute flyers assuring the public that he would not auction any goods seized in lieu of taxes.<sup>43</sup> Other flyers and posters advertising the pro-reform rally were simultaneously being distributed calling for tradesmen to close their shops for a few hours to demonstrate their support for Reform and to allow their workers to attend.<sup>44</sup>

A story widely reported in the English and Irish newspapers concerned the Roman Catholic Bishop of Cork, the Reverend Doctor Murphy. Travelling back to Ireland on the London to Bristol mail coach on the morning of Tuesday 11th, Murphy stopped briefly at Bath.<sup>45</sup> As he walked through the streets, the prelate was mistaken for the Protestant Bishop of Cork and Ross, the Reverend Doctor Kyle, who had voted by proxy against the Reform Bill in the House of Lords. A crowd soon ‘assailed him with the most tremendous yells, hissing, hooting, and cries of down with the bloody Bishops who voted against Reform’. According to one report:

---

<sup>39</sup> For the High-Common see Janet Pryke and John Oswin, “High Common, Bath (the Approach Golf Course): A report on geophysical surveys during 2022” (Bath and Counties Archaeological Society, 2023).

<sup>40</sup> This was alluded to in a letter to the *Evening Mail* 12 October 1831.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to *Evening Mail* 12 October 1831; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 18 October 1831.

<sup>42</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 13 October 1831.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times* 14 October 1831; Belchem, ‘Orator Hunt’: *Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism* pp. 50-51.

<sup>44</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 13 October 1831.

<sup>45</sup> The following account is based on reports in *Waterford Chronicle* 15 October 1831; *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier* 15 October 1831; *Morning Herald* (London) 18 October 1831; *Morning Advertiser* 18 October 1831; *Sun* 18 October 1831; *Cork Constitution* 22 October 1831; *Suffolk Chronicle* 22 October 1831; *Reading Mercury* 24 October 1831; *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 28 October 1831.

For some minutes Doctor Murphy walked on without heeding them, until at length they became so outrageous as to make him fear they were going to lay violent hands on him, when he turned round and informed them he was not a Protestant but a Roman Catholic Bishop, and a friend to Reform. The mob instantly ceased to insult him, and commenced cheering him loudly, which they continued to do until he entered his lodgings.<sup>46</sup>

However, sometime later that day, when Murphy tried to leave the refuge of the Inn on the Bristol stage to continue his journey to Ireland 'a large assemblage of people soon surrounded the Coach and demanded to know if the Bishop of Cork was a passenger'. Once again mistaking Rev. Dr Murphy for a Protestant Bishop they shouted, 'they had the damned shovel hat' and tried to drag him out of the carriage despite his protestations that he was the wrong target (see Figure 3). After failing to extricate Murphy, the crowd attempted to turn the coach over but were thwarted by the swift actions of the driver who whipped the horses on, leaving several passengers behind. Another newspaper report noted that the actual target of the 'Bath mob' Reverend Kyle and his family, after 'fulfilling his parliamentary duties' in London, had travelled via Shrewsbury to Dublin, shrewdly avoiding Bath and Bristol altogether.<sup>47</sup>

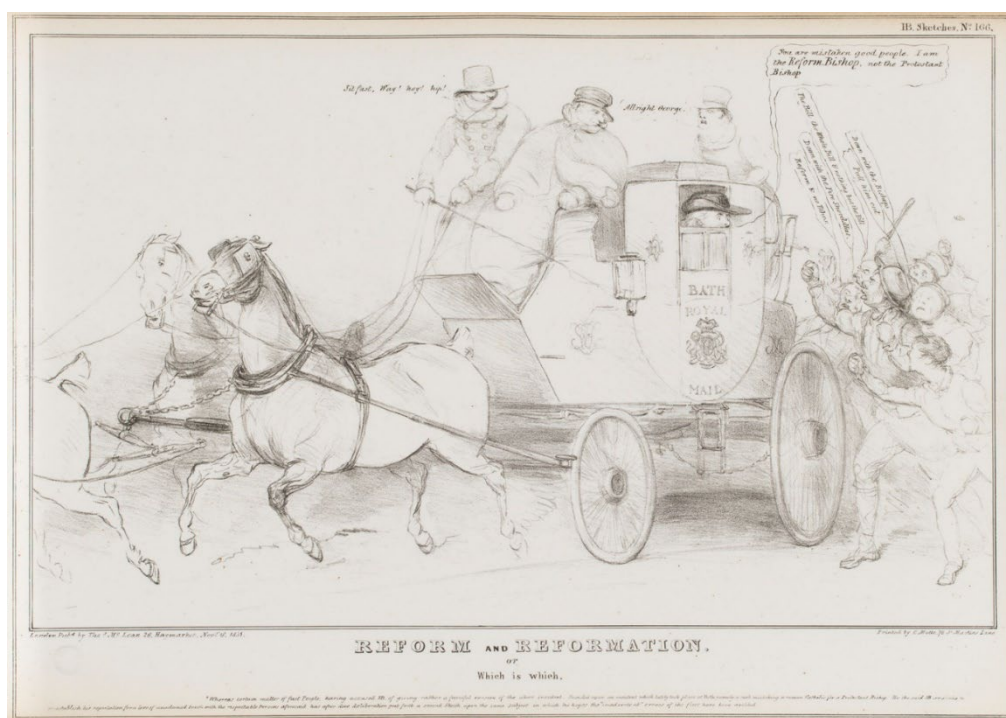


Figure 3: 'Reform and Reformation. or Which is which.' *Lithograph satirising the mistaken attack on the Bishop of Cork's carriage in Bath. From the left, carriage driver: 'Sit fast, Way! hey! hip!', driver's mate: 'Alright George', Bishop of Cork: 'You are mistaken good people. I am the Reform Bishop, not the Protestant Bishop', Crowd: 'Down with the Bishops', 'Pull him out', 'The Bill the Whole Bill & nothing but the Bill', 'Down with the Fire shovel hats', 'Reform and no Tithes'.<sup>48</sup>*

The great public reform meeting the magistrates had finally given their assent to went ahead on 13 October. With marching bands and banners flying, some 22,000 people of all classes, according to one

<sup>46</sup> *Waterford Chronicle* Saturday 15 October 1831.

<sup>47</sup> *Cork Constitution* 22 October 1831.

<sup>48</sup> John ('HB') Doyle, printed by Charles Etienne Pierre Motte, published by Thomas McLean lithograph, 18 November 1831. National Portrait Gallery D41101.

estimate, marched from Queen Square to a temporary platform erected outside the Sydney Hotel at the far end of Great Pulteney Street. It was, boasted a pamphlet account, ‘the most numerous that ever took place in Bath’.<sup>49</sup> There were marching bands and brightly coloured flags and banners with pro-reform slogans picked out in silk lettering. The city’s trades turned out in full, with contingents of printers, blacksmiths, coachmakers, tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, cabinet makers, masons, plasterers, painters and sawyers. The leading banner read ‘The United Trades – We are all agreed – The Bill and nothing else’ and on the reverse a version of the slogan from the American Revolution ‘Taxation without representation is cruel and unjust’. Other banners displayed slogans referring to freedom of the press, people’s rights, loyalty to the King, his ministers and the Reform Bill and Magna Carta. The contingent of printers even brought a printing press with them which ran off flyers with the following rhyme under the motto ‘The Guardian of our Rights’:

HAIL, to the Press! To Thee we Britons owe,  
 All we believe and almost all we know;  
 Resistless Pleader of the People’s cause,  
 Strong Guardian of our Liberty and Laws!  
 Knowledge and Truth by thee the Million gain,  
 And Lords shall strive to make them slaves in vain!<sup>50</sup>

The demonstration represented ‘a wonderful and unparalleled unanimity... between the lowest classes and those immediately above them’, according to one observer. Or as the *Bath & Cheltenham Gazette* would have it,

The reform measure has already elicited a new character in the citizens of Bath. Shut out from all share in the election of representatives in parliament for a long series of years, Bathonians have been universally regarded as mere drones in the political hive. But the rejection of the Bill that was expected to enfranchise a considerable proportion of the inhabitants, has drawn them out in a manner altogether novel and respectable, and far beyond expectation.<sup>51</sup>

The marchers systematically expressed their feelings over the failure of the Reform Bill by targeting the Corporation, ‘passing the Guildhall, each division made a halt and vented its indignation against the Anti-reformers in tremendous groans, finishing with cheers for the opposite party’.<sup>52</sup> Speakers at the rally outside the Sydney Hotel nevertheless went to some lengths to warn their audience against physical action. ‘Avoid everything bearing the slightest resemblance to popular tumult’, counselled Captain Rowland Mainwaring. ‘Rioting would have quite a contrary effect from what you might probably anticipate; it would inure your cause instead of promoting it’. Henry Godwin was next:

Shall we break the peace? (No, we will not!) remember, if we break the peace, it is the King’s peace that we shall be violating... Do not seek to carry by lawless force that object which can better – far better – be secured by tranquil argument.<sup>53</sup>

Although each speaker in turn emphasised the need for peaceful campaigning, as several reports concurred, things didn’t remain entirely ‘respectable’. An outraged correspondent in the *Bath Herald*

---

<sup>49</sup> *A Full Report of the Reform Meeting Held in Front of the Sydney Hotel* (Bath, 1831), 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 20 October 1831.

<sup>51</sup> Neale, *Bath 1680-1850* p. 339. See also Stephen Brooks, ‘Bath and the Great reform Bill’ in John Wroughton (ed.), *Bath in the Age of Reform* (Bath 1972), pp. 21-31; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 18 October 1831.

<sup>52</sup> *Bath Herald* 15 October 1831.

<sup>53</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 20 October 1831.

claimed that one of the banners carried by the crowd depicted a 'General Officer suspended from a Gallows', by implication the Duke of Wellington. This was denied by the organisers of the protest and the paper commented:

Our only defence of the mechanics with whom this device originated is – that having looked searchingly into their merry faces, we came to the conclusion that though “they spoke with daggers” they would be the last men on earth “to use them”.<sup>54</sup>

However, what could not be denied was that once the meeting was over some of the Guildhall's windows were smashed as the crowds made their way home across Pulteney Bridge.<sup>55</sup>

That the Guildhall should be verbally targeted by the demonstrators during the day and that evening by missiles is not, perhaps surprising. The day of the pro-reform meeting happened to coincide with the inauguration of the new Mayor, George Kitson. This annual civic ceremony began with a sermon in the Abbey and then, later that evening, a banquet at the Guildhall for 'about 200 gentlemen', including the MPs for the city of Bath and county of Somerset and Bristol's mayor, Charles Pinney. Pro-reform MP General Palmer spoke briefly at the Sydney Hotel reform rally to 'the most enthusiastic applause' but also attended the mayoral events at the Abbey and the Guildhall.<sup>56</sup> Palmer's presence at the latter events was considered to have moderated a risky situation for the anti-reform Bath MP, Lord John Thynne. A journalist who attended the Sydney Hotel rally wrote:

The Mayor and Corporation are to have their dinner this evening, and I doubt, with all their care, if they will be able to preserve their favourite member, Lord J. Thynne, from being grossly insulted; indeed, had it not been for General Palmer screening him this morning, his life would have been in great danger, as he is cordially detested by all the inhabitants.<sup>57</sup>

Several sources reported that when Thynne accompanied the Mayor and members of the Corporation to Bath Abbey in the morning he was 'so assailed with various missiles, thrown by the populace, as to sustain considerable injury'.<sup>58</sup> The *Bath Herald* noted that the dinner in the Guildhall was disrupted by cheers for the pro-reformers including Palmer and groans for Lord Thynne and that:

The procession to and from the Church was marked by a very angry display of popular feeling towards the Anti-reform member [Lord John Thynne] and his partisans, and on the return to the Guildhall, the windows of that building were assailed with stones and several squares demolished.<sup>59</sup>

Bristol and Bath may have been epicentres for pro-reform agitation of various forms, but they were not alone in the region. In Somerset, 10 miles south of Bath, a public reform meeting took place in Frome on 14 October, the day after the meeting at the Sydney Hotel, and the same month a Political Union (PU) was launched in the town. Seven miles to the west of the City on Compton Common near the village of Compton Dando on 20 October an estimated 2,000 people gathered for a pro-reform rally. They travelled from nearby villages and towns, with a large contingent walking the three miles from Keynsham with a marching band.<sup>60</sup> In west Wiltshire the provincial towns of Chippenham (15

---

<sup>54</sup> *Bath Herald* 22 October 1831.

<sup>55</sup> *Bath Journal* 17 October 1831.

<sup>56</sup> *Bristol Times and Mirror* 15 October 1831; *Bristol Mercury* 18 October 1831; *Bath Chronicle* 20 October 1831.

<sup>57</sup> *Evening Mail* 17 October 1831.

<sup>58</sup> *Morning Herald* (London) 18 October 1831 (from *Bristol Liberal*); *Evening Mail* 17 October 1831.

<sup>59</sup> *Bath Herald* 15 October 1831.

<sup>60</sup> *Evening Mail* 21 October 1831; *Bath Chronicle* 27 October 1831.



October), Trowbridge (17 October) and Bradford-on-Avon (21 October) all within 15 miles of Bath had mass pro-reform meetings and, in contrast to the situation in Somerset there was a county meeting held in Wiltshire on 28 October in Devizes which attracted a crowd of 5-15,000.<sup>61</sup> Working class anger was visibly expressed by the quarrymen of Bradford-upon-Avon, only seven miles from Bath, who marched to the reform meeting outside the Swan Inn with '199' chalked on their hats. A black banner draped from the Inn read "Shall 199 rob 20 millions?" a reference to the number of Lords who had voted against the Reform Bill.<sup>62</sup>

### 3 Class and Society in Late Georgian Bath

How far the much-vaunted new bonds of cross-class camaraderie really went amongst the reformers of Bath is difficult to judge. In its Georgian heyday, Bath had made its name as a city of frivolous consumption in which disparities between privileged wealth and leisure on the one hand, and grinding poverty on the other, were conspicuous. The city teemed with low paid service sector workers, attracted by the prospect of needy seasonal visitors. By the 1830s however, despite steady industrial growth and continuing opportunities in the artisan trades, the city's relative economic decline was palpable, and the Corporation set about rebranding Bath as a more sober centre of genteel residence and retreat. Economic decline may not have affected everybody, but if R. S. Neale's figures are accurate, real weekly wages for Bath's labouring poor were lower in 1832 (on average, 7s 6d) than they had been either in the 1780s (8s) or in 1801 (9s 6d). Margot Finn has put it more starkly: These earnings in 1832 were 'not only below contemporary estimates of the minimum cost to feed, clothe and lodge a family of four (12s a week) but beneath even the subsistence figure for food alone (7s 9d)'.<sup>63</sup> As we will see, a notable feature of the crowd's language in the Bath riot in 1831 was a call not only for political reform, but for basic sustenance, expressed in the cry, 'We will have bread!' The labour force continued to expand in the 1820s and 30s as small-scale industrialisation grew, but the lower town where most of Bath's poor and artisan classes lived, was rapidly degenerating into a residential slum. The seedy reputation of the Avon Street, Milk Street, Corn Street and Quayside district (see Figure 4) in particular had been developing rhetorically since the late eighteenth century, and by 1820 it had become a byword both for squalor and moral turpitude.

---

<sup>61</sup> *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* 24 October 1831; *Bath Chronicle* 20, 27 October 1831; *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* 20 October, 03 November 1831; *Bath Herald* 22 October 1831.

<sup>62</sup> *Bath Herald* 29 October 1831.

<sup>63</sup> Neale, *Bath 1680-1850*, 80; Margot Finn, 'Debt and Credit in Bath's Court of Requests, 1829-39', *Urban History* 21, 2 (1994), p. 216.



Figure 4: Map of Bath c.1830. The poorest areas were in the lower part of town, on the left-hand side on this map and close to the river: for example, the Quay, Avon Street, Milk Street, Dolemead and Corn Street. Part of the High Common can be seen at top right.

However, image and reality were not necessarily the same thing. While the 'othering' of the Avon Street district allowed both the Corporation and respectable residents in the upper town to compartmentalise and simplify the city's social and economic problems, we should not overlook the fact that nine Avon Street householders and another three in Milk Street were added to the electoral franchise when the Reform Bill passed in 1832.<sup>64</sup> Prejudicial rhetoric nevertheless painted Avon Street

<sup>64</sup> The Reform Act effectively increased the electoral franchise at Bath from 30 to 3,000. *The Bath Poll, Being a List of Names of Persons who Voted in the Election of Members for the Above City on December 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> and for Whom they Voted* (Bath: J. Weston, 1833). The twelve Avon Street and Milk Street voters between them gave 10 votes to Palmer, 8 votes to John Arthur Roebuck – a radical candidate favouring further democratic reform – and only 3 for Henry Hobhouse, a Whig but popularly supposed to be very lukewarm about reform. No Tories stood in the 1832 election. A number of artisan tradesmen from across the city were added to the franchise at Bath in 1832, although as John Phillips has pointed out, we should be cautious about associating the presence of named trades in Poll Book with the idea that the Bill accelerated social mobility. Most or all of Bath's newly enfranchised shoemakers in 1832 for example, were almost certainly established masters already. John A. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-1841* (OUP: Oxford, 1992), p. 141.



(see Figure 5) as little more than a ‘receptacle for unfortunate women’, or ‘the Wapping of Bath’, and it was certainly overcrowded, providing cramped lodgings for around 1,200 people by 1836.<sup>65</sup> For the full pejorative tone, we must turn to the social reformer Edwin Chadwick, who’s often quoted description of the Street in 1842 began, ‘Everything vile and offensive is congregated there. All the scum of Bath – its low prostitutes, its thieves, its beggars – are piled up in the dens, rather than houses, of which the street consists’.<sup>66</sup> Qualification aside, it remains the case that for many contemporaries, Bath was not one by two cities, demarcated as the upper town and lower town, and they had precious little in common. This qualitative assessment was backed up by statistics from Chadwick. Quoting from a survey of more than 1,200 deceased Bath residents, he noted that life expectancy for gentlemen, professional persons, and their families (55 years of age) was nearly fifty per cent greater than that for tradesmen (37) and more than double that of mechanics and labourers (25).<sup>67</sup>



Figure 5: ‘Everything vile and offensive’: Richard Cruickshank’s satirical depiction of a typical night in an Avon Street beer shop.

To the makers and guardians of respectable public opinion, the lower town’s depraved moral reputation implied not only insipient criminality but political radicalism. As the hostile *Bath Chronicle* commented in 1833, on the prospect of further reforms after the passing of the Reform Act:

<sup>65</sup> Pierce Egan, *Walks Through Bath Describing Everything Worthy of Interest... a Complete Guide to the Visitors of the Above City* (Bath, 1819), 192; *Bath Chronicle* 5 May 1836.

<sup>66</sup> Avon Street’s most persistent and careful historian is Graham Davis, whose work has done so much to peel apart the substantive gap between rhetorical construction and lived experience in the nineteenth century city. See for example, Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, *Bath, a New History* (Keele, 1996), especially pp. 87-114; Davis, ‘Social decline and slum conditions’, *Bath History*, VIII (2000), 134-147; Graham Davis, *Bath as Spa and Bath as Slum: The Social History of a Victorian City* (Lewiston NY and Lampeter, 2009). See also Cai Mason, *The Archaeology of Industry, Commerce and the Lives of the Poor in Bath’s Lost Quayside District* (Wessex Archaeology occasional paper, 2020), especially chapter 5, pp. 69-98.

<sup>67</sup> E. Chadwick, *Report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population and on its means of improvement* (London: 1842).

The inhabitants of Bath require no argument to prove that the franchise has been sufficiently extended. A pretty exhibition we have, as it is, held up before the eyes of the kingdom at large! We already have a *representative*<sup>68</sup> who's fitting title would be "Member for Avon Street, Milk Street and the Lower Bristol Road" or of "the Dolemead District of Burghs". The kind of personage who would be elected for Bath under the operation of universal suffrage we cannot pretend to guess.<sup>69</sup>

At least two of the prisoners taken up and later prosecuted for their part in the Bath riot had lodgings in Avon Street. One of them, the collier Richard Williams, was also the most heavily punished, with a sentence of transportation for life. Indeed, the fact that their addresses were noted and published at all (and most of the others were not) may be seen as evidence enough of the district's notoriety.

The immediate context for the Bath riot was the much more serious outbreak of rioting at Bristol at the end of October. Neither place, it may be noted, took to the streets in this way when the Lords' rejection of the Reform Bill first became known. Despite the incidents of 'rough music' given to visiting anti-reform Bishops and Lords, both cities had largely responded with peaceful meetings of protest and demonstrations of support for Reform.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not the social composition of the crowds that gathered in Bath on the evening of 30 October was remarkably different to the crowd that marched in columns to Sydney Gardens on the 13 October we can only speculate. But if the precipitating incident for rioting at Bristol was the arrival of the Recorder to open the city assize on 29 October, the trigger at Bath was the mustering of the local Yeomanry to combat the Bristol crowd. The Bath riot was, in effect, a spontaneous solidarity action.

#### **4 The Bath riot: Sunday 30 - Monday 31 October 1831**

Less than three weeks after the new mayors of Bath and Bristol dined together in celebration at the Guildhall, they would both be plunged into a crisis driven by the rejection of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords. At dawn in Bristol on Sunday 30 October Charles Pinney, several aldermen and a few exhausted special constables remained barricaded in the upper floor of the Mansion House after the rioting in Queen Square the day before. Although the crowd outside was small, their numbers were growing, and they began to throw stones at the building. Suspecting they might attempt to storm the Mansion House in the absence of the Dragoon Guards, Pinney and his remaining entourage decided to escape over the rooves of nearby houses. Having achieved this feat, sometime after 10.00am, Pinney arrived back at the Guildhall and, amongst other urgent tasks, began seeking support from nearby Yeomanry and military units.<sup>71</sup>

The North Somerset Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry (NSRYC) was originally formed in Frome in 1798. In keeping with other such Yeomanry units of the period it had a dual purpose. During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the public function of the Yeomanry Regiments was to provide internal defence against French invasion. However, they also provided internal policing, in that the Lord Lieutenant of the county could call upon the Yeomanry Cavalry to put down civil disorder. Troops

---

<sup>68</sup> The new 'representative' was John Arthur Roebuck, elected for the first time in December 1832 after splitting the pro-reform vote to defeat the soft Whig candidate, Henry Hobhouse. Roebuck and Palmer were elected.

<sup>69</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 28 November 1833.

<sup>70</sup> The Bishop of Bath and Wells attending the opening of St Paul's Church in Southville, Bristol had been given 'rough music' by a pro-reform crowd and forced to leave in his carriage. For more on this see Poole, S. et al "Prelude to a riot: special constables and the crowd at Wetherell's entry into Bristol" (2024).

<sup>71</sup> TNA TS 11/415 Treasury Solicitor and HM Procurator General, Papers: Bristol riots: Bristol special commission and King's Bench: Rex vs Pinney – Circumstances.

of the NSRYC had been regularly involved in the latter activities in 1810, 1812 and 1817 at Bath, among miners at Radstock in 1814 and 1817, and weavers at Frome in 1816, 1822 and 1823.

In the mid-1820s, the now distant threat of foreign invasion and the consequent lack of state funding for Yeomanry Regiments led many to disband. It appears that the NSRYC went into decline in this period, only mustering for ceremonial functions concerned with Royal visits to Bath. October 1829 was the nadir for the Regiment, when, after being ordered to gather in Bath:

complaints of want of punctuality on general parade were made, and many detailed orders as to the dress and appearance of the men were given, and a return of correct field reports was en-joined. A return of carbines and pistols was ordered, as also of all horses, not the property of the riders.<sup>72</sup>

What appeared to be the disbandment of the NSRYC was halted a year later when the threat of the Swing agricultural riots reached Somerset. In the intervening period the regiment lost its second-in-command and 'father' with the resignation of veteran Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Wickham, who was replaced by Lord Edward Thynne, son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Bath and Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Thomas Thynne. By the 1830s, the increasing use of the Yeomanry for policing activities had changed some public perceptions and acceptance of their function. This was noted by a historian of the NSRYC, W. G. Fisher, who commented on the period:

The early appearance of the Yeomanry did not always have a good effect, especially when industrial workers assembled to make known their grievances. The latter began gradually to look upon the Yeomanry, consisting as it did of farmers employing labour at 6s. and 7s. a week, as a body particularly opposed to the improvement of wage conditions in the collieries and factories, since this would, and did, have the effect of attracting the agricultural labourer from the land. Therefore, the appearance of the Yeomanry often added fuel to the smouldering fires, the passions of men who conceived themselves to be oppressed would burst into flame.<sup>73</sup>

Relations with the colliers and weavers in particular, became increasingly strained during the post-war years in which the Yeomanry's intervention was most frequent, allowing even relatively minor disputes to rapidly escalate. In 1814 for instance, a Captain with the Bath troop stopped a coal waggon on the lower Bristol road and prevaricated with the driver, a miner named James Hunt, for having no reins on his horse. In the ensuing argument, Wiltshire drew his pistol and shot Hunt dead. The Captain was arrested for it and arraigned at the assize the following year, but the Grand Jury threw out an initial prosecution for murder 'without apparent provocation' and reduced the charge to manslaughter. Wiltshire now argued successfully that the gun had gone off accidentally when Hunt assaulted him, and he was accordingly acquitted.<sup>74</sup>

By 1831 the NSRYC had been reorganised into two Divisions, Bath and Frome, the former consisting of troops in Bath, Ston Easton, Keynsham, East Harptree and Bedminster, and the latter of Frome, Mells, Shepton and Batcombe.<sup>75</sup> In overall command of the Regiment was Thomas Strangways Horner

---

<sup>72</sup> H. E. Carrington *The North Somerset Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry* (Bath: H.E. Carrington, 1850) pp. 42-43.

<sup>73</sup> Fisher W. G. *The History of Somerset Yeomanry, Volunteer and Territorial Units* (Taunton: Pheonix Press, 1924) p. 57.

<sup>74</sup> Fisher, *The History of Somerset Yeomanry* pp. 58-60; *Salisbury Journal* 12 September 1814; *Bristol Mirror* 8, 15 April 1815.

<sup>75</sup> L. Barlow and R. J. Smith, *The Uniforms of the British Yeomanry Force 1794–1914, 2: North Somerset Yeomanry*, (Aldershot: Robert Ogilby Trust/Tunbridge Wells: Midas Books, 1979) p. 3.

who was based at the country estate of Mells Park, 10 miles south of Bath and 17 miles from Bristol.<sup>76</sup> The nearest units of the NSRYC to Bristol were (if the Mayor of Bristol was aware of them), in order of accessibility by road, those in Bedminster (1 mile), Keynsham (5 miles) and Bath (11 miles). However, in order to muster and activate them, Pinney needed the agreement of the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset (or at least county-level magistrates) and of their commanding officer, Horner. Consequently, Pinney sent at least one of his pleas for aid to the nearby Mayor of Bath.<sup>77</sup>

Pinney's vague request for help from 'any yeomanry or military he may have in his neighbourhood' arrived with the Mayor of Bath early that afternoon. Kitson immediately contacted the county magistrates, Charles Cook and William Clarke, who sanctioned it at once. At 3.20pm the commander of the Bath troop of the North Somerset Yeomanry Regiment, Captain Charles Wilkins, received instructions to 'assemble his men and march them to the neighbourhood of Bristol for the preservation of the peace'.<sup>78</sup> This would take some time to effect because Wilkins lived in the suburb of Twerton and not in central Bath, and some of his troop were six miles or so distant. Given the urgency of the situation, Wilkins had been given scant instructions to work from. As he expressed it some days later, in answer to criticisms from Kitson that he had not acted quickly enough, he had not been told 'where he was to make up his quarters or under whose orders he was to act'. Wilkins made a quick but fateful decision to muster his troop in the 'usual rendezvous' of Queen Square in central Bath (see Figure 7) and began sending out orders to round up his men.<sup>79</sup>

About two hours after Wilkins received his call for assistance outside the Guildhall, William Hall, mayor's officer, warned Robert Tothill (another mayor's officer) to expect trouble because he believed people would be opposed to the Yeomanry assembling in Queen Square.<sup>80</sup> The authorities had been equally apprehensive two days earlier when it became known that Wetherell was intending to break his journey to Bristol with an overnight stay at Bath's York House Hotel. 'There existed against him a good deal of angry feeling', it was noted in the press, and some 'rough compliments at the Bridge, in the lower part of Bath' were anticipated when he left in the morning, especially after the appearance of provocative handbills announcing 'Sir C. Wetherell is at the York House Hotel!' Ultimately, protests were avoided because Hotel staff smuggled him out of the building by way of a side street 'without more than half a dozen people knowing he had quitted Bladud's city'.<sup>81</sup> It was a telling indication, nevertheless, of the public mood surrounding Wetherell's visit, and the interest being taken at Bath in the impact of his mission to Bristol.

Mayor Kitson later said he knew that people from Bath had been 'out in the streets leading to Bristol to collect information respecting that city' so they were obviously aware of what was going on when members of the Yeomanry began to arrive.<sup>82</sup> The glow and rising smoke from the Bristol fires had been

---

<sup>76</sup> SHC DD CN 54 Somerset Yeomanry Cavalry Muster Rolls.

<sup>77</sup> Although the NSRYC Bedminster Troop were the nearest to Bristol city centre, the request for aid was largely a failure as their 'meagre muster' of only 'a dozen' troopers meant the unit was considerably under strength and in the event was not called into action. This led to the subsequent resignation of the commander of the troop, Captain Henry Shute. *Bath Chronicle* 24 November 1831.

<sup>78</sup> TNA HO 52/15, f.597 Copy of letter from JPs Charles Cook and William Clarke to Captain Charles Wilkins 30 October 1831.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, HO 52/15, ff.593-594 & 596, Marquess of Bath to Melbourne, enclosing Captain Wilkins's explanation of events, 4 and 14 Nov 1831. Wilkins was the owner of a large textile mill in Twerton, employing some 800 hands by 1833. See *Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Factories, Minutes of Evidence* (1833), pp. 60-62.

<sup>80</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, information of William Hall, 16 November 1831.

<sup>81</sup> *London Courier* 1 November 1831.

<sup>82</sup> TNA HO 52/15/3, f.624, Kitson to Melbourne, 31 October 1831.



visible from some parts of Bath since late afternoon and, as the mayors' officer William Miller would later tell the assize hearing, 'It was known at Bath that the Mansion House in Bristol was on fire, and the gaol, and that the prisoners had been liberated'.<sup>83</sup> As soon as it was known that 'Bristol was in the hands of the rioters', wrote one of the city's two chief constables, Bath was 'in a state of great excitement'.<sup>84</sup> Large numbers of people gathered at the bottom of Union Street 'to await the arrival of the Bristol mail and learn the news thence, reported a Bath-based correspondent of the *London Courier*. 'Crowds stopped the mail and would not allow it to proceed till particulars were told'. By this means they learned of the mustering of the Yeomanry. They were 'exasperated' at the news and 'determined that those gentlemen should not quit Bath'.<sup>85</sup> Tothill happened to see the North Somerset Yeomanry's Quarter Master, Bence, ride by in full regimental uniform, pursued by a crowd and take refuge in the *Greyhound* coaching inn in the Market Place (almost opposite the Guildhall, see Figure 7). Tothill went in to investigate and was joined there by Hall and at least one other mayor's officer, summoned by the landlord because the crowd had stopped outside and were shouting for Bence to leave and not go to Bristol.<sup>86</sup>



Figure 6: The *White Hart* Inn, Bath (1869)<sup>87</sup>

At 6.00pm, Hall left the *Greyhound* in search of Captain Wilkins and found him, just arrived, in Southgate Street. Hall told him about Bence's troubles, but Wilkins insisted he 'could not help it' and that he must rally his men in Queen Square at 7.00pm. Wilkins, distinctive in his Regimentals, continued towards the *White Hart* coaching inn, the headquarters of the North Somerset Yeomanry when in Bath (see Figure 6), but was impeded by a crowd of 'low characters' who repeated the

<sup>83</sup> *Sherborne Mercury* 9 April 1832.

<sup>84</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, information of Chief Constable, 16 November 1831.

<sup>85</sup> *London Courier* 1 November 1831.

<sup>86</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, information of Robert Tothill, 16 November 1831.

<sup>87</sup> John Charles Maggs (1819–1896), VAG, Bath and North East Somerset Council.

demand that the Yeomanry should not go to Bristol.<sup>88</sup> They formed a line and forced him back down Stall Street.<sup>89</sup> Daniel Rees, a servant at the *White Hart* described the scene:

[Rees] saw Capt. Wilkins in his regimentals riding nearly opposite the White Hart, followed by a mob of several hundred persons, hooting, shouting, and throwing oyster shells and mud at him. The Captain repeatedly attempted to turn his horse towards the mob, but without effect, and he soon cantered down the street.<sup>90</sup>

In his own account of what happened, published in the *Bath Journal* a week later, Wilkins stated:

'I told them it was impossible; that I was as much for the passing of the Reform Bill as themselves, but that, as an officer, I must and should do my duty'.<sup>91</sup>

His pro-Reform sympathies may well have been genuine. In 1833, as the employer of some 800 hands in his Twerton textile mill, Wilkins would impress the parliamentary commissioners investigating child labour in factories with his paternalistic approach to workers' welfare. He eventually reached the *White Hart* by taking a back street route and entering by a rear door.<sup>92</sup> Mayors' officer Hall's testimony offers the most detailed account of the evening's events. Wilkins was next seen by Hall in the front doorway to the *White Hart*, addressing the crowd and:

saying that he was a Reformer and that the troop should not proceed to Bristol that night. The captain then went into the White Hart Inn. Deponent [Hall] then with the assistance of several others formed a line in front of the door to prevent the mob from bringing out the captain. The mob all this time continued crying out, 'Out with him, out with the bugger; he shall not go to Bristol', and shoving with all force to gain an entrance to the inn.<sup>93</sup>

In Wilkins' own estimation, things were not yet out of control. 'At this time, although there was much noise, I had no insults offered me and heard no offensive expressions used', he wrote later.<sup>94</sup> This is moot. According to David Read, a servant at the inn giving evidence at the assize hearings, Wilkins's protestations that he must do his duty as a soldier provoked people in the crowd to shout back at him to 'take those damned clothes off', and in Hall's recollection, Wilkins' excuses had only 'made them more enraged'.<sup>95</sup>

Between 6.30pm and 7.00pm, Hall and the other defenders repeatedly told the crowd that Wilkins had left by a rear door, 'but to no purpose'. One 'gentleman' even appeared on the balcony and addressed the crowd but to no avail and he was chased back into the hotel by a volley of stones. Wilkins had indeed left the premises. He had removed his uniform so that he would not be so easily

---

<sup>88</sup> *Bath Herald* 5 November 1831.

<sup>89</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, information of William Hall, (second testimony, n.d.).

<sup>90</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 3 April 1832.

<sup>91</sup> *Bath Journal*, 7 November 1831. A similar quote appears in the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 1 November 1831.

<sup>92</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, prosecution brief vs John Holbein and John Durnell. For Wilkins's reputation as an employer see *Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Factories, Minutes of Evidence* (1833), pp. 60-62.

<sup>93</sup> A deponent is a person who makes a deposition or affidavit under oath. Op cit., information of William Hall (second testimony, n.d.); prosecution brief vs John Holbein and John Durnell.

<sup>94</sup> *Bath Journal* 7 November 1831.

<sup>95</sup> *Albion and Star* 3 April 1832.

recognised and made his escape by the back door.<sup>96</sup> For some time, the crowd pushed at the front door while Hall, the Inn's servants and a handful of others pushed back. Hall noted John Durnell prominent amongst the crowd, 'encouraging the mob' and repeatedly shouting:

Out with him, out with him; we will have him out. He shall not go to Bristol.  
Out with the bugger. We'll have bread and reform and down with the  
borough mongers.<sup>97</sup>

Eventually, the front doors were closed, bolted and barricaded using a large fire engine and two iron bars, and the crowd responded by attacking the doors, windows, shutters and, once access was obtained, furniture, with stones, 'bludgeons, faggot sticks and pieces of broken furniture'.<sup>98</sup> As the destruction at the *White Hart* continued, 'considerable parties' of rioters broke off to throw stones at the Guildhall windows only 150m away. The *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* later speculated that this was to keep the 'Police Officers' occupied in defending the Guildhall so they could not intervene at the *White Hart*. Whether this was by design or chance it had that effect, so for a considerable period the rioters at the Inn were 'unmolested by any constables or other force'.<sup>99</sup>

It seems likely that it was the barricading of the *White Hart* by its defenders, together with the disappearance of Wilkins behind locked doors and shuttered windows that changed the mood. The attack began with stone-throwing at the upstairs windows because these had not been shuttered. Then the Inn's office was broken into. Inn servant, Daniel Rees, later claimed that he told them, 'you can't want anything in here, don't destroy the office', but they replied, 'we will have the office down and the house too... this is our time; go it, go it my lads. We will serve them as they have at Bristol'. One rioter said, presumably to Rees, 'why not hit his bloody brains out?' Rees followed them into the Coffee Room where he saw them breaking up the fixtures and furniture. William Richards, a collier, was seen using a chair taken from the Inn to smash a window frame, and then violently kicking a man who tried to stop him. This marked his card – mayor Kitson judging it sufficient to ensure Richards would later be charged with a capital felony at the assize.

By the time the attack on the Inn was over, some 487 panes of glass had allegedly been broken, at a cost of £300.<sup>100</sup> In the estimation of one of the chief constables, there were 3-400 people present by this time, and according to the *Bath Chronicle*, three quarters of them were boys aged between 14 and 17 years. This claim is not supported by the age profile of those taken prisoner and prosecuted, but it may be that older rioters were targeted for arrest.<sup>101</sup> Hall claimed the crowd was much larger, up to 2,000 people around the *White Hart* alone.<sup>102</sup> This was corroborated by 14-year-old John Tice who stated he saw 'in front of the White Hart a mob...of 2000, certainly many more than a 1000'. Tice added that he heard the rioters shouting, 'Go it, Go it' and 'We don't care for the Constables' as they wrecked the Inn.<sup>103</sup> Hall and both Chief Constables now reported to the Guildhall and were ordered to the *White Hart* by Alderman William Clark to effect the crowd's dispersal. Having returned to the Inn, but realising they would need more constables, they set off to the Guildhall once again, a voice in

---

<sup>96</sup> *Bath Chronicle*, 3 November 1831; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 1 November 1831; *Bath Herald* 5 November 1831.

<sup>97</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, Information of William Hall, testimony dated 11 November 1831.

<sup>98</sup> Op. cit. Information of William Hall (second testimony, n.d.); Prosecution brief vs John Holbein and John Durnell; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 3 April 1832.

<sup>99</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 1 November 1831; *Bath Herald* 5 November 1831.

<sup>100</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 5 April 1831; information of William Sims, 31 October 1831.

<sup>101</sup> *Bath Chronicle*, 3 November 1831.

<sup>102</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, first information of William Hall, 31 October 1831.

<sup>103</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 3 April 1832.

the crowd shouting after one of them, ‘there goes one of the damned borough mongers’. They attempted an arrest on one man in the crowd and ‘dragged him into Bath Street but he was instantly rescued by the mob’.<sup>104</sup>

Inside the Guildhall, Mayor Kitson and several other members of the Corporation were busy enrolling special constables from amongst a slowly growing number of householders who had come to offer their services. To begin with they had only about 20 volunteers, with each given a wooden baton and a label inscribed with ‘Special Constable’ to place in their hats. The Chief Constables led them out to disperse the crowd, but they were quickly overwhelmed, and some found themselves isolated. One of the Chief Constables later testified that he was caught by the crowd in Abbey Church Yard and challenged to a fight. He was hit on the back of the head with a stick and his hat badge taken. As he tried to get away, a man grabbed him by the neck cloth so he raised his baton, but someone got hold of it and bent his arm back, at which point he feared the string around his wrist would cause his wrist to break. However, he managed to free himself and returned to Guildhall without his hat or his baton and with his neck cloth torn off.<sup>105</sup>

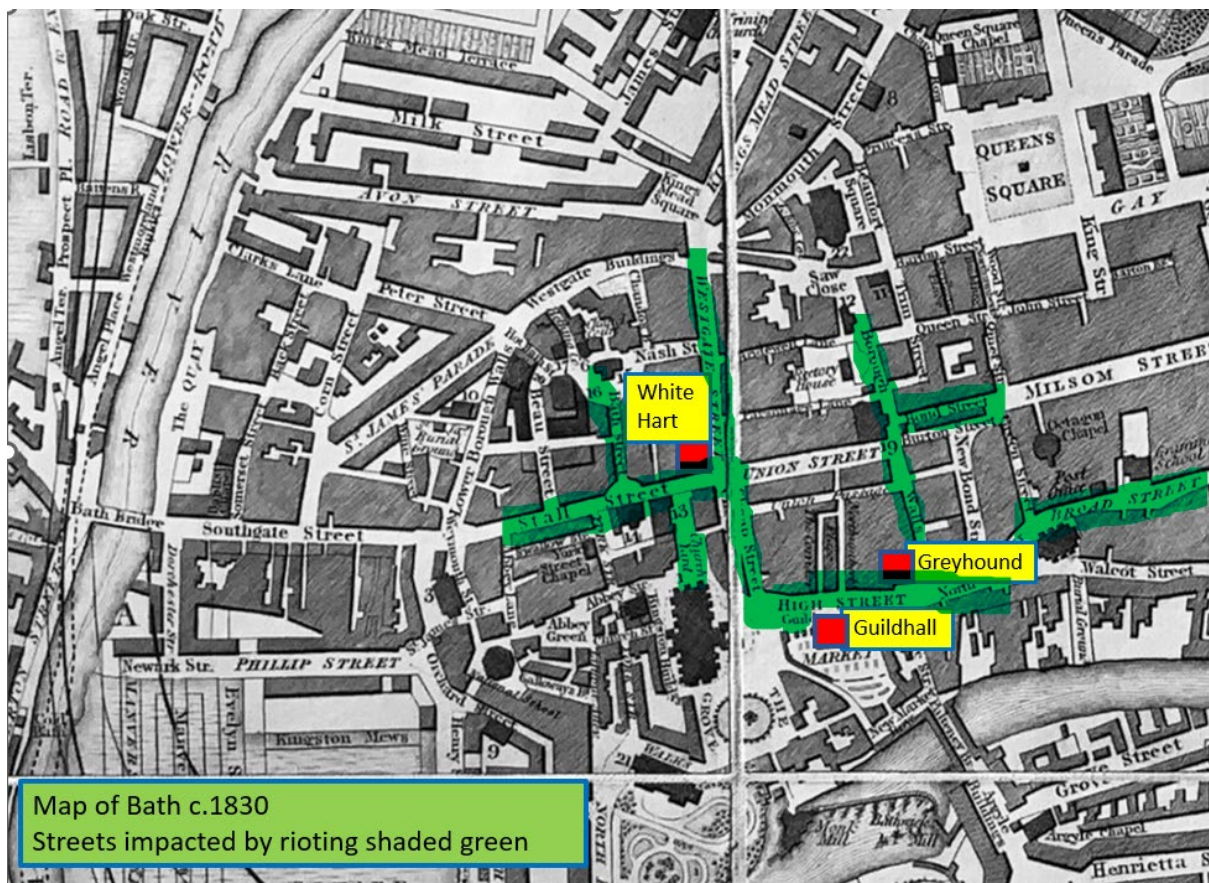


Figure 7: Map of central Bath (c.1830) showing the extent of the rioting on 30 October 1831. The shaded streets were all named by the authorities as locations in which crowd and constables clashed between about 6.00pm and 2.00am the following morning.

Crowd control proved difficult at first with so few constables because they had to keep running between the *White Hart* and the Guildhall, but once ‘several hundreds’ of constables had been

<sup>104</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, information of Chief Constable, 16 November 1831.

<sup>105</sup> Op cit., information of Chief Constable, 16 November 1831.



enrolled, it became possible to split them into two groups, divided between the two locales.<sup>106</sup> The Guildhall was rapidly becoming a target in its own right because anyone arrested outside the *White Hart* or in the surrounding streets was being taken there and secured. The riot was spreading by this time too into a number of adjacent streets (Broad St, Abbey Church Yard, Stall Street, Cheap Street, Bath Street, Market Place, Northgate Street, Upper Borough Walls, and Bond Street, see Figure 7). The spread of rioting beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of the old city and into Somerset left the authorities with an additional problem. As sections of the crowd crossed the city boundary line, they 'immediately commenced an attack on the city special constables, by throwing stones etc and daring them to a pursuit', explained the Town Clerk, Philip George. The constables did as they were bid, but George was worried that in doing so they exceeded their authority. Strictly speaking, policing was the responsibility of the county magistracy once the boundary was crossed, but no county magistrates were present.<sup>107</sup>

Hall encountered a crowd in Broad Street, 'hallooing, shouting and screeching', and confronted them with some constables, arresting a young shoemakers' apprentice, William Wake, who had 13 stones in his pocket, 'for his own protection', or so he said. There was hand to hand fighting in these places with constables, as Hall later told the assize court, the crowd were 'drawn up in a regular line like a regiment of soldiers'. They were armed with bludgeons, he said, 'with which they dared and menaced the constables'. These were lengths of wood, gathered by a section of the crowd, some 300-400 strong according to the woman from whose yard they were appropriated. They ran down Westgate Street to collect them from her yard on the Upper Bristol Road. To impede the constables further, aid stone throwing and perhaps to mask the identity of individuals in the crowd, small boys were hoisted up to the gas lamps in several of these streets, particularly in Stall Street and Bath Street, to knock them out or to pull down the pipes.<sup>108</sup> Darkness enabled anonymity and it also meant that 'many of the police and special constables met with very serious injuries', according to Tothill. As the Inn servant David Read testified, 'I begged the mob to desist for a great many of them were known...'<sup>109</sup> Whilst the rioting continued and having failed to access Queen Square, Captain Wilkins was busying himself visiting as many members of his troop as possible and telling them to muster not at 7.00pm as originally instructed, but at 5.00am the following morning. This time Wilkins ordered them to meet two miles along the Bristol Road, avoiding Bath city centre.<sup>110</sup>

By 8.00pm rioting was now concentrated on the Guildhall, the Market Place and the surrounding streets. Hall recognised Benjamin Stride in the Market Place, 'talking about reform and exciting the mob', and instructed him to be quiet. Stride declined and told Hall he 'wished he had a stick'.<sup>111</sup> Constables tried without success to clear the Market Place, but it was still disturbed at midnight. When one tried to arrest Joseph Maggs, seen breaking two panes of glass in the Guildhall, 20-30 people tried to rescue him but he was eventually secured and taken inside.<sup>112</sup> George Needs, another constable, had similar difficulty around midnight as they tried to clear people out of the Market Place towards

---

<sup>106</sup> *Sherborne Mercury* 9 April 1832.

<sup>107</sup> TNA HO 52/15/3, f.626, Philip George to Lord Melbourne, 8 November 1831.

<sup>108</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, Information of William Hall (first testimony, 31 October 1831 and second testimony, n.d.); prosecution brief vs Benjamin Stride, John Macey and Joseph Maggs; *Bath Chronicle* 5 April 1832.

<sup>109</sup> Op. cit. Information of Robert Tothill, 16 November 1831; *Bath Journal* 9 April 1832; *Sherborne Mercury* 9 April 1832.

<sup>110</sup> *Bath Journal*, 7 November 1831; TNA, HO 52/15, f.594 Captain Wilkins's explanation of events, 4 Nov 1831.

<sup>111</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, First testimony of William Hall, 31 October 1831.

<sup>112</sup> Op. cit. Information of William Duckett, sergeant at Mace, 31 October 1831.

Lower Borough Walls, where he met with 2-300 rioters, ‘hallooing and flinging stones’.<sup>113</sup> According to the prosecution brief, prepared for the subsequent trial of prisoners, the crowd outside the Guildhall were shouting:

‘Reform; down with the borough mongers, we have been starving long enough; we must have bread; we should like to see the hall down to the ground’, and ‘Let loose the prisoners and we will disperse’.

Some of these phrases are conspicuously absent from the witness depositions on which the brief was presumably based however, and it is perfectly possible that the phrase, ‘we should like to see the hall down to the ground’, was added to the brief as evidence of felonious intent to cover any future compensation claims. This would equally apply to the evidence given by Daniel Rees, the *White Hart* Inn servant, during the assize hearing in the Spring, that he heard people say, ‘we will have the office down and the house too’.<sup>114</sup> Rioting continued until about 2.00am and by the time the streets were clear, the Guildhall had lost around 40 panes of glass from its windows.<sup>115</sup>

As there was some concern that renewed efforts to obstruct the Yeomanry might be made the following day, Kitson continued swearing in special constables on Monday morning. By the afternoon around 300 people had volunteered. He also called a meeting at 3.00pm at the Guildhall ‘for the purpose of concerting more effectual measures for preserving the public peace’. According to the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* the attendees comprised:

a large number of our resident gentry, including several Naval and Military Officers and the open space in the Hall was crowded with tradesmen and other inhabitants of the city, the greater part of whom had previously tendered their names to act as special constables.<sup>116</sup>

The meeting proposed to have six-hour, nightly patrols by groups of special constables, with an emphasis on the lower parts of town where it was assumed most potential troublemakers were living. The fears generated amongst those at the Guildhall by these particular areas were highlighted by the demand from the floor for 30 rather than 20 special constables in each party policing these districts, which was apparently conceded. Each party of ‘specials’ was to be led by one Gentleman as their Captain, and Kitson was greeted with ‘three hearty cheers’ before the meeting dispersed.<sup>117</sup> As darkness fell, crowds did begin to reassemble in the Market place and ‘their principal object appeared to be an attack on the town hall’. Little seems to have come of it however, and constables speedily dispersed them.<sup>118</sup>

## 5 The aftermath

The owners of the *White Hart*, William Bishop and Thomas Cooper, claimed a lengthy list of serious damages to the building and, naturally, looked to the Hundred for compensation, but their case was contested by the Corporation under the terms of the 1827 Act. The list, valued by them at £200, was certainly extensive: Structural damage was done to 5 roofs, 5 walls, 5 doors, 5 partitions, 5 ceilings, 5 floors, 50 windows, frames, sashes, sills and shutters, 20 locks, 20 bolts, 20 bars, 20 staples, and 20 hinges. Then there were the fixtures, fittings, furniture and other pieces of Inn property: 50 chairs, 10

<sup>113</sup> Op. cit. Information of George Needs, special constable, 31 October 1831.

<sup>114</sup> Op cit., prosecution brief vs John Holbein and John Durnell; *Bath Chronicle* 5 April 1832.

<sup>115</sup> *Sherborne Mercury* 9 April 1831.

<sup>116</sup> *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 1 November 1831.

<sup>117</sup> *Bath Herald* 5 November 1831; *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* 1 November 1831.

<sup>118</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, bundle 206, Prosecution brief vs John Holbein and John Durnell; *Bath Chronicle* 3 November 1831.



clocks, 50 tables, 20 candlesticks, 50 goblets, 20 forks, 50 spoons, 20 carafes, 20 decanters, 100 glasses, 5 sideboards, 10 jugs, 10 basins, 10 trays, and 10 lamps, for which Bishop and Cooper demanded a further £200. The Corporation disputed the city's liability on the grounds that the city parishes constituted an ancient borough distinct from the Hundred of Bathforum and refused to pay. Bishop and Cooper therefore took the Corporation to court, and the case was due to be heard at the same assizes as the criminal charges against the men accused of attempting to pull the building down.<sup>119</sup>

In January 1832, Philip George the Town Clerk took legal advice and, as he ought to have expected, was reminded that:

to render the Hundred liable for damages occasioned by a mob beginning to pull down a house etc., the riot must be of such a kind as to amount to a felony...It follows therefore that if the prisoners who are charged with the offence on which the right of action is founded shall be acquitted upon the merits of the case; the plaintiffs must fail in their action.

Precedents were dusted off and cited by the Corporation's solicitors, chiefly this time from a compensation claim arising from the London Spa Fields rising of December 1816. In that case, gunsmiths' shops in Skinner Street had been severely damaged, along with their stock, when the crowd broke into them in search of arms and in order to rescue the Spencean leader, 'young Watson' from arrest. The liability of the Hundred was contestable, it had been argued, because although a felony had been committed, it was not brought under the Riot Act. It was 'a felony of quite a different kind', for the crowd's 'purpose was not to demolish the house but to obtain arms and liberate their leader'. They had, in other words, no grievance against either the shop or its owner and so the offence had more to do with burglary than Riot. However, the objection had been overturned by Lord Ellenborough. 'The question', he said, 'was whether their purpose was not to pull down and demolish the house had they not been pacified by learning that Young Watson had made his escape'. Compensation was accordingly granted against the Hundred. The implication, George will have noted, was that if the Crowd attacking the *White Hart* at Bath had not been similarly 'pacified' by the knowledge that Wilkins had left the building, their felonious intention to pull it down might be admitted as evidence.<sup>120</sup>

Unsurprisingly, as George knew only too well, Bishop and Cooper had already determined to prosecute Richards and possibly Smith and Durnell as well on charges of capital felony at the Spring assize. Their counsel pressed George to drop the Corporation's objection if convictions were obtained before Bishop and Cooper's claim was tried. George replied that he was 'inclined to acquiesce', although the Corporation's solicitors advised against it. Although they rejected George's suggestion that the city was independent of the Hundred of Bathforum, it remained far from certain that the defendants would be convicted on the capital charge, and if it could not be proved, Bishop and Cooper's case for compensation would necessarily fail regardless of the boundaries of the Hundred.<sup>121</sup> In the event, the capital charges were proven and in August Bishop and Cooper were awarded their full costs, at the expense of the Hundred, of £233 5s 5d.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, Bundle 205 (damages), Brief for Bishop and Cooper.

<sup>120</sup> Op. cit. Richard Blick to Philip George, 13 January 1832; *Law Chronicle* 22 January 1818.

<sup>121</sup> Op. cit. Brief for Plaintiffs, William Bishop and Thomas Cooper (*White Hart*); Indictment vs Richards, Durnell and Smith; R. Batchelor to Philip George, 11 February 1832; Philip George to Batchelor, 18 February 1832; Richard Blick to Philip George, 26 January, 20 February, 10 March 1832. Durnell was not eventually prosecuted for the capital offence, the evidence appearing too thin against him to sustain the charge.

<sup>122</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 23 August 1832.

In the years immediately following the riot, questions were raised about the ability of the city to deal with serious disorder in the absence of professional police. Philip George for one was anxious to remind the Corporation's critics that order had been restored that evening, and maintained in the following days, by up to 3,000 volunteer special constables. 'Was any military aid brought in?', George was asked when he gave evidence in Parliament in support of a petition against the Municipal Corporations Bill in 1835. 'None at all', he replied, for none were needed. In fact, the whole disturbance had been put down by 'the city police, the Corporation and the inhabitants', and reforms in policing were neither necessary nor wished for.<sup>123</sup> What George neglected to say, however, was that despite the intervention of 300 constables (not 3,000!), the crowd managed to prevent an entire military unit from mustering and delayed their arrival in Bristol, where they were urgently needed, until the following morning. By the time the Bath troop arrived in Bristol the riots were more or less over. Moreover, the Bath crowd had actively engaged this body of constables for eight hours, between 6.00pm and 2.00am, without any effective dispersal taking place. By any estimation, the Bath riot of October 1831 was a significant event and not one to be played down. The Tory *Bath Chronicle*, for one, was fully convinced of the riot's serious character:

The truth is...that if vigorous measures had not been taken to quell this trifling disturbance, there is every reason to conclude that Bath would have been the scene of horrors similar to those enacted in Bristol. We were in Bristol when the attack on the Mansion House was made and we also witnessed the attack on the White Hart and we declare that there did not appear to us more chance of extensive mischief in the former case than in the latter... Had they, however, succeeded in reaching the White Hart wine and spirit store – which was their loudly avowed object – had intoxicating liquors become accessible to the mob, there can be but little doubt that the consequent mischief would have been wide and fatal.<sup>124</sup>

## 6 Court cases

Over the following weeks, prosecution briefs were prepared in a systematic manner and on a range of charges. First, one case was tried summarily by magistrates in November: James Willey (alias Simms), was sentenced to three months in Shepton Mallet gaol for breaking gas lamps.<sup>125</sup> Next, four categories of prisoner were put before the county quarter session in January 1832: John Holbin and John Durnell for the attack on the *White Hart*; Benjamin Stride, John Macey and Joseph Maggs for the attack on the Guildhall, George Vining for stealing an umbrella and a parasol from a window sill at the *White Hart*, and William Wake, an apprentice selected purely on account of his youth, on a single charge of common riot.

Holbin and Durnell were arraigned on three separate counts, none of them capital, the most serious of them conspiracy to destroy property and 50 of the Inn's windows. Stride, Macey and Maggs were also arraigned on three counts, the most serious of which charged them with breaking 10 windows at the Guildhall. Of Wake, a young apprentice, the prosecution brief simply stated, 'it is remarkable that boys of this description were particularly active and from his being found with several large stones in his pockets, he has been selected as a fit object for punishment'.<sup>126</sup> Vining, identified by two witnesses,

---

<sup>123</sup> *Evidence Taken Before the House of Lords on the Municipal Corporations Bill (1835)*, p. 257.

<sup>124</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 20 August 1835.

<sup>125</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 24 November 1831.

<sup>126</sup> BRO, Philip George Papers, Bundle 205, Prosecution brief vs William Wake; *Sherborne Mercury* 9 January 1832.

was the only defendant to enter a guilty plea.<sup>127</sup> Finally, in April 1832, three men were prosecuted at the Assize: Jacob Milsom, James Smith and William Richards, the last two on the capital charge for damage done to the *White Hart*.

The Bath cases were heard alongside those arising from the riot at Yeovil at the Somerset assize, before Justices Park and Gazelee, the duo who also condemned Bleathman and Long to death in Dorset.<sup>128</sup> Gazelee made sure Smith and Richards and Milsom knew exactly what to expect from the charges against them:

Probably the bill presented to them might be for beginning to demolish a dwelling house. The Act declared that if any persons should riotously assemble together to the disturbance of the public peace, and unlawfully demolish, or begin to demolish, any house etc., then those persons should be guilty of felony. Now, the beginning to demolish was open to various constructions. If boys going about the streets calling for an illumination, throw at a window, that would not be beginning to demolish; therefore the question was for a Petit Jury.

And it would therefore be up to the jury to decide ‘what the intention was’.<sup>129</sup> Richards loudly pleaded his innocence (‘on his knees’, according to the *Sherborne Mercury*) and claimed he had only been a bystander, never a participant. Cross examined as a prosecution witness, Hall admitted that Richards had shouted for the crowd not to hurt him, as he was ‘a good fellow’, and that he hadn’t actually seen Richards commit any offence. But others, including William Sims, who saw Richards kick one of the constables and break the Inn’s shutters with a stick, gave evidence against him and he was convicted (as were all the defendants).<sup>130</sup> Ultimately, although all three were convicted on the capital charge, Richards, Milsom and Smith were spared the noose, and entered as ‘death recorded’. Richards, the 40-year-old collier from Avon Street, was singled out for the most severe sentence, transportation for life. He arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in September.<sup>131</sup>

## 7 The rioters

For several reasons analysis of the arrestees from the reform-related rioting in Bath was not an easy task. Unlike comparable studies of smaller provincial towns in Dorset and Somerset,<sup>132</sup> in Bath the population was far greater which created larger numbers of similar common names. To compound this problem, there was no data on the age of three of the arrestees (Macey, Willey and Vining) and at least two (Willey and Milsom) were using false names at one time or another. Although prison registers and description books, which typically provide direct identification of the subject and associated prosopographical information, were available for Ilchester and Wilton gaols they were not available for Shepton Mallet. This affected the data gathering for several of the subjects. As a result, much of the study of the arrestees and their relatives required back-tracking from census data derived

<sup>127</sup> SHC, Epiphany Quarter Session papers 1832, examination of George Vining and information of William Hall, Davis Rees and John Tice.

<sup>128</sup> For Long and Bleathman see: Poole, S., Ball, R. and Drury J. “The Blandford Forum riots of October 1831” Riot 1831 (2023). Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/2023/05/the-blandford-forum-riots-of-october-1831/>.

<sup>129</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 5 April 1832.

<sup>130</sup> *Sherborne Mercury* 9 April 1832.

<sup>131</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 12 April 1832. Initial reports named all three of these capitally convicted prisoners as sentenced to transportation, but Smith and Milsom actually served 18-month sentences. Richards was transported for life: *Bath Chronicle* 30 August 1835; TNA HO 8 Quarterly returns of prisoners, March 1832.

<sup>132</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”. Riot 1831 (2023). Retrieved from: <https://riot1831.com/category/case-studies/>.

in 1841 and the succeeding decades.<sup>133</sup> Where there was uncertainty about the identity of a particular subject or a lack of clarity, it was decided to err on the side of caution and mark the categories as ‘not known’ (N/K).

Table 1 lists the 11 arrestees from the riots in Bath in October 1831.<sup>134</sup> Prosopographical data derived from the sources is summarised in the table and allows limited characterisation of the crowd. All of the arrestees were male and the eight with known ages in 1831 ranged from 16 to 40 years with a median of 21.5 years. Of the six subjects for whom we have data concerning marital status, four were single and two were married with children. Seven subjects had place of residence information in 1831; six were from the city of Bath and the other from Witham Friary near Frome. Of the Bath residents, two lived on Avon Street, one on Milk Street (both streets in the lower town) and three were from the expanding parish of Walcot. This evidence demonstrates that the majority of arrestees were from the city rather than having travelled there, so this was in essence a ‘Bath crowd’. In contrast, considering place of birth, of the seven with data, only one was born in the city. All the others were from towns or villages in Somerset or Wiltshire, with one born in Bristol. This evidence suggests a pattern of rural to urban migration in the early 1800s.

As for the class composition of the arrestees, of the majority of those with known occupations (nine), seven were labourers, sawyers or colliers and one was an artisan in training (shoemaker). It should be noted that two of the sample also had service industry occupations (hosteller and waiter), reflecting the particularities of employment in Bath. One important question concerning the sample of arrestees relates to the expanded franchise, the relationship to the ownership of land and property and thus class. Clearly before 1832 with the vote restricted to 30 members of the Corporation, none of the sample were able to exercise this ‘right’. The sample in the Poll Book for the election of December 1832 shows that one arrestee, the 23-year-old Joseph Maggs from Milk Street, does appear to have claimed this ‘right’. However, this was only after a dispute with the borough registrars as he applied for two properties on Milk Street.<sup>135</sup> Unsurprisingly, in 1832 Maggs voted for the two pro-reform Whig

<sup>133</sup> Prosopographical data that has been derived from sources after 1831 is denoted in Table 2 by square brackets.

<sup>134</sup> The following sources were used to derive the biographical data: 1833 *Bath Directory*, Bath Historical Directories. Retrieved from <https://bathhistoricaldirectories.org.uk/>; 1841 census Somerset, Marston Biggott, District 4, Walcot, Lansdown, District 1a; 1851 census Somerset Witham Friary, 1b, Bath St James, 1d; 1861 England Census, Somerset, Bath, St James; Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914, Ditchat, 1813-1857, 1816; Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1531-1812, Winford, 1774-1812; Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914, Marriage Registers, Witham Friary, 1813-1837, 1820; Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914, Marriage Registers, Bath, St James, 1822-1834, 1833; Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1754-1914, Marriage Registers, Walcot St Swithin, 1829-1838, 1835; Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914, Witham Friary, 1809-1824, 1813-1857; Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914, Witham Friary, 1813-1910, 1846; Bristol, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1938, Gloucestershire, St Philip and Jacob, Bishop Transcripts, 1679-1852, 1814; Home Office HO27 Criminal Registers, England And Wales, 1805-1892, Somerset, 1832, Wells, 1844; England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892, England, Somerset, 1844, 1850; Wilton Gaol, Register of Prisoners 1831-1847, 1832; Ilchester Gaol, Felons Register 1828-1833, 1832, 1833, 1833-1838, 1834; Ilchester Gaol, Description Book 1827-1838, 1832, 1833; Gloucestershire, England, Prison Records, 1728-1914, Registers of Prisoners, The County Gaol, 1817-1824, 1823; Home Office HO 7 Convicts, Miscellanea: Nov 1823, Ship Justitia; Home Office: Criminal Petitions: Series I HO 17/55/IS5; Digital Panopticon Life Archive ID fasai80528; Libraries Tasmania, Conduct Registers of Male Convicts arriving in the Period of the Assignment System 1833-1837 CON31-1-21, CON18-1-5, CON31-1-37; *Bath Chronicle*; *Bristol Mercury*; *Bristol Mirror*; *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*; Clare Anderson, “The Convict Hulks of Bermuda”, *Carceral Archipelago*, University of Leicester (2014) Retrieved from: <https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/carchipelago/2014/06/26/the-convict-hulks-of-bermuda/>

<sup>135</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 22 October 1835.

candidates Palmer and the more radical Roebuck.<sup>136</sup> The lack of voting rights amongst the other rioters is evidence of their largely property-less condition. Despite the difficulties of determining literacy from prison records and marriage certificates, it appears six out of seven for whom we have data could read and several others may have been able to write.

The criminal histories of the arrestees prior to the October 1831 riot provide interesting reading, with four having been imprisoned at one time or another. William Wake, a 16-year-old trainee shoemaker from Walcot, Bath, was committed to gaol for one month for being an 'idle and disorderly apprentice' in the third week of September 1831. This suggests he was released immediately before the riot of 29 October. Wake is also unusual as he may have been a victim of leprosy in his youth, a condition apparently 'cleansed' by a stay in the Bath Hospital the previous year.<sup>137</sup>

James Smith, Jacob Milsom and William Richards were described by one witness as 'being in company together' during the riot and the fact that Smith and Richards both lived on Avon Street suggests they may have known each other.<sup>138</sup> All three had criminal pasts and there is evidence of the use of false names, ages and addresses amongst them. James Smith, a 23-year-old labourer and fish carrier, was acquitted in 1823 at the age 15 for stealing 17 yards of dowlas, a coarse plain cloth. Three years later along with a William Harper, Smith was committed to the House of Correction for a month for trespassing in the woods of the Marquis of Lansdown (less than two miles northwest of Bath). In 1828, Smith was convicted of 'stealing underwood' from Claverton Wood (two miles east of Bath). He was committed to Shepton Mallet gaol for two months with hard labour by a former Mayor of Bath, Charles Crook, a long-standing member of Bath Corporation.<sup>139</sup>

An editorial article in the *Bath Chronicle* in response to the debates concerning the 1835 Municipal Corporations Bill listed the rioters and their sentences from October 1831. An Abraham Milsom appears on this list rather than the expected Jacob Milsom.<sup>140</sup> Rather than being an error, it appears by this stage that the authorities realised Milsom was using more than one forename. It also appears that he may have been altering his age, whether by design or ignorance, as this varies from 18-22 in 1831, according to our sources. Milsom, born in the village of Widcombe (immediately adjoining the city jurisdiction on the other side of Bath Bridge), was variously listed as a labourer and chimney sweep. In 1826, at the age of 13 he had been arrested and convicted of stealing fruit from a garden and sentenced to a month's imprisonment. Two years later, he was at it again, this time in Widcombe with another boy, Thomas Howe.<sup>141</sup> As the 'scrumping' had been an ongoing problem for the nurseryman, he had employed a 'watcher' who chased after the boys. Howe was apprehended but Milsom chose to run into a nearby stream where a crowd gathered to watch the 'action'. Milsom described as 'sooty' (as he was a chimney sweep) was 'leisurely distributing his ill-gotten booty of apples amongst the bystanders' as a local Baker tried to dislodge him with a stick. The two boys were tried and given two months detention in a House of Correction.<sup>142</sup> Although these crimes were fairly minor, after Milsom was convicted and imprisoned for his part in the Bath riot, he was soon in trouble for a more serious offence. Shortly after being released from Wilton gaol in 1833, he engaged with Jane Boyce and an unnamed other in an attempt to rescue a burglar, George Maggs as he was being

---

<sup>136</sup> *The Bath Poll*, p. 51.

<sup>137</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 08 April 1830, 22 September 1831.

<sup>138</sup> Evidence of Ann Morey. *Bath Chronicle* 05 April 1832.

<sup>139</sup> Ilchester Gaol, Felons Register 1822-1828, 1823; *Bath Chronicle* 21 September 1826, 28 August 1828; Fawcett, Bath City Council Members.

<sup>140</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 20 August 1835.

<sup>141</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 03 August 1826.

<sup>142</sup> *Bristol Mercury* 26 August 1828.

transported to Shepton Mallet gaol. At the village of Stratton-on-the-Fosse near Radstock the trio overpowered the law officer and freed Maggs, but after a chase he was apprehended. Milsom and Boyce were later charged as accessories to the original burglary at a linen draper's shop on Bath Street.<sup>143</sup>

William Richards, at 40 the eldest of the trio of Bath rioters, a collier and top Sawyer, was living in Avon Street in 1831. Born in Bristol, Richards, then a 'potter', had been convicted in 1821 of stealing a 'gamecock and a duck' at Tidenham, across the Severn near the Forest of Dean and served a six-month sentence. Two years later he was charged with stealing four fowls and a hen from two farms in Westbury-on-Trym north of Bristol. It was noted in the prison records that he had 'been in custody a few times and had a very bad character'.<sup>144</sup> Richards was found guilty and transported for seven years to Bermuda where he lived on the prison ship *Antelope*, enduring harsh conditions. During the day the prisoners were put to work building the dock facilities, hewing limestone and timber.<sup>145</sup> Richards served nearly six years of his sentence in Bermuda before returning to England in 1829.<sup>146</sup> The evidence suggests that he married soon after and the couple had a child in Bath. However, within three years he was back in the dock again for his involvement in the riot. As noted previously, his second transportation would be for life and to the other side of the world.



Figure 8: Convict hulk, Bermuda.<sup>147</sup>

In summary, assuming the sample of arrestees is at least somewhat representative of the rioters, the crowds of October 1831 in Bath were in the main, disenfranchised, property-less, young, single, working-class men born in the surrounding counties and currently living and working in the city. Although some had criminal pasts and had suffered imprisonment and transportation as a result, their offences were mainly food and fuel crimes consummate with the century-long criminalisation of

<sup>143</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 05 December 1833; 1833 *Bath Directory*.

<sup>144</sup> *Bristol Mirror* 21 July 1821; *Bristol Mercury* 28 July 1823; Home Office HO 7 Convicts, Miscellanea: Nov 1823, Ship *Justitia*.

<sup>145</sup> Anderson, "The Convict Hulks of Bermuda".

<sup>146</sup> Libraries Tasmania, Conduct Registers of Male Convicts arriving in the Period of the Assignment System 1833-1837 CON31-1-37.

<sup>147</sup> Image: [www.bermuda-online.org](http://www.bermuda-online.org).



customary rural practices such as wood-taking, poaching and scrumping. Although, a very few of the property-owning male rioters may have become enfranchised in 1832, the vast majority would remain without the right to vote for many decades, if not the rest of their lives.

ID	Name	Age in 1831 (b.d.)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status, no. children	Semi-literate?	Voting right (1832)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Incident in riot	Charge	Tried	Presiding magistrates or judges	Sentence (Gaol)	Notes
1	Durnell (Durrell), John	21	Jeweller, Labourer, Waiter	Winford, Somerset	N/K	N/K	N/K	No	None	Attack on <i>White Hart</i>	Unlawful assembly, breaking windows, assaults	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	Dickinson and Phelips at QS	6 months in gaol with hard labour (Shepton Mallet)	
2	Holbin, John	18 [20, 1833] (1813)	Plasterer and labourer, [Shoemaker 1833]	Bath, Somerset	Judah Place, Walcot St, Bath	S/-	R&W	No	None	Attack on <i>White Hart</i>	Unlawful assembly, breaking windows, assaults	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	Dickinson and Phelips at QS	3 months in gaol with hard labour (Shepton Mallet)	Transported for life in August 1833 for burglary and theft
3	Stride, Benjamin	30	Agricultural labourer	Somerset	Witham Friary	M/3	R&W [No]	No	None	Attack on Guildhall	Unlawful assembly, breaking windows, assaults [Riot and assault]	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	Dickinson and Phelips at QS	6 months in gaol with hard labour (Wilton)	Married 1820. Sons b. 1820, 1825, 1830 in Witham Friary. Living in Marston Biggott near Frome with mother and father in 1841.
4	Macey, John	N/K	Labourer	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	No	None	Attack on Guildhall	Breaking windows	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	N/K	4 months in gaol with hard labour	
5	Maggs, Joseph	22 (1809)	Hosteller (Inn keeper)	N/K	Milk Street, Bath (1832)	S/-	Yes	Yes	None	Attack on Guildhall	Breaking windows	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	N/K	6 weeks in gaol	Worked at the <i>Full Moon</i>
6	Wake, William	16	Shoemakers apprentice	Alhampton? Somerset	Walcot, Bath	S/-	Yes	No	1 month commitment for being an "idle and disorderly apprentice" Sep 1831	Common riot	Unlawful assembly, breaking windows, assaults	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	N/K	4 months in gaol with hard labour (Shepton Mallet)	May have contracted Leprosy aged 15. 'Cleansed' at Bath Hospital
7	Willey (Simms), James	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	No	None	N/K	Breaking gas lamps	Nov 1831 PS	N/K	3 months in gaol (Shepton Mallet)	

ID	Name	Age in 1831 (b.d.)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status, no. children	Semi-literate?	Voting right (1832)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Incident in riot	Charge	Tried	Presiding magistrates or judges	Sentence (Gaol)	Notes
8	Vining (Viney), George	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	No	None	Attack on <i>White Hart</i>	Theft of umbrella and parasol from <i>White Hart</i>	2 Jan 1832 Somerset QS	N/K	1 week solitary	
9	Smith, James	23 (1808)	Fish carrier, Labourer	Bradford, Wiltshire	Avon Street, Bath (Walcot)	S/-	R&W	No	Not Guilty of stealing cloth (1823)? Taking wood at Claverton (1828), 2 months hard labour in Shepton Mallet gaol; Trespass on the Earl of Lansdown's property (1829) 1 month imprisonment	Attack on <i>White Hart</i>	Unlawful assembly, breaking windows, assaults; demolition of the <i>White Hart</i>	29 Mar 1832 - Lent Assizes	Dickinson and Phelips at QS then Park and Gazelee at Assizes	Death recorded: Imprisoned for 18 months with hard labour (Shepton Mallet)	Held in Shepton Gaol until next assizes, then moved 29 Mar 1832 to Ilchester and then back to Shepton in April 1832.
10	Milsom, Jacob (Abraham)	18 [22]	Labourer, Chimney Sweep	Widcombe, Bath, Somerset	Walcot, Bath	S/-	R	No	1826 stealing fruit from a garden 1 month imprisonment (age 13); 1828 stealing apples from garden in Widcombe 2 months in House of Correction (age 15)	Attack on <i>White Hart</i>	Demolishing the <i>White Hart</i>	29 Mar 1832 - Lent Assizes	Dickinson and Phelips at QS then Park and Gazelee at Assizes	Death recorded: Imprisoned for 18 months with hard labour (Wilton)	Held in Ilchester Gaol until trial then moved to Wilton. He was married and living on Avon Street, Bath in 1841 census.

ID	Name	Age in 1831 (b.d.)	Occupation	Place of birth	Residence (1831)	Marital status, no. children	Semi-literate?	Voting right (1832)	Criminal offences prior to riot	Incident in riot	Charge	Tried	Presiding magistrates or judges	Sentence (Gaol)	Notes
11	Richards, William	40	(Potter), Collier, Top Sawyer	Bristol	66, Avon Street (Walcot) Bath	M/1	R&W	No	Stealing fowls at Tidenham in 1821, 6 months imprisonment; Transported to Bermuda for 7 years from Gloucester prison in 1823 for stealing fowls in Westbury on Trym. Served 5 years 11 months on prison hulks.	Attack on <i>White Hart</i>	Unlawful assembly, breaking windows, assaults	29 Mar 1832 - Lent Assizes	Dickinson and Phelps at QS then Park and Gazelee at Assizes	Death recorded: Transported for life	Held in Shepton Gaol until next assizes, then moved 29 Mar 1832 to Ilchester. Transported to Van Diemen's Land.

Key: b.d. = birth date, M = married, S = single, R = reads, W = writes, N/K = not known, QS = quarter session, PS = petty session

Table 1: Prosopographical data collected on arrestees from the Bath riot of 29 October 1831

## 8 Afterword

The widely held perception of nineteenth century Bath as a place of quiet, genteel residence and declining social influence has shifted attention away from the city's growing industrial workforce and on the development of radical politics. Bath's exceptionally restrictive electoral franchise, the 'self-perpetuating oligarchy' that managed the corporation and relatively large population, provided the basis for pro-reform sentiments well before the constitutional crisis of 1831. The mass reform movement in the city in 1831, briefly, though perhaps uncomfortably, united both middle and working-class supporters, putting tens of thousands into parish meetings and onto the streets in protest marches and rallies.

After the defeat of the Reform Bill in early October 1831 there were signs of a more radical turn with calls for direct action in the form of non-payment of taxes and tithes, targeted attacks on anti-reformers and, more worryingly for the 'respectable' campaigners, evidence of autonomous organisation by the 'lower classes' outside of their control. This culminated in the extraordinary 'riot' of Sunday 30 October, when hundreds of labourers, artisans and servants, took to the streets to suppress the mustering of the Bath troop of the North Somerset Regiment of Yeomanry. This semi-spontaneous act of solidarity with the Bristol rioters, could have resulted in numerous casualties, and did lead to three (commuted) capital sentences, with one unfortunate transported for life. In describing the event, the word exceptional springs to mind, but we must remind ourselves that the following day, across the mouth of the Severn, similar actions were undertaken by the 'lower orders' of Newport in reaction to the Bristol riot.<sup>148</sup>

One marker of Bath's reformist zeal in the period was the plan to erect a massive monument to celebrate the passing of the Great Reform Bill in 1832. The 'Reform Column', as it became known (see Figure 9), was designed by local architect Henry Goodridge. The *Bath Chronicle* enthusiastically described it thus:

Upon a square pediment with projecting corners, supporting four enormous lions couchant...a fluted Column of the Doric Order, surmounted by a colossal statue of the King upon an ornamented circular pedestal. The height of the whole will be *one hundred and twenty feet* to be ascended by stairs within the column; from the top of which the entire plain in which our city stands may be surveyed, and the spectator will have a view of nearly the whole of the enfranchised district. This noble column will be a beautiful ornament to our city.<sup>149</sup>

The subscription fund had already raised £700 when the project was announced in June 1832 after a public meeting, and construction of the base plinth in fashionable Laura Place was underway by December.<sup>150</sup> However, complaints about the height of the memorial from the well-off local residents and perhaps a shortage of funds for such a massive project, scuppered the plan within a year.<sup>151</sup> This left the subscribers out of pocket, and by the summer of 1834 the 'memorial to future generations of

---

<sup>148</sup> See Ball, R. et al *Newport, reform and the 'incident' of October 1831* (2024).

<sup>149</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 6 December 1832.

<sup>150</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 28 June, 6 December 1832.

<sup>151</sup> A survey of voting patterns in 1832 amongst residents of Laura Place, Henrietta Street, Argyle Buildings, Johnson Street and Great Pulteney Street in the vicinity of the proposed 'Reform Column' showed that most voted for the Whig candidates Palmer and Hobhouse, the latter being 'lukewarm' to reform, and ignored the more radical Roebuck. A considerable number failed to vote, probably because there was no Tory candidate. *The Bath Poll*; Mowl, T., and J. Orbach *Unbuilt Bath: The city as it might have been* (Bradford-on-Avon: Stephen Morris, 2023).

the passing of the Reform Bill, has not now one stone left upon another'.<sup>152</sup> The radical pro-reform paper *The Ballot*, edited by MP Thomas Wakely, which 'advocated Chartist principles', noted sardonically:

When the nation was shouting for the victories of Nelson, Flaxman proposed to carve a *Britannia*, some two hundred feet high, on Greenwich Hill, in honour of our naval triumphs: the nation applauded the notion, as they do the Reform Column, and then turned to something else and thought no more about it, as it will think no more about the Reform Column ... And why? Because the set of gross political imposters who, with an honest man or two, form the present administration, having done their best to earn *fame to themselves* by bringing in the Reform Bill, have done their very worst to render the measure ineffective. They have as good as disenfranchised scores of thousands... The Reform Act is literally an incubus on the breast of Reform, - and who would subscribe to the memory of an incubus?<sup>153</sup>

Within a decade of the failure of the Bath Reform Column project, Nelson's Column was being constructed and the Chartist movement's struggle for male suffrage was in its ascendancy.



Figure 9: The proposed Bath 'Reform Column' in Laura Place<sup>154</sup>

<sup>152</sup> *Leicester Herald* 16 July 1834.

<sup>153</sup> Gaskell, B. "Ballot" The British Library. Retrieved from: <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/ballot>; *The Ballot* 19 August 1832.

<sup>154</sup> Henry Edmund Goodridge, BATVG: PD: 1979.151 VAG, Bath and North East Somerset Council.