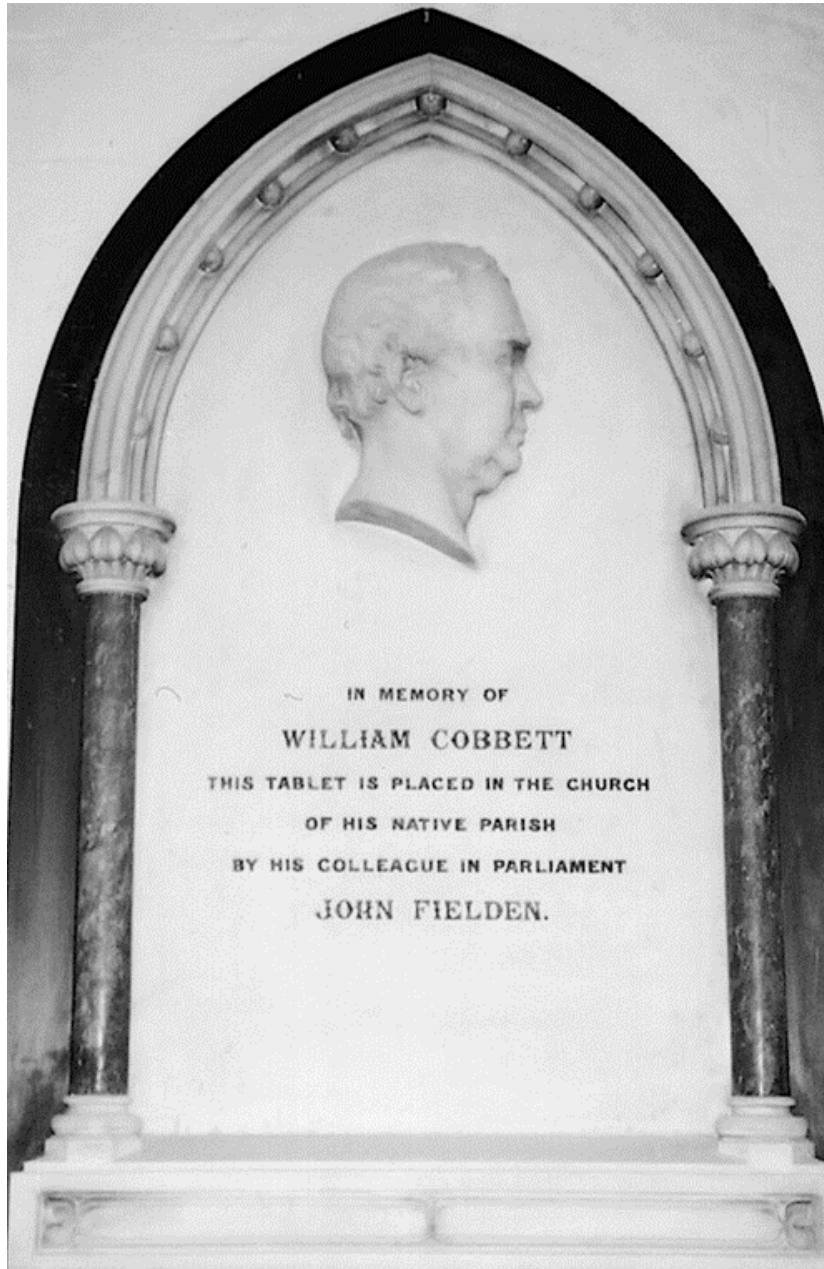


*The William Cobbett Society*



***Cobbett's New Register***

Vol.12 No.2 2018

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**Front Cover Illustration:** *Plaque to William Cobbett in St Andrew's Church, Farnham presented by John Fielden. We have our front cover photo by kind permission of Jacqueline Banerjee, Ph.D. in whose recent book Literary Surrey (2005) it features in an excellent chapter on Cobbett. She also discusses Cobbett in her article on the Victorian Web:*  
<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/jefferies/litre11.html>

*The following is an edited chapter of Anna Pavord's recent book Landskipping: Painters, Ploughmen and Places, Bloomsbury, 2016. It has very kindly been given to us by the author, who will be giving the Annual Memorial Lecture this year.*

## **WILLIAM COBBETT**

*Anna Pavord*

William Cobbett's famous *Rural Rides* started to appear in 1821, in the pages of his journal the *Political Register*. His first ride took him from London to Gloucester. His last, from Kensington into Hampshire, was made in August 1826.

Cobbett rode with the eyes of a yeoman farmer. He appreciated well-grown crops, well-tended orchards, properly managed flocks. He was energetic, endlessly curious, splenetic, endearing in his lack of self-doubt. Agriculture in Britain might yet be saved if only farmers would do things his way: sow more swedes, plant robinia.

He loved England passionately. It is one of his most endearing traits and his radical views put him always on the side of the people who worked the land, not those who owned it. He railed wildly against the enclosures, the end of the commoner's right to cut turf and fuel from the wastelands.

Unlike the Chartists, who wanted a new moral order, he wanted to turn the clock back, to restore the undisturbed scenes of his childhood in the vales around Farnham, Surrey. He writes fiercely of his conviction that the wens will "moulder away", that the "ridiculous" new houses covering the old commonlands, "will first be deserted, then crumble down, then be swept away, and the cattle, sheep, pigs and geese will once more graze upon the common".

It was because of this sympathy with the labourer (the *Political Register* had a circulation of c. 60,000, mostly among working men) that Cobbett always felt happiest in sheltered, well-wooded country. He had little sympathy with the high, open landscape of the Cotswolds, which he visited on the first of his rides. Going towards Cirencester in October 1821, he noted the "wretched hovels", of the labourers, stuck upon bits of waste ground along the sides of the road. The stone landscape, he considered "quite abominable." What did people here do for fuel?

Cobbett's *Rural Rides* rarely took him so far from home as this. Most of his

subsequent journeys lay through Sussex and Kent, Surrey and Hampshire. In Kent and Sussex, blessed with plenty of trees, he felt the labourer had at least a chance of a reasonable life. The woods “furnish fuel for the heating of ovens; they afford material for the making of pretty pigsties, hurdles and dead fences of various sorts; for the sticking of pease and beans in the gardens; and for giving to everything a neat and substantial appearance.” In the high chalk lands round Salisbury, where fuel had to be bought, he remembered the miserable sight of the poor taking turns to make a fire so that on the one flame, four or five kettles could be boiled at once. “What a winter life must those lead, whose turn it is not to make the fire.”

He had little appreciation of the wild, natural beauty that, at this time, was drawing crowds of tourists to the Lake District. For him, beauty is entirely bound up with use. The kind of landscape he responds to manifests itself in Mr Sloper’s farm at West Woody in Hampshire: “large tracts of turnips; clean land; stubbles ploughed up early; ploughing with oxen; and a very large and singularly fine flock of sheep.” Cobbett likes a landscape to be productive, ship-shape.

As a commentator, he had impeccable credentials: his father had farmed, in a small way. His grandfather had been an agricultural labourer. He looked the part too: dressed in woollen broadcloth, with an unwavering, slightly pugnacious gaze, hand stuck confidently in the pocket of a waistcoat tightly buttoned over a swelling front.

On the *Rides*, he travelled always in the same way, setting out on horseback from Kensington, where he had his nursery, usually with one of his sons in attendance. Each night, the son got their horses properly stabled and fed, while Cobbett could immediately call for food and beer and get down on paper the detail of the day. Even in town, he kept country hours, rising at four and going to bed at eight.

To accomplish his plan of visiting farmers in their homes, noting the kind of work labourers were doing in the fields, he had either to be on foot or on horse-back. Coaches stuck to the main turnpike roads and would not get him into the “real” country places. He would not have been able to chat to the farmers in the market at Chertsey or to the drovers bringing thousands of Welsh cattle (mostly heifers in calf) from Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire to the fairs in Sussex.

Swedes, turnips, barley, peas, apples, whatever the crop, Cobbett took an interest in it. There was only one crop he did not like to see – potatoes. He

hated the potato because he thought that, under the Speenhamland system, it was being used to pull even lower the living standards of the English labourer. It was an essential element of the cheaper diet advocated by those who were urging vicious amendments to the Poor Laws.

Writing on trees, all the complex threads of his rides, his reason for making them, come together: their importance in a view; their value as timber, his observation, frequently expressed in the *Rides*, that in wooded country the lot of the agricultural labourer was slightly less hard than it was elsewhere.

The hilly country round Hurstbourne Tarrant in Hampshire was one of his favourite places. Here there were fine oak woods, underplanted with ash and hazel, which stretched along the tops and sides of the hills for miles. The mass of these woodlands, the spacey void of the pastures, it was a combination of elements endlessly repeated through the landscapes of southern England. And he loved them.

In his Sussex journal of 1822 he noted how much more of interest to the traveller was offered by the woodland counties. "Even in winter the coppices are beautiful to the eye, while they comfort the mind with the idea of shelter and warmth". Of all trees, the ash, he reckoned was the most useful and the hardiest of all British native trees. Wherever it was planted, it grew straight and true. On a Hertfordshire journey in January 1822, he spent a great deal of time computing the probable value of ash plantations and laying out the many ways in which the wood could be used.

And he was intrigued by a way of treating the edges of cornfields in Hertfordshire which he had not seen in any other county. The custom was to leave a border round the ploughed part of the fields where grass could grow for a hay crop. Cobbett was there in June, when the hay had been cut and gathered, so round every corn field was a closely mown grass walk about ten feet wide, between the corn and the hedge. "This is most beautiful!" he wrote enraptured. "The hedges are now full of the shepherd's rose, honeysuckles, and all sorts of wild flowers; so that you are upon a grass walk, with this most beautiful of all flower gardens and shrubberies on your one hand, and with the corn on the other." But even in this rapture, he could not miss the opportunity to point out that the practice resulted in profit as well as beauty. The ground close to the hedges would bear little corn, but grass grew there perfectly well.

During the period of the *Rides*, his journeys usually started in Kensington, where he had established a nursery. Returning to the city, he could rarely

resist an outburst against the stock-jobbers, the tax-eaters, who, even then were moving out from the city to settle in the villages of Surrey and Berkshire. Sunninghill made him so splenetic, you wonder he could stay in the saddle: “a spot” he raged, “all made into ‘*grounds*’ and gardens by *tax eaters*. The inhabitants of it have beggared twenty agricultural villages and hamlets.”

In terms of his blood pressure, Kent was no safer. At Up-street, on the way to Canterbury, he notes the irony of a sign reading “PARADISE PLACE *Spring guns and steel traps are set here.*” It could only be a stock-jobber’s place he concluded.

Though he found much to admire in areas such as Kent and Norfolk (the Norfolk farmers particularly he found “very neat and *trim* in all their farming concerns”), it was in Hampshire that he felt happiest. He liked a landscape of high downs with woods on the sides of the hills. He liked looking down on farmhouses, sheltered by stands of tall trees. He liked watching the slow movement of the great flocks of sheep coming down from the high pastures to the fields where they were folded for the night.

On 24 August 1826 he was back in Uphusband, near Hurstbourne Tarrant. By the evening, he was sitting at a south-facing window of the inn looking out over “a most populous rookery, in which, of all things in the world, I delight”. The sun was setting; the rooks were skimming and curving over the tops of the trees. Under their branches, Cobbett could see a flock of several hundred sheep, “nibbling their way in from the Down.” Here was his Arcadia.

## **AN APPRECIATION OF *COBBETT’S ENGLAND* FOLIO SOCIETY EDITION 1968**

*Penny Young*

I was rather pleased with myself when, last July, I came across an immaculate, pristine 1968 copy of *Cobbett’s England* in a second-hand bookshop on the North Norfolk coast. Here was a rather fine selection from Cobbett’s writings together with reproductions of the famous series of eight engravings by the great caricaturist, James Gillray, entitled *The Life of William Cobbett, written by himself*. It is true that the pictures were not in full colour but they were very well presented indeed and the rather fine boards were in perfect condition. So here was the famous production by The

Folio Society. I had paid £5 for it and was rather gratified when I looked it up on the web and found that people were paying far, far more than that for a copy. (Not that I want to sell it.)

My mood, however, changed to one of astonishment when I started to read the Introduction. I had thought that this famous folio edition was a fabulous celebration of the work of one of England's most famous sons – William Cobbett... the man who started out as a plough boy, who taught himself to read and write when he joined the army and went on to become the most popular radical political writer of his times – the man William Hazlitt would famously call ‘a kind of *fourth estate* in the politics of the country’ – the man who gave us Hansard...

It had all started off so well: ‘William Cobbett is best remembered as the greatest of English political journalists.’ But what followed swiftly nipped my joy in the bud. In the opinion of the editor, John Derry, who wrote the Introduction: ‘He was no political thinker, for his mind was too warped by prejudice and too easily moved by emotion for him to attain any real depth or consistency as a theorist. And although for the last few years of his life he represented Oldham in the reformed House of Commons, he was singularly ineffective as a practising politician.’

And things got worse. *Rural Rides*, Derry continued, was ‘a legendary book, though it is more difficult and less rewarding, especially if read at a sitting, than its reputation suggests.’ Publications, wrote Derry, poured from his pen and Cobbett wrote ‘compulsively and prolixly, never worrying over relevance or repetitiveness. Articles on politics and finance, pieces of autobiography and reminiscence, compendiums of instruction and advice, even textbooks for those wishing to find a wife or improve their command of the English language: this was the myriad jumble of miscellaneous publications which made up Cobbett's lifework.’

Just to repeat that last bit: ‘THE MYRIAD JUMBLE OF MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATIONS WHICH MADE UP COBBETT'S LIFEWORK.’

Let's turn again to Hazlitt for an antidote to that outrageous last line. Lewis Melville, who himself wrote that Cobbett was ‘the most powerful political writer of his day’, and ‘one of the best and most forcible writers in the language,’ quoted the following lines from Hazlitt in his own biography of William Cobbett: “‘He might be said to have the clearness of Swift, the naturalness of Defoe, and the picturesque satirical description of

Mandeville; if all such comparison were not impertinent. A really great and original writer is like nobody but himself.” (Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Cobbett in England and America*, 1913, vol.1, p. 26)

Returning to John Derry and his Introduction, Cobbett, he wrote, ‘even constructed his own fanciful version of English history to give his prejudices a show of learning.’ He was, however, ‘incapable of discriminating between the important and the trivial.’ Derry, then, almost pays a compliment: ‘The sections I have chosen will, I hope, convey something of Cobbett’s bluff charm ...’ but he spoils it rather by adding, ‘as well as his self-righteousness.’ Derry does, however, concede that Cobbett had a ‘unique style’ although he was ‘never objective.’ The Introduction concludes thus: ‘He is the epitome of those who take refuge in the past when they find the present difficult and perplexing and impossible to comprehend, believing as they do that only their own limited experience of life has a lasting validity and an abiding worth.’ (Oh dear.)

It was a relief to turn the very beautiful pages – The Folio Society uses quality paper throughout – and start reading the selections of Cobbett’s own work. There are six sections.... The first one is entitled: ‘Cobbett The Man’, and it begins thus:

‘All that I can boast of in my birth is that I was born in old England. With respect to my ancestors, I shall go no further back than my grandfather, and for this very plain reason, that I never heard talk of any prior to him. He was a day-labourer, and I have heard my father say, that he worked for one farmer from the day of his marriage to that of his death...’  
(*Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, Philadelphia, 1796)

What a pleasure it is to step into the world of Cobbett and hear his own voice – calm, matter of fact, straightforward, telling things as they were. Here is the man who taught himself to read and write and who developed an inimitable prose style that made and continues to make his readers feel he is with them and talking to them personally. There are excellent extracts from a variety of sources:

‘My opinions were my own. I dashed at all prejudices. I scorned to follow anybody in matter of opinion. Before my time, every writer of talent enlisted himself under the banners of one party, or one minister or other. I stood free from all such connections...’ (*Political Register*, XXXV, 2 October 1819)

Cobbett never gets boring. It is extraordinary that you can read what you have read already so many times before – yet find it as fresh and interesting

as it first was. And, of course, there is the pleasure of reading passages that one might not have read in detail before – such as the trip to Coventry after Cobbett returned to England from America in November 1819. So many people turned up to greet him, the meeting took place outside the city.

‘Having drawn the chaise up in a suitable position ... I found myself surrounded by several thousands of persons of both sexes ... while other persons were running towards us, not only along the track of the chaise from the city, but in all directions over the fields and meadows. This was not a meeting. There had been nothing done to call it together. It was spontaneous, it was collected of itself by the mere sound of my name.’

**(*Political Register*, XXXV, 4 December 1819)**

One has to laugh at the inclusion in this section of probably one of Cobbett’s most extravagant claims: ‘... I was the great and constant and only really sharp and efficient thorn in the side of that system ... I was the evening and the day star, the moon and the sun and the aurora of the press; all other parts of it have come twinkling behind me, shining now and then, indeed, but shining with borrowed light...’ (***Political Register*, LXIX, 10 April 1830**)

One suspects that the Folio editor, John Derry, might have grimly enjoyed that bit in particular...

And so it goes on. The next section is ‘Cobbett and his Contemporaries’. Here is an interesting Cobbettian take on some of the leading figures and groups of the times that he most detested. The section starts: ‘From the result of the elections in general we are led to hope that the race of “well-meaning men”, of “economists” and “philanthropists” will have experienced a considerable diminution.’ He included Henry Addington, first Viscount Sidmouth: ‘We believe Mr Addington to be a very *honest* man, but what is that? Honesty alone is not a recommendation for a footman, and shall it be for a first minister?’ Then there was the statesman, William Pitt, prime minister at the age of 25 ... ‘We think it probable that Mr Pitt may again be Minister, and if he should, we hope he will perceive and avoid the evil consequences of surrounding himself with *low* and *little men*.’

**(July 1802, *Political Works* 1 260-2)**

There is a swipe, too, at the philanthropist and factory-owner, Robert Owen of Lanark, whose schemes were: ‘nothing short of a species of *Monkery*. This gentleman is for establishing innumerable ‘communities’ of paupers!’ (***The Last Hundred Days of English Freedom*, August 1817, *Political Works* v 230**)

Parson Malthus – and his ‘errors’ – are, of course, included ... ‘I have during my life detested many men; but never any one so much as you.’ So too, William Wilberforce ... ‘I have you before me in a canting pamphlet; and upon your conduct and character, as developed in that pamphlet, it is my intention to remark fully, at some future time.’

Then comes ‘On Dissenters, Methodists and Catholics’ ‘...in many cases, I believe, their teaching tends to immorality and to misery.’ This is followed by ‘The Quakers’ ‘...Here is a sect of non-labourers. One would think that their religion bound them under a curse not to work. Some part of the people of all

other sects work; sweat at work; do something that is useful to other people; but here is a sect of buyers and sellers. They make nothing; they cause nothing to come...’

**(Long Island, 6 February 1819, *Political Works* v 395-406)**

**(Kensington, 27 August 1823, *Political Works* v1 351-67)**

**(*The Dissenters*, May 1811, *Political Works IV* 52-60)**

**(Reigate, 26 July 1823, *Rural Rides* 1 163-4)**

There follow four more sections. The first is entitled ‘Cobbett The Parliamentary Reformer’. It is vintage Cobbett and begins thus:

‘Of what has been denominated *Parliamentary Reform* I have always disapproved; because I never could perceive, in any one of the projects that were broached, the least prospect of producing a *real reform*.’

**(Parliamentary Reform, *Political Register*, March 1806, *Political Works* 11, 51-2)**

‘Cobbett the Traditionalist’ comes next. This is a glorious selection which includes ‘Advice to a Youth’, ‘The Qualities to look for in a Wife’, ‘Boxing’, ‘The Dangers and Delusions of Education’ and ‘Teaching the Children of the Poor to Read’. The next section is ‘Cobbett and Contemporary Social Problems’ - this starts with ‘The Evils of the Factories’ and goes on to explore ‘The Popularity of Emigration’, ‘The Corn Laws’ and ‘The Scandal of the Enclosures’.

And finally, there is a big section on ‘Cobbett and the Changing Face of England’ – and this turns out to be a wonderful selection from *Rural Rides*.

I still find the editor’s remarks about Cobbett’s prowess with the pen at the beginning questionable but I have to say that the selections of Cobbett’s works are excellent.

# HOW DID WILLIAM COBBETT FINALLY ACHIEVE ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT IN 1832?

*Dr Robert Sykes*

*Dr Robert Sykes has kindly produced a transcript of the fascinating talk he gave after the AGM this year.*

In December 1832, William Cobbett was elected as a Member of Parliament for the new, two member constituency of Oldham alongside John Fielden. It was the first general election after the Reform Crisis of 1830-1832. Their success requires some explanation! Cobbett and Fielden were to be highly unusual, if not unique, in the first reformed Parliament, as being advocates of popular radicalism. Cobbett had been unsuccessful in his previous attempts to be elected to parliament. By this stage his support came mainly from the working classes and they were excluded from the suffrage by the property qualification established by the Reform Act. Cobbett was also standing for the larger, more prestigious constituency of Manchester. Although he accomplished a respectable showing there, he still came bottom out of five candidates. Elsewhere other popular radicals standing for election were defeated. Henry Hunt, the great orator of the radical movement, had managed to secure election as MP for Preston (which was one of the few constituencies where most adult male householders had the vote in the old unreformed system) in a by-election in December 1830. He was defeated there in the 1832 general election.

Moreover, the plot thickens! For Cobbett and Fielden were not narrowly victorious but won by a landslide! So, what was special about that Oldham election? Was it a reward for a lifetime achievement as the greatest journalist of his day after his tactical support for the Reform Bill? As we shall see there were other more important factors at work. And why Oldham? It was a heavily industrialised town at the heart of the northern, cotton manufacturing area of Lancashire. Cobbett was born in Surrey and became a farmer in Hampshire. His experience and expertise lay much more in the South, in agriculture rather than with the new cotton factories. He is probably today best known for his portraits of rural life, his *Rural Rides*. This paper will attempt to provide answers for these questions. It will start by setting the general context, before moving to the local Lancashire sources, which do provide an explanation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. A. Sykes, *Popular Politics and Trade Unionism in South-East Lancashire, 1829-1842* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1982). For more background and a contribution to a debate amongst historians about class relationships using Oldham as a case study, see R. A. Sykes, *Some Aspects of Working-Class Consciousness in Oldham, 1830-1842*, *The Historical Journal*, 23, 1, 1980.

In the unreformed system, the right to vote was tied to various property qualifications but was usually quite restricted. There were constituencies where virtually no-one lived anymore, the so-called rotten boroughs such as Old Sarum. In contrast, the largest cities outside London, such as Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds elected no MPs at all. It has been estimated that around 50% of MPs owed their election to a patron and that less than a third of elections were contested.<sup>2</sup> The system preserved landed, aristocratic control of government. In 1816-1820, at the end of the long Napoleonic Wars, there was a great upsurge of working class political radicalism, especially in the rapidly growing manufacturing and urban areas. This popular radicalism united around three key demands: universal suffrage (votes for all adult males), annual parliaments and vote by secret ballot. It became increasingly differentiated from the more limited demands of the middle class reform movement. The two outstanding radical leaders were the great orator, Henry Hunt and the journalist and writer, William Cobbett. Then a combination of repression and relative prosperity ensured that the 1820s were predominantly a time of quiescence.

However, after an economic downturn in 1829, renewed interest in parliamentary reform grew rapidly in 1830. The retirement of the very long serving Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, in 1827 initiated a process of division amongst the Tory party. It had been in power and blocked reform for so long. Further fragmentation followed when, as Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington and his key associate, Robert Peel, pushed Catholic Emancipation through Parliament to the dismay of many fellow Tories. The July 1830 French revolution provided additional inspiration to the reformers, who made gains in the summer 1830 General Election. When Wellington appeared to declare against any reform in November 1830, he was perceived to be so obviously out of step with public opinion that his ministry fell. A Whig ministry, committed to some measure of reform, took office.

The new Prime Minister, Earl Grey, was clear and revealing in his aims that the measure should be “large enough to satisfy public opinion and to afford sure ground of resistance to further innovation”.<sup>3</sup> The Whig aristocrats were not intending to initiate a process which would lead to further democratisation. However the Reform Bill published in March 1831 was much more comprehensive and extensive than almost anyone had expected.

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<sup>2</sup> E. J. Evans, *The Great Reform Act of 1832* (London, 1983) p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Evans, *Reform Act*, p. 30.

It abolished the rotten boroughs and created new boroughs where the population had grown (including Oldham). The Bill also proposed a new, standardised property qualification for voting, which was ownership or occupying property worth at least £10 per year. This did produce a substantial increase in the size of the electorate. One estimate is that whereas 366,000 were entitled to vote under the old unreformed system in 1831, 653,000 were entitled to vote in 1833 after the passing of the Reform Act. However the estimated number of adult males in England and Wales in 1833 was 3,578,000.<sup>4</sup> This meant that over 80% of adult males were still unable to vote. In crude terms what the Reform Act did was enfranchise the middle classes down to the level of many shopkeepers, but still exclude the working classes. However the Reform Bill was opposed by most Tory politicians on the grounds that it was too drastic and likely to endanger aristocratic government. This meant that there was an anti-reform majority in the House of Lords. It was to be over a year of political crisis and sustained pressure from public opinion outside Parliament before the Reform Bill passed in June 1832.

There was overwhelming middle class support for the measure, and at first very strong popular radical backing. But a split began to appear. At a by-election in December 1830, Henry Hunt had managed to secure election as MP for Preston. He was therefore in Parliament when the Reform Bill was introduced. He began to denounce the bill as not benefiting the working classes and advocated agitation to secure much wider voting rights and ideally the radical aim of Universal Suffrage. He said in 1832,

“Lord John Russell, Lord Althorpe, and others of the ministry, had never pretended that this bill was to give any substantial benefits to the working classes; they had all along declared that they had proposed it as a means of cementing the tottering institutions of the country.”<sup>5</sup>

Cobbett took the line that the Bill should be supported as a better than expected first step. It was demonstrably touch and go whether the existing Bill could be forced through Parliament: it would be even more difficult for a more radical measure to succeed. Cobbett began to attack Hunt, saying that he was in practice colluding with the Tory anti-reformers by undermining popular unity. He berated “the hackerings, the stammerings, the boggings, the blunderings, and the cowering downs of this famous

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<sup>4</sup> Evans, *Reform Act*, p.50.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in John Belchem, “*Orator*” Hunt, *Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985) p. 224.

Cock”.<sup>6</sup> The existing words in the English language were not sufficient to convey Cobbett’s fury, so he invented some more!

So, who was right, Cobbett or Hunt? In a way both were right! Hunt was correct about the motives of the Whigs and subsequently it became commonplace for radicals in the Chartist movement to say that Hunt had been proved right that the Reform Act had been a betrayal. However Hunt’s position at the time led to a tactical dead end. Should you actually oppose the Bill when it was the only realistic measure on offer? In the end, Hunt, in the House of Commons, voted for the Bill. Cobbett’s position was more pragmatic and moderate. His stance was almost certainly a factor in his success in the 1832 Oldham election. The electorate voting for him would not have had the vote if the Reform Act had not been carried. However there were other more important factors at work.

These can be traced through the local, primary sources on politics in Oldham. At the time there were five weekly newspapers, each with different political viewpoints, published in Manchester. All of them carried columns reporting on events in the local towns, including Oldham. In addition we have the Butterworth manuscript diaries.<sup>7</sup> Edwin Butterworth worked as a journalist in his home town of Oldham sending in such reports. Many entries in his “diaries” are simply drafts of those reports, but on some occasions, including for the 1832 election, he wrote at much greater length. So what is the story these sources tell?

The local Lancashire towns - Manchester, Salford, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Ashton and Oldham - were all new constituencies electing MPs for the first time and this created enormous interest and activity. The process of different political groups selecting candidates and campaigning for them went on for months before, often starting before the Bill passed in June 1832 (the election took place in December). Oldham was not unusual in seeing radical support for specific candidates, with very radical pledges. It was quite distinctive in that the radicals in Oldham were first in the field and secured a particularly strong candidate. John Fielden was a partner in Fielden Brothers, one of the largest cotton firms in the industry (based in Todmorden so direct influence as an employer in Oldham was not a factor). He was a highly untypical millowner in that he became not only a radical and admirer of Cobbett (as did his brother, Thomas) but also an advocate of factory

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Belchem, *Hunt* p.225.

<sup>7</sup> The paper with the largest circulation was the *Manchester Guardian*, forerunner of today’s *Guardian*. Then it was a moderate reformer/ Liberal paper, critical of the radicals. See also Butterworth diaries (Oldham Public Library). Butterworth was also a local historian, E. Butterworth, *Historical Sketches of Oldham* (Oldham, 1856).

reform to place legal limits on factory working hours.<sup>8</sup> Fielden agreed to stand and insisted that Cobbett should be his partner. In August and September 1832, Fielden and Cobbett were the only declared candidates and there were enormous meetings and processions when they toured the constituency.<sup>9</sup> A vital reason for their eventual success was the failure of both the Whig/Liberals and Tories, unlike elsewhere, to identify candidates at an early stage. With Fielden already declared, the Liberal and Non-conformist voters were faced with a major dilemma. Fielden was a successful industrialist in the locally dominant cotton industry with a record of activity on the Manchester Reform Committee, which had guided local middle class activity in favour of the Reform Bill. He therefore met the key middle class criteria for a suitable reform candidate! To stand against him risked splitting the Liberal vote and letting in a Tory. The scale of popular support for Cobbett and Fielden may well also have discouraged other candidates from coming forward. Finally, in October, a moderate reformer, B. H. Bright, was put forward, but he was a Bristol lawyer and therefore without local connections and without experience of the cotton industry. All the sources agree that the declared aim was to supplant Cobbett and secure the election of Bright alongside Fielden.<sup>10</sup> But Fielden had made partnership with Cobbett a fundamental condition of his candidature!

Then, in December, only just over two weeks before the poll, a Tory candidate, William Burge, was put forward. Wheeler's *Manchester Chronicle*, which had been so anxious for a strong, "respectable" opposition to the radicals, was aghast. It listed his disadvantages: not only was he an ultra-Tory, who had been MP for a rotten borough and had opposed the Reform Bill, he was also the salaried agent of the Jamaican slave owners!<sup>11</sup> Now it was revealed that the Whig, Bright, whose father was a slave owner, had personal interests in slavery and would not commit himself to total abolition of slavery. The slave trade had been banned in 1807, but slavery had continued in the colonies and was only to be abolished by one of the very first acts of the reformed Parliament in 1833. The Anti-Slavery Society, with William Wilberforce as the best known figure, was one of the foremost pressure groups of the age. George Thompson one of their nationally known lecturers came to Oldham. Butterworth records that he spoke to a

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<sup>8</sup> John Fielden, *Curse of the Factory System* (London, 1836).

<sup>9</sup> *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 7, 14 July; 15, 22 September 1832. This was the most radical of the Manchester papers.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. *Butterworth Diary*, 3 October; *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Courier* (the Conservative paper) 6 October 1832.

<sup>11</sup> Wheeler's *Manchester Chronicle* 30 June, 24 November, 1 December 1832.

“respectable” audience of two to three thousand. He attacked both Bright and Burge, and caused “a great reaction to occur in favour of Cobbett and Fielden”. He wrote that “most” of the Wesleyans, “some Churchmen” and “many dissenters” now declared against any candidate connected with slavery. George Stephen, Wilberforce’s nephew and solicitor for the Anti-Slavery society, arrived to contest the election should either of the “slavery candidates” appear likely to win. Butterworth summarised the situation; the “Whigs” had produced a candidate who was, “directly concerned in slavery”, the Tory, Burge, had “acted just as the radicals desired” in attacking Bright as “equally guilty as the Tory respecting slavery...it proved their death blow amongst the religious portion of the constituency.”<sup>12</sup> The radicals had good reason to comment that if the Whigs had produced a reformer “of talent” he might have troubled them. Cobbett himself contrasted the political weight of his opponents in Manchester with the “insignificant” ones at Oldham.<sup>13</sup> It needs to be emphasised that the two most radical MPs in the first reformed Parliament did not narrowly secure victory, but had landslide majorities in clearly exceptional circumstances. According to the poll book, the result was Fielden (radical) 668, Cobbett (radical) 634, Bright (Whig) 147, Burge (Tory) 91 and Stephen (Anti-slavery) 3.<sup>14</sup>

So, to return to the questions posed at the outset. Why Oldham? Because radicalism was strongest in such northern industrial towns and that was where Fielden stood. Why was Cobbett successful? Cobbett’s own appeal and his moderate, pragmatic approach to the Reform Bill played a part. However the role played by Fielden was probably more important. More significant still was the failure of both the Oldham Whigs and Tories to provide early candidates and then to come up with ones without local connections. It was the lack of an effective middle class opposition which differentiated Oldham from the other local towns, where radicals mounted candidates without success. Finally there was the Slavery issue, in Butterworth’s words, the “death blow”.

The same Liberal tactical dilemma, the risk of splitting the vote and letting in a Tory ensured that Fielden did not face a credible moderate Liberal challenger until 1847, and then he was defeated. Fielden remained very

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<sup>12</sup> *Butterworth Diary* 5, 8, 14 December 1832; *Manchester Times* (a Liberal paper), 15 December 1832. There was real irony here, as Cobbett had, in the past, criticised Wilberforce and the Anti-Slavery Society for emphasising injustice overseas over injustice and repression at home!

<sup>13</sup> *An Address from One of the Many Thousand Non-Electors of the Borough of Oldham*, 29 December 1832; *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 22 December 1832.

<sup>14</sup> Oldham 1832 Poll Book. For a more detailed analysis, see Sykes, *Working-class Consciousness in Oldham*, p. 173-6.

highly admired by the radicals. He was cautious in his appearances in public agitation as he believed they inhibited his ability to achieve things in Parliament. However he was in the chair for the great Lancashire radical meeting in 1838 at Kersal Moor, which initiated the Chartist movement in the area. The first historian of Chartism, R. C. Gammage, himself a Chartist, emphasised his stature and was fulsome in his praise, “the sun has seldom shone over a better man than John Fielden”.<sup>15</sup> Cobbett finally achieved his long-held aim to become an MP. However it was at the age of 69 and he was beset with family and health problems before his death in 1835. Yet in those final years he continued to be active, his radicalism was undiluted and he did take up the causes of the working classes of the North. It may seem surprising for those who see Cobbett only through the lens of his southern, rural perspective. However he did what he had always done, saw things for himself and then launched a torrent of invective and righteous indignation against what he saw as the hypocrisy and self-interest of the rich and in defence of the common people. And he was good at it! Here he is in Parliament in 1833 on the occasion of the defeat of the Bill (championed by Fielden) to limit factory hours to ten a day.

“I have only one observation to make, and I will not detain the House two minutes in doing so. We have, Sir, this night made one of the greatest discoveries ever made by a House of Commons, a discovery which will be hailed by the constituents of the Hon. Gentlemen behind me with singular pleasure. Hitherto, we have been told that our navy was the glory of the country, and that our maritime commerce and extensive manufactures were the mainstays of the realm. We have also been told that the land had its share in our greatness, and should justly be considered as the pride and glory of England. The Bank, also, has put in its claim to share in this praise, and has stated that public credit is due to it; but, now, a most surprising discovery has been made, namely, that all our greatness and prosperity, that our superiority over other nations, is owing to 300,000 little girls in Lancashire. We have made the notable discovery, that, if these little girls work two hours less in a day than they do now, it would occasion the ruin of the country; that it would enable other nations to compete with us; and thus make an end to our boasted wealth, and bring us to beggary!”<sup>16</sup> But it was not to be until 1847 that the Ten Hours Act was passed, and 1867 before there was a further extension of the right to vote!

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<sup>15</sup> R. C. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement 1837-1854* (London, 1894) p.64. (It was first published in 1854). See also R. A. Sykes, *Early Chartism and Trade Unionism in South-East Lancashire* in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (eds) *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Patricia Hollis, *Class and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England 1815-1850*, London 1973 p. 198.

## **RURAL RIDE ON SUNDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> JULY 2017**

*Summary by Katharine Stearn and Richard Hinxman*

The Cobbett Society this year was treated to an outstanding Rural Ride, the result of years of research by member Richard Hinxman. He has been researching the history of his ancestor and namesake Richard Hinxman (c.1786-1834), a farmer and radical friend of Cobbett who campaigned with him for Parliamentary Reform.

With regret, owing to the sheer quantity and length of the readings this year, a full record will not be given in *Cobbett's New Register*. Instead, the complete narrative and readings for this Rural Ride will be published at a web address to be announced later. But to give a flavour and provide a memento, the following is a summary of the themes and events of the day.

We enjoyed fine weather for the annual tour, this time entitled "1817: The Fateful Year." 200 years ago, people were demanding wider voting rights, an end to austerity and Government corruption, and greater Parliamentary transparency – all still topical today. By 1817, this debate was turning to dangerous confrontation.

The tour followed the fortunes of 5 radical agitators campaigning for reform in 1817. These were: William Cobbett, Henry 'Orator' Hunt, Lord Thomas Cochrane, John Goldsmith, and Richard Hinxman, all yeoman farmers then living in Hampshire.

This 'band of brothers' headed the Hampshire Petition to Parliament, signed by over 10,000 people at a great public meeting on 10 February 1817, at the old Widley Fairground behind Portsmouth.

Soon afterwards, Parliament attempted to stifle criticism by suspending the Habeas Corpus Act and banning public meetings for over 2 years. Cobbett fled to America to escape arrest, Cochrane left the country in disgust, and Hunt was imprisoned in 1819 for attempting to speak out.

During the tour, descendants and namesakes of Richard Hinxman and John Goldsmith met for the first time in 200 years, at the latter's Hambleton home, West End Farm. Other visits included Portsdown Hill, Lord Cochrane's estate at Holly Hill, and Cobbett's Fairthorn estate at Botley, farmed by Hinxman when Cobbett fled to the USA.

Morning coffee was taken at The Chairmakers at World's End, where our kind hosts had erected a marquee for us to take our refreshments in. A roast

lunch was enjoyed at Cams Mill, situated on the pretty Wallington estuary at the end of Portsmouth harbour. Finally, a cream tea at The Bugle Inn in Botley provided sustenance, while readings from contemporary documents illustrated the reformers' dramatic story. An enjoyable and thought-provoking time was had by all.

Thanks are due first and foremost to Richard Hinxman for his meticulous preparation and organisation of a thoroughly enjoyable and highly informative day. Huge thanks to our Publicity Officer Gloria Dyche once again for her hard work in organising the tickets, and to our readers: Luath Grant-Ferguson, Richard Thomas, Katharine Stearn and Richard Hinxman, who did a great job, conveying the readings with clarity.

### **THE CITIZENS' PROJECT**

*The Royal Holloway has organised a Citizens' Project to explore the 'history of liberty, protest and reform' in British democratic history through local museums and online. The Cobbett Society offered the following case for the inclusion of the Museum of Farnham and William Cobbett in this project.*

### **WILLIAM COBBETT'S CONTRIBUTION TO DEMOCRACY**

*Katharine Stearn*

“The partial, capricious cruel blows of despotism are much less injurious to the general and real liberties... than are any of those proceedings, by which tyranny is exercised under the names, and with the forms and appearance of law and justice.”

*(Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, March 2, 1805).*

Cobbett could be said to embody the English tradition of protest, liberty and the rule of law. He was the self-educated son of a small farmer in Surrey in the days when Surrey was still a place of small farms. He spoke for the poor of England at a time when their rights both in law and in government were almost entirely non-existent. He fought for liberty on so many fronts, that perhaps it is best merely to summarise his perspective, and then list some of the areas in which he fought. Cobbett believed that the good life was the inheritance of all, rich and poor alike, and that poverty should be no bar to the full enjoyments of the benefits of Providence in whatever form.

For him it was oppression that stole these universal benefits, and as such, oppression needed to be fought wherever it was found. He found it in the England of his day, where government was so entirely in the hands of the rich that the interests of the poor could be ignored. He joined the fight for the retention of Habeas Corpus when it was suspended in 1817, wrote against the Gagging Acts, he was a powerful voice in the movement for Catholic Emancipation, and his last energies were expended in fighting the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which heralded the era of the workhouse. But perhaps his most solid contributions were in the field of press freedom.

William Cobbett had an unerring instinct for the requirements of democracy. He founded *Hansard's Political Debates*, the record of the proceedings of Parliament, which started its life as *Cobbett's Political Debates* in 1803 and has been published continuously ever since. Imprisoned for seditious libel in 1810, Cobbett was forced to sell this publication along with some others to his printer Thomas Hansard in order to fend off penury...

His other great contribution is his role in the development of the free press. Cobbett set the standard for a truly free press in these terms:

1. **Freedom from Government control.** He was made the very lucrative offer in 1800 of either one or both of Prime Minister, William Pitt's Government newspapers, the 'True Briton' and 'The Sun'. To the surprise of friends, he turned down this prestigious offer, preferring to set up a newspaper at his own expense and maintain his independence.
2. **Freedom from moneyed interest.** When his money ran out, Cobbett was offered a sum of money by friends to get his newspaper off the ground. He eventually accepted on the written understanding that the money was a gift and that no further expectations would be made on him in terms of the position he would take in his paper, even if it was utterly at odds with the views of the donors.

“From my very first outset in politics, I formed the resolution of keeping myself perfectly independent. In adherence to this resolution, I rejected, in America, many offers of great pecuniary advantage.”

(*Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, October 12, 1805.)

3. **Freedom from the influence of advertisers.** Cobbett announced at the start of his journalistic career that he would have no advertisements for quack medicines in his publication. He fully realised that this would lose him “at least £500 a year”, but he never wavered in this principle, and throughout his career only ever advertised his own products or those of the shops he bought from and therefore endorsed.
4. **Affordability:** Cobbett rather stumbled on the fourth principle which was of course, affordability. He put newspapers into the price range of the poorest in society, the labourers, by producing in 1816 a shortened version of his newspaper alongside the full one. This avoided the government tax on newspapers designed to keep them out of the reach of the poor. He managed to sell it for two pence, earning it the derisive title from the establishment of the ‘Two-Penny Trash’. (This title Cobbett went on to use when he revived his cheaper paper in the run up to the Great Reform Bill.) It was a phenomenal publishing success.

“...the cheap Register as a whole was a huge success. The circulation went up by leaps and bounds, until it reached the unprecedented figure of 40,000 to 50,000 copies a week, a circulation many times larger than that of any other journal of the time. These figures are vouched for by independent testimony e.g. Monthly Magazine, January 1817.”  
(From *The Life of William Cobbett*, 1924, G.D.H. Cole p. 207.)

Cobbett was one of the main players in the build-up to the Great Reform Bill. He has faded somewhat from the history books, but his power was fully recognised - and feared - by the establishment of the time. As the Whig reformer Lord Grey came to power at the expense of the Tories who had declared themselves anti-reform, a ditty, written by a disgruntled Tory MP, circulated in 1830:

“If Cobbett is the first of men,  
The second is Lord Grey.  
Oh must we not be happy, when  
The Whigs are in today!”

(From *The New Order of Things*, W. M. Praed, 9th Dec. 1830.)

His efforts in the cause of reform were monumental, a fact recognised even by his enemies:

“He is a kind of fourth estate in the politics of the country. He is not only unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present

day, but one of the best writers in the language... not only no individual but no corrupt system could hold out against his powerful and repeated attacks..."

(On 'The Character of Cobbett', from: *Table Talk, Essays on Men and Manners*, William Hazlitt, 1822.)

- and respected by historians:

"... Cobbett was ...the most powerful tribune that the English poor have ever known... Cobbett may be said to have spent twenty years of his life in the effort to save the labourers from degradation and ruin. He was the only man of his generation who regarded politics from this standpoint."

(From *The Village Labourer 1760-1832*, J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, 1911, page 234-6.)

"...he [Cobbett] made the wrongs and sufferings of the poor known to educated men. He angrily drew aside the curtain that hid their lives from public notice and sympathy. He proclaimed rich and poor to be one English nation, and demanded that the Constitution should include them both."

(From: *British History in the Nineteenth Century (1782-1901)*, GM Trevelyan, 1922.)

Cobbett put forward the argument for reform over a period of 30 years, through his weekly newspaper, through books and pamphlets, through a relentless bombardment of the establishment in the written word. It would be impossible to do justice to the position he took in a short piece like this. Perhaps best to say simply that for Cobbett, in any assessment of national prosperity, the lot of the poor could not be ignored or belittled:

"And yet... while the main body of the working class in England are fed and clad and even lodged worse than felons, and are daily becoming even worse and worse off, the King is advised to tell the Parliament, and the world, that we are in a state of unexampled prosperity, and that this prosperity must be permanent, because all the great interests are prospering! THE WORKING PEOPLE ARE NOT, THEN, "A GREAT INTEREST"! THEY WILL BE FOUND TO BE ONE, BY-AND-BY..."

(*Rural Rides*, William Cobbett, (1830): 'Ride From Winchester to Burghclere', 31st October, 1825.)

## COBBETT VERBATIM? ... WELL, NOT QUITE!

*David Chun*

It is a measure of the power of Cobbett's pen that in the 1800s a number of publications came into existence with, according to Cobbett, the 'express purpose of writing down the Register'. Perhaps the most vitriolic of these was *The Satirist, or, Monthly Meteor*, of which George Manners (1778-1853) was the editor and owner from 1807 to 1812.<sup>1</sup> Usually the anti-Cobbett attacks are too vicious and febrile to display any real humour, but some items in *The Satirist* are, to my mind, highly amusing, such as the piece which appeared on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1809. It is the sort of scurrilous and somewhat surreal humour that we associate with *Private Eye* – the 'Dear Bill' letters spring to mind. It refers to an altercation between *The Satirist* and Cobbett over a pamphlet that had been published by Cobbett's friend Peter Finnerty attacking the Duke of York. However, it can be enjoyed on its own terms without any deep knowledge of the historical background. The notion of Cobbett deciding to intimidate Manners, and thinking better of it - Manners was apparently six feet four inches in height – and the idea of him collecting abuse from Billingsgate fishwives to put in the *Political Register* can still raise a smile after 200 years.

### PORCUPINE'S POCKET-BOOK

MR. SATIRIST,

WALKING the other day near BOTLEY, I picked up the pocket-book, which accompanies this note. The papers and memorandums it contains appear to be rather curious, but I am not sufficiently acquainted with these matters to know whether they are of value sufficient to be advertized. By publishing some of the heads, however, in your work, the owner, if he should chance to read it, will see where he may recover his property; and I take the liberty of selecting you for this purpose, because your work is so very generally read.

I am, yours, &c. &c,

December, 9.

A.B.

The SATIRIST very willingly adopts A.B.'s suggestion, and, that the owner may be at no loss to recognize his property, adds a description of the book itself. It is bound in *black calf*, and lettered P. PORCUPINE. It is mounted with *brass*, of which, indeed, there is a great deal about it. P. PORCUPINE

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<sup>1</sup> George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend*, Oxford, 1982, vol.1, p. 228.

is a solid piece of brass. On the inside, by way of frontispiece, is pasted a disgusting drawing of a monster with two heads voiding excrement, and at the same time feeding on it. In the pockets of the book are several loose papers, the heads of which are subjoined. Part of the *asses skin* appears to have been roughly handled, and looks exactly as if *a cat had scratched it*. There are, however, several memorandums on it, some of which are copied below; the rest, the SATIRIST could not venture to transcribe, as he has not yet brought himself to consider his ears as an unnecessary ornament, or the wearing them a piece of foppery.

The following curious indorsements are on some of the papers found in the pocket-book:

“No. 1. Plan for reconciling contradictions, and shewing that the same person may be a coward and a hero, a fool and a philosopher, a villain yet honest, a traitor and a patriot: or a mode of satisfying myself that a man may deserve the gallows, and at the same time be most worthy of my friendship and esteem.

“No. 2. The inutility of argument logically, and the superiority of assertions to proofs clearly proved.

“No. 3. The whole art of LYING practically illustrated and adapted in the meanest capacity; with a large table of lies suited to every occasion, and rules for using them. N.B. This is not to be published till after my death, reserving it at present for my own private use.

“No. 4. How to gull the public, shewn by a number of ingenious experiments performed with the greatest success by W.C.P.P. To which is added a newly-invented process for extracting gold from a jakes, as practised by the same professor. *Mem.* A patent is to be obtained for this last discovery, and, therefore, it will be of no advantage to any but the inventor.”

There are some other loose papers consisting principally of money accounts relating to one POL. REG. Whether this POL. REG. is a lady kept by the owner of the book, or whether POL. REG. keeps him, does not appear.

Of the memorandums on the asses skin, the following are part.

“*Nov.3.* Went into a coffee-house where I was not known. Heard every body enjoying the d—d blow up the SAT. has given me. One said the *Meteor* had thrown a proper light on my character. All agreed to cut me,

and have no more to do with POL. REG. *Mem.* To get good intelligence whether the SAT. may be bribed or bullied.

“*Nov. 4.* Went to bed cursed savage with myself for having burnt my fingers with the infernal *Meteor*. Dreamed I was transformed into a cur, and snapping at the heels of a fine prancing courser, had my brains kicked out. Waked with a splitting head-ache. Went to Leadenhall-street to bully the publisher of the SAT. After walking up and down several times before his house to collect my spirits for the occasion saw him coming out. D—d athletic fellow – did not look as if he was to be frightened – so thought better of it – second thoughts are best. Coming back met poor Sir Richard<sup>2</sup> – condoled with him on our mutual disgrace – nothing like a companion in trouble.

“*Nov. 5. Mem.* To deduct 3s. 7d. from my next payment to S. H—, for not having told me the whole of the conversation that passed at his master’s table last Wednesday relative to the P— affair: and pay same to F—y<sup>3</sup>, who had been asked there to dinner, and gave me the short-hand notes which he had secretly taken of all that was said.

“*Nov. 6.* Be called early to-morrow morning to go to Billingsgate, to collect a few rhetorical flowers for POL. REG.

“*Nov. 7.* Returned from Billingsgate without success. Fish-women mere tyros in abuse. All as insipid to me as swipes to a man used to gin. Plenty of fish but no sauce – good joke – studied it as I came home. *Mem.* Sport it as an extempore *bon-mot*, next time I eat turbot at B—‘s.”

The SATIRIST can proceed no further with this extract for the reason assigned above: but any person who can prove his right to the pocket-book, by stating the remainder of its contents, may receive it on application at the SATIRIST OFFICE.

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<sup>2</sup> Presumably Sir Richard Phillips (1767-1840).

<sup>3</sup> Presumably Peter Finnerty (1766-1822).

## WILLIAM HONE 1780-1842

*For those readers for whom William Hone is not a well-known name, our editor Penny Young has provided a brief introduction to the following article:*

Born in Bath, Hone moved to London and set up shop as a journalist, author, bookseller and publisher. His famous shop at 55 Fleet Street had a front just three feet across. Here he wrote and published 130 books and pamphlets, edited two national newspapers and produced his famous political satires ridiculing the government. His illustrator was George Cruikshank. They sold in the hundreds of thousands. Hone challenged the establishment and the cruelty of the state and, as all the radical reformers, he was imprisoned on trumped up charges. His hero was William Cobbett and Hone stood by Cobbett when he fled to America. Ben Wilson, author of *The Laughter of Triumph, William Hone and the Fight for the Free Press* (2005) calls Hone ‘the forgotten hero of the British Press.’

### COBBETT IN THE HONE COLLECTION AT ADELPHI UNIVERSITY

*Elayne Gardstein, Senior Adjunct Professor, Adelphi University Libraries.*

The Helene and Josephine Lewisohn William Hone Collection at Adelphi University in Garden City, NY includes approximately 300 manuscript items, consisting of correspondence, notebooks, manuscripts, miscellaneous items, a scrap album, ephemera and visual materials by or relating to William Hone (1780-1842). They complement over 600 published items in the collection, encompassing monographs, pamphlets, broadsides, and caricature prints. The Hone Collection was acquired in 1993 through a gift from the Friends of the Adelphi University Library and a bequest from the Lewinsohn Estate. Together with Adelphi’s William Cobbett Collection, the Hone Collection provides a wealth of source materials for scholars conducting research about Regency England and the reform movements of the early nineteenth century.

With the exception of some purchases made after 1993, Adelphi’s Hone Collection once belonged to Anne Cliff Renier (1911? -1988) and Fernand Gabriel Renier (1905-1988) of London. They are best known for amassing the largest children’s literature collection in the U.K.: The Renier Collection of Historic and Contemporary Publications for Children. The Reniers’ interest in censorship issues and social history of the period 1780-1840 also

led them to collect radical press and antiquarian material in diverse formats associated with and by William Hone and others.<sup>1</sup>

Adelphi's Hone Collection includes items by or concerning Cobbett and date 1816-1831. With one exception, all bear the Renier provenance. Anne Renier was a librarian and paid particular attention to labeling the multitude of items amassed in their southwest London home at 12 Melville Road Barnes. She placed pamphlets in paper wrappers with author, title, and date information; items had either a bookplate "From the Library of ANNE RENIER and F.G. RENIER" printed in white on a black background or had "Renier" written on them.

The earliest title of interest is *The Life of William Cobbett, author of The Political Register / written by himself*, the seventh edition printed by Macdonald and Son, 46, Cloth Fair for W. Hone, 55, Fleet Street, and 67, Old Bailey, London in 1816. According to Ann Bowden in *William Hone's Political Journalism, 1815-1821*, this is Hone's abridged reprinting of Cobbett's *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*.<sup>2</sup> The latter was first published in 1796 during Cobbett's stay in Philadelphia. The Reniers also owned a photostat of the ninth edition of Hone's pamphlet. The original pamphlet copied by photostat once belonged to Cobbett's biographer, G. D. H. Cole. In *William Cobbett: A Bibliographical Account of his Life and Times*, M. L. Pearl considered Hone's edition as one of the versions that "faithfully reproduced the original text, apart from some minor cuts at the beginning and the end. The 1816 edition is of special interest in that it was published by the Radical William Hone...."<sup>3</sup> This ninth and final edition of *The Life of William Cobbett* is also present in a bound Hone Collection compilation.

The compilation received its title from the book's first item, *The Reformists' Register and Weekly Commentary*, printed by and for William Hone in 1817. It was purchased in the 1993-1994 academic year, the same year as the

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<sup>1</sup> See Louisa Smith. "Interview with Tessa Chester, Curator of the Renier Collection." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 22, no.3, September 1998, pp. 312-317. Article accessed through Project Muse (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/35415>). See also The Anne and Fernand Renier Collection of children's books on the Victoria and Albert website: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/anne-and-fernand-renier/>. The children's collection, part of the National Art Library, was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum; it is currently stored at Blythe House.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Bowden, *William Hone's Political Journalism, 1815-1821*. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas at Austin, 1975), pp. 55, 70, p. 92 note 111. Page references to this unpublished Ph.D. dissertation are from the photocopy acquired through U.M.I. Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1996. It is also available online through ProQuest Theses & Dissertations Global. Bowden considered the 1816 version a unique example of Hone's piracy of a biographical essay.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Leonard Pearl. *William Cobbett: A Bibliographical Account of his Life and Times*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971, p. 33. Pearl noted that Cole did an edition of Cobbett's pamphlet in 1927. Pearl also noted that Hone's edition cost four pence while Cobbett's 1809 edition sold for a half crown.

arrival of the Hone Collection at Adelphi. The volume, bound in early half leather with gilt spine, contains publications by Hone, Cobbett and others published separately 1816-1817. Its provenance is of interest, as it was once owned by Peter Stradley (1796-1883). He was born in England and immigrated to America on August 23, 1817; he worked as a blacksmith and postmaster in Flatrock, North Carolina. All the works in this bound volume were published prior to his departure from England. Cobbett items include: *The Life of William Cobbett* (9<sup>th</sup> edition, 1816); *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* (volume 32, numbers 1-12, January 4-March 29, 1817); *Mr. Cobbett's Taking Leave of his Countrymen* (printed by Hay and Turner, 1817); and *Mr. Cobbett's Address to his Countrymen* (written in Jamaica, Long Island, May 11, 1817, printed in London by R. Carlile). The items by William Hone augment details about Cobbett's departure for New York.

Beginning with volume 1 of *The Reformists' Register* (February 1 to July 19, 1817), Hone railed against false news as reported in a *Morning Post* article of March 18, 1817 about Cobbett's horsewhipping and referred to that newspaper as the *Lying Post* (column 257).<sup>4</sup> Hone reported on Cobbett's departure from Liverpool on March 25, 1817 (column 317) and wrote an address on April 5, 1817, "A Letter to the Readers of Mr. Cobbett's Weekly Political Pamphlet" (column 321) and expressed regret for the suspension of Cobbett's publication. This same issue provided details about public sentiment, emigration, imprisonment, embarkation, "Cobbett's Address on Leaving England" and Hone's last interview with Cobbett in the latter's Catherine Street house on March 15, 1817 (column 333). Hone emphasized Cobbett's importance as a public writer, "You, my countrymen, are indebted to MR. COBBETT, for an abundance of knowledge, of important knowledge, which has made you wiser and better men. He has imparted many truths, many valuable truths to you, of which you were ignorant; he has made you wise unto political salvation; he has sown amongst us the seeds of Reform, which have taken deep root, which all the harpies of corruption and violence can never eradicate, and which in good time will bring forth good fruit." (column 337). On April 12, 1817, Hone published "A Second Letter to Mr. Cobbett's Readers" (column 353) and wrote, "I believe that no man has more enlightened his countrymen than Mr. COBBETT....I say of Mr. Cobbett—'He was so great a man that I cannot remember his faults.'" (column 372). Hone's preface to *The Reformists' Register*, dated July 17, 1817, described the dire circumstances for Hone and

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<sup>4</sup> William Hone. *The Reformists' Register and Weekly Commentary*. London: Printed by and for William Hone, 1817. All references and quotes from this work refer to column locations.

his contemporaries, the lack of Parliamentary reform, the gagging bills to “restrain freedom of speech”, and the two suspensions of the Habeas Corpus Act. He admitted that two thirds of the present volume was written during suspension and one third during his own imprisonment. At this point in time, Cobbett was already living on Long Island in self-imposed exile (1817-1819). The next Hone Collection item of Cobbett interest was created towards the end of his sojourn in America.

*Fanatical Reformists, or The Smithfield Ass-embly of New Legislators*, is a caricature print attributed by to the artist Charles Williams (active 1797-1830) and dated circa July 1819.<sup>5</sup> M. Dorothy George (1878-1971) compiled seven volumes of the definitive *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings* in the British Museum, covering the period 1771-1832. According to George, the *Fanatical Reformists* caricature is related to another Williams print published by T. Tegg, *The Smithfield Parliament*, and may have been published in *Bon Ton Magazine*. At Adelphi, there are three copies; two hand-colored etchings and one uncolored version. Here, the orator Henry Hunt in a garnet jacket, yellow waistcoat, and blue and white striped trousers sits astride a rearing ass at the Smithfield Market. The braying animal has Cobbett’s head and profiles of five Reformers on its neck. Cobbett’s outspoken character was lauded even while he was an ocean away. Hunt holds a scroll labeled “Universal Suffrage” and addresses a crowd of brown cattle, pigs, asses, sheep and horses. The animals have halters around their necks, and Hunt advises them to keep the halters “to scrag the overgrown Paupers [Ministers, pensioners] &c. &c.” The satirical humor of such prints gave way to criticism of Cobbett and the other Radicals in the months to follow.

William Hone and George Cruikshank’s famous pamphlet, *The Political House that Jack Built*, was published in December 1819. Almost immediately, imitations were printed, and Cobbett appeared in pamphlet caricatures following his return to England. Dated January 1820 by George, *The True Political House that Jack Built*, was published for its anonymous author by Dean & Munday. One image is entitled “This is the DOCTOR, of Grammatical Fame” and depicts Orator Henry Hunt, the radical publisher James Watson, and William Cobbett posed outside an open window.<sup>6</sup> The title refers to Cobbett as author of his famous *Grammar of the English*

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<sup>5</sup> M. Dorothy George. *The Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*. London: The British Museum, 1935-1954. Volume IX, 1949, BMC 13253. Caricatures listed by George are noted: BMC (British Museum Catalogue) followed by their numbers.

<sup>6</sup> George. Volume X, 1952, BMC 13540.

*Language*. Here, Cobbett has two heads and writes his short-lived *Evening Post* while the *Register* is at his feet. One Cobbett mouth proclaims “HUNT the Virtuous [...] Tom Pain a Being Worthy of Adoration [...] Burdett a Gentleman” while the other mouth calls out “HUNT a Whoremonger [...] Tom Pain a Name for everything that is Infamous [...] Burdett a Blackguard”. Large signs on the building announce “ADULTERY PLACE” and “HUNT’S BREAKFAST POWDER” in reference to Hunt’s dubious activities and to the Radicals’ promise to abstain from taxable beverages such as coffee and tea in favor of roasted grains. Cobbett’s return to England with the bones of Thomas Paine was illustrated in a number of Hone Collection items.

Also dating from January 1820, Dean & Munday of Threadneedle Street brought out a pamphlet by “the author of the *Dorchester Guide*” and illustrated at least in part by George Cruikshank. It was entitled *Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb, and the Death of Tommy Pain...To which is Added. An Expostulatory Epistle to Mr. Hone, the Lunarian*.<sup>7</sup> The pamphlet’s cover [fig. 1] depicts Cobbett as a farmer, symbolized by the tree and hat filled with its apples. The devil clutches Cobbett’s left shoulder, while Paine’s skeleton grabs Cobbett’s neck. This lampoon is a chronicle of Cobbett’s misadventures before, during and after his American sojourn. Like *The Political House that Jack Built*, its satirical verses are in alphabetical nursery rhyme format. In the introductory preface, the anonymous author explained the rejection of the title *Cobbettical House that Jack Built* in order to retain the originality of *Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb*. Illustrations show Cobbett as a soldier, Cobbett removing Paine’s bones from his coffin, Cobbett sitting on *The Rights of Man* while transported by boat, Cobbett as a turncoat and Cobbett overboard in rough seas. One illustration alludes to Cobbett as “Peter Porcupine”; a porcupine accompanies the verse: “This animal, a knavish brute, (Though cunning too withal), The venomd shafts he used to shoot, On friends and foes let fall.”<sup>8</sup>

An important caricature print by George Cruikshank, *Coriolanus Addressing the Plebeians*, was published in London by G. Humphrey of St.

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<sup>7</sup> Its anonymous author dates the pamphlet in the Introduction: “Just as this was going to press, Mr. Hone’s Man in the Moon was put into my hand...” *Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb*, p. 10. *Man in the Moon* was first published by Hone in January 1820, hence the lunarian reference. See George, Volume X, BMC 13522-13530 for complete commentary on *Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb*. George notes that the British Museum copy has George Cruikshank’s initials on four of the nine illustrations.

<sup>8</sup> *Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb and the Death of Tommy Pain*. London: Dean and Munday, 1820, p.13.

SKETCHES OF THE  
**LIFE OF BILLY COBB,**  
AND THE  
**DEATH OF TOMMY PAIN.**

*Compiled from Original Documents, obtained in an Original Manner.*

WITH CUTS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,  
*An Expostulatory Epistle to Mr. Hone, the Lunarian.*



BY THE AUTHOR OF THE DORCHESTER GUIDE.

LONDON;

*Printed (for the Author,) and sold by Dean and Munday, Threadneedle-street.  
And all other Booksellers.*

PRICE ONE-SHILLING.

[fig. 1] *Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb and the Death of Tommy Pain.* 1820.  
William Hone Collection, Adelphi University.

James Street on February 29, 1820.<sup>9</sup> This hand colored print with gray border depicts King George IV in a gold toga, armor and red robe addressing a crowd of Radicals in red caps of liberty. In the British Museum Catalogue, George summarizes the scene: “A serious attack on the Radicals is combined with praise of the King.” The front line of “Plebeians” in tattered Roman tunics shrinks fearfully away, while a defiant Cobbett holds a bone in each hand. The reference to Thomas Paine was repeated in the *Age of Reason* book at Richard Carlile’s feet. A skull with red cap (Paine) is behind Cobbett with a banner for “Revolution-Plunder.” At the side, a determined Hone holds two clubs, one for Parody and one for the *Man in the Moon* and the *House that Jack Built* pamphlets.

Two final items in Adelphi’s Hone Collection touch upon quite different aspects of Cobbett’s life. The Reniers kept pages from the December, 1821 issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. A section entitled “Ancient National Melodies, No.1” contains Song II “Cobbett’s Complaint: A Dirge” – “to the tune ‘O Hone, O Hone’.” The verse laments the death of Queen Caroline and its loss to the Radicals: “Now let no eyes be dry...Now all lament and cry...For Caroline is dead, And with her our hopes are fled, For by her we all were fed...”<sup>10</sup> John Gardner, in his chapter entitled “Cobbett’s Return to England in 1819,” devotes a section to ‘Cobbett and Queen Caroline.’

Cobbett became a champion of King George IV’s estranged wife Caroline following her return to England in June, 1820. Cobbett defended her rights in his *Register*, and wrote the “Queen’s Letter to the King” printed in the *Times* later that summer. Queen Caroline died on August 7, 1821. Her cause and those of all women were taken up by the Radicals in their fight against government corruption.<sup>11</sup> During the following decade, conditions led to the Great Reform Act of 1832. A rare pamphlet in Adelphi’s Hone Collection includes Cobbett in this effort.

*Reform!!!, or, The House that Jack Built* was brought out in 1831 by Alfred Miller of Oxford Street in London. The illustrations and satirical verses are imitative of *The Political House that Jack Built*, while the content reflects

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<sup>9</sup> George, Volume X, 1952, BMC 13677. See George’s commentary for enumeration of the major revolutionaries shown. George notes that Cruikshank’s print was likely designed prior to the arrests concerning the Cato Street Conspiracy plot against the government as guilty conspirators were shown.

<sup>10</sup> Ancient National Melodies, No. 1, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Volume 10 (August-December, 1821), pp. 556-557.

<sup>11</sup> See John Gardner, “Cobbett’s Return to England in 1819.” *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Contexts and Legacy*. Edited by James Grande and John Stevenson. Taylor and Francis, 2015, pp. 69-75. First published by Pickering & Chatto, London. Accessed through ProQuest Ebook Central at Adelphi University.



This is the BILL CAT, staunch and bold,  
That drove the RATS from BOROUGH-HOLD,  
To make them all disgorge the gold,  
They FILCH'D from the HOUSE that JACK BUILT.

[fig. 2] "Bill Cat" from *Reform!!! or, The House that Jack Built*. 1831. William Hone Collection, Adelphi University.

the current political situation in need of reform. On page 5, Cobbett has become the “Bill Cat” giving chase to rats [fig. 2]. These vermin symbolize the corrupt borough-monger thieves who stole gold from “the House that Jack Built.” A single rat was captured under a trap cunningly labeled “What a Catastrophe.”<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to Anne and Fernand Renier’s astute collecting over many decades, Adelphi’s Hone Collection augments the holdings of its Cobbett Collection. Of special note, the individual caricature prints and illustrated pamphlets provide visual focus to Cobbett’s importance as a reformer.

## COBBETT VERBATIM

*Katharine Stearn*

### Cobbett on Pensions and Sinécures

At a time when, according to the historian J.H. Plumb, merely to “advocate the abolition of such sinécures as the Tastership of the King’s Wines in Dublin or the Clerkship of the Pells smacked of revolution” (*Men and Centuries*, J.H. Plumb, 1963), Cobbett was, unsurprisingly, far from silent on the matter. His biographer George Spater goes so far as to claim for him the following distinction:

“Cobbett’s year of probing into pensions and sinécures, which involved naming men and women in high society... was sufficiently embarrassing to both grantors and grantees to cause the eventual discontinuance of the practice of making grants except in return for proved services...”  
(*William Cobbett: The Poor Man’s Friend*, George Spater, 1982).

Here is a taste of Cobbett’s ‘probing’:

“This Duke’s name is Grenville, and there is a large family of these Grenvilles. This one was made a Duke only the other day; and, therefore, we must suppose, that those who advised the King to make him a Duke, discovered some great merit in him. But as to the bill of fare of these Grenvilles: this Duke’s father received out of the taxes, for a great number of years, a very large sum of money every year, and that, too, for a sinécure-office; that is to say, an office where there was nothing for him to do... Lord Grenville and a Mr Thomas Grenville, who are uncles of this Duke, have, now, the former £4,000. and the latter £2,000 a-year, in sinécure offices;

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<sup>12</sup> In addition to Adelphi, only three other copies of this pamphlet are listed in WorldCat. One is at the University of Warwick in the U.K.

and, in a Report laid before the House of Commons, in 1808, it appears that Lady Grenville, the wife, of the former, had a pension settled on her of £1,500 a-year, to commence at her lord's death!"  
(*Political Register* 42, 23 March, 1822.)

## **WILLIAM COBBETT, BREXIT AND ENGLISHNESS**

*Summary of The Annual Memorial Lecture 2017 by Stewart Edge*

The 2017 Cobbett Memorial Lecture was given by Patrick Wright, Professor of Literature and Visual and Material Culture at Kings College London and well known as the presenter of 'The English Fix' on BBC Radio 4.

The basic challenge of the evening was 'What would Cobbett have thought of Brexit?' Professor Wright seemed to relish the task of relating aspects of what lay behind the referendum vote for Brexit to many references from his studies of 'Englishness'. He started by listing 'motifs' around the Brexit Referendum which indicated concerns: 'somewhere' versus 'nowhere' (patriots versus rootless cosmopolitans); people versus elites; the country versus the city; the past, betrayed by the present; the 'left behind'. He raised the view that to those supporting Brexit the EU represented 'encroachment' – of rules, regulations, experts, bureaucrats, migrants – on a settled English identity; whilst to the Remainers these were the views of 'Little Englanders'.

Professor Wright drew on references by others to strengthen the 'Englishness' analysis - such as GK Chesterton (*'Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget; For we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet'*). He enlisted George Orwell as one who had appealed for a popular patriotism, which had been picked up by John Major, then George Brown and finally David Cameron as they all sought (and failed?) to crystallize 'British Values' as something to protect and build upon.

It was time then for him to draw a picture of Cobbett's position on all this. Cobbett of course has set the standard for descriptions of Englishness in his *Rural Rides*, and Professor Wright was not short of Cobbett descriptions of the glories of England - or indeed of the UK in 'The sun, in his whole course round the globe, shines not on a spot so blessed as this great, and now united Kingdom; gay and productive fields and gardens, lofty and extensive woods, innumerable flocks and herds, rich and inexhaustible mines, a mild and wholesome climate, giving health, activity, and vigour to fourteen millions of people...' (*Political Register*, 28-30 July 1803).

And again ‘It is impossible for the eyes of man to be fixed on a finer country than that between the village of Codford and the town of Warminster’ ..... But this latter quote is followed in the next sentence with reference to the problems so important to Cobbett ‘...and it is not very easy for the eyes of man to discover labouring people more miserable’. (*Rural Rides*, Warminster (Wilts), Friday, 1st Sept. 1826.)

Cobbett’s ideal of a good life for a man of means was a plain one which ‘avoided ostentation and pretence’, using ‘oak not fancy mahogany’. He was not against inequalities but wanted social responsibility rooted in place. He defended the traditional rural settlement bravely and also ferociously, against vividly imagined encroaching forces. These ‘encroachments’ included paper money; stock-jobbers; tax-eaters (sinecures, pensions etc.); Corn Laws; ‘Scotch feelosophers’; Malthus – surplus population/assisted emigration etc.; the workhouse and associated ‘relief’ systems; tea-drinking; shop-bought mustard; Commercial brewers; The City – London as ‘the Great Wen’; The Reformation; Bishops, ‘parsons’ and the Protestant Church; Methodists; Jews; Education – as answer to rural poverty; Historians (‘worthless accounts of wars and court intrigue’); Change (‘the institutions of England ...should remain unchanged’).

Professor Wright appropriately raised the assessments of Cobbett by two left wing thinkers, Karl Marx and G.D.H. Cole (the latter a biographer of Cobbett). Marx disagreed with Cobbett in his attributing to public debt and paper money (as key fundamental causes) much of the misery of the people. However Marx, in saying that industrialisation was leading to a breakdown of the boundaries previously set by morality and nature, agreed with Cobbett that the evils arising with industrialisation must be challenged. ‘Are we in England? Or are we in hell, while we are reading this!’ (*Cobbett’s Legacy to Labourers*, (1835), commenting on the new system of workhouses). Professor Wright compared Marx’s critique of Cobbett - looking backwards, with his rhetoric of the past set against the present, and registering the pain but not understanding the causes – with the position taken by many supporting Brexit.

Like Marx, G.D.H. Cole was an admirer of Cobbett but not an uncritical one. Cobbett, he said, ‘took his stand to the last on the ground of the past’ – with no connection with trades unions, Owen’s co-operatives, new politics for the factory, and with too much trust in parliamentary reform.

‘Cobbett’s backward look may have been in one sense a vain hankering after an irrecoverable and partly mythical past. But it also kept alive a keen

criticism of the human values of the new industrial order – a criticism soon to be shouted down by the triumphant progressivism of the early Victorians, to be sustained in Carlyle’s mouth as hardly more than a reverberating grumble, to be recaptured only in part, and in an essentially different form, in the writings of Ruskin and William Morris, and, in another part, even more fragmentary, in the contemporary social criticism of Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton and of Mr Penty’. (G.D.H. Cole, *The Life of William Cobbett*, London: Collins, 1924, p. 268). Professor Wright briefly gave glimpses of Ruskin and Morris in support of this quote. And again he quoted GK Chesterton’s ‘The Secret People’ to focus on the disconnect between the governing and the governed.

However, as a questioner suggested, it would not be correct to describe Cobbett, a farmer who was always looking for new and better ways to till the soil, as always backward-looking. And another questioner was keen to point out that a man who spent many years in America, wrote a French Grammar and vehemently supported the Irish should not be categorised as a ‘Little Englander’.

In closing and summarising what Cobbett’s views of Brexit would have been, Professor Wright did point out that times were very different, but that the way Cobbett thought of England had many similarities to today’s views of ‘Englishness’ which in part lay behind the Brexit vote. Cobbett he said would not have been a natural supporter of the EU – in particular because it was large and remote: his pejorative use of the term ‘The Thing’ for the political establishment would surely have included the EU.

Another excellent evening at the Maltings, with Professor Wright professionally drawing out the power and depth of Cobbett’s writings and his relevance to the issues of today.

## APPRECIATION

**Sir Richard Body (1927-2018)**

*Richard Thomas and Barbara Biddell*

Sir Richard, who died in February, was a well-known Member of Parliament, supporter of small farmers, and an opponent of the EU. He had also been, from 1996 until blindness made it difficult to attend meetings, President of the William Cobbett Society, and proved an enthusiastic and active supporter and promoter of the Society.

Like Cobbett he had wide ranging interests but most of them focussed on rural affairs and issues affecting farmers. He was also an accomplished author.

He was born in 1927, served briefly in the RAF just after World War II and became a barrister in 1949. His interest in politics started early, while at school in Reading before the war. He stood as a Conservative parliamentary candidate for two hopeless seats before finally being elected in 1955 as MP for Boston in Lincolnshire, a seat which he held for 35 years. He claimed to have no interest in becoming a Minister and, given his rebellious streak, had little hope of becoming one. Even though he was by background a country squire, he, like Cobbett, supported the small farmer. One quote '*I would rather have a farm worker's vote than a farmer's, if he is a bad employer*' is pure Cobbett.

He had an unpredictable mix of enthusiasms: he was opposed to capital punishment, against the indiscriminate use of pesticides in farming, pro-animal welfare and a supporter of organic agriculture. He also opposed city bankers who planted pine forests for tax purposes. He was, for a number of years, a member and later chair of the House of Commons select committee on Agriculture — from which position he called for the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture, saying it was not needed. He used his deep knowledge of agriculture to attack the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which he said supported 'industrial' farmers and landowners rather than smallholders. He also fell out with the National Farmers' Union because of its support for the 'cereal barons' and started, in 1985, an association to help small farmers.

His antagonism to the CAP and Europe in general lead him to becoming a co-chair of the 'Get Britain Out' campaign before the 1975 referendum.

He, like Cobbett, believed in the power of the written word. He published a number of Books, including *Agriculture: The Triumph and the Shame* (1983) and *Our Food, Our Land: Why Contemporary Farming Practices Must Change* (1991). He was the original ‘Muck Spreader’ in *Private Eye* drawing attention to what he saw as the idiocies and iniquities of British and European approaches to farming and food production.

Barbara Biddell, his successor as President, writes:

“Sir Richard and his wife hosted a number of the Annual Cobbett Lectures when they were held in the magnificent Great Hall of Farnham Castle. He was a genial President and the festive atmosphere of the event was improved by the wine which he donated each year.

“In October 2004 Sir Richard gave the Annual Lecture. It was a tour de force. He spoke for 40 minutes without a note, with great clarity and persuasion on the provocative subject 'Did Cobbett change United States History?' Had Cobbett's influence as a writer and pamphleteer in the United States in the 1790s affected the course of American Society? He thought it had.

“Two years later Sir Richard and Lady Marian joined the Society for a residential weekend at Canterbury Christ Church University, when the Society retraced Cobbett's 1823 Rural Ride across Kent but starting from Canterbury and ending at Tenterden. Sir Richard had by then set up New European Publications, the press which produced, among other titles, Molly Townsend's most interesting book *This Happy Land: William Cobbett on America 1794-1835* (2007). It was a great loss to the Society when, owing to his increasing blindness, he retired as President in 2009.”

He and Cobbett will have much to talk about.

*Sir Richard Body was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1927 and died on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2018.*

# MINUTES OF THE AGM OF THE WILLIAM COBBETT SOCIETY

*Minutes of the AGM held at the Garden Gallery, the Museum of Farnham, Saturday, March 10, 2018.*

**1. Apologies:** Thirty-three attended. Apologies were received from: John Stevenson, Gloria Dyche, Richard and Gill Penfold, Angela Peers-David, Donald Rafferty (Isle of South Uist), Hans Dumoulin, Andrew Millet.

**2. Last Year's Minutes:** The minutes of last year's AGM were published in the 2017 *Cobbett's New Register*. These were unanimously approved. There were no matters arising which were not already on the Agenda

**3. Acting Chairman's Report:** Welcome to this year's AGM. My report covers the period since the last AGM which does not seem - but is - almost exactly one year ago.

The year had its usual series of highlights, including the Rural Ride in July and the Annual Memorial Lecture in October.

We published, in May, a bumper *Cobbett's New Register* with the striking picture of Penelope Keith on the cover unveiling the Cobbett Statue. It had a different design as well as a few Bewick Cartoons, and thanks to Treloar Print in Alton, did not cost much more to print. This year's *Register* is in the capable editorial hands of Penny Young and Katharine Stearn and any of you bursting to get some of your research on Cobbett into print, should have a word with them. A complete version of the talk given by Richard Hinxman at the end of last year's AGM on the portraits of Cobbett and his fellow reformers by Adam Buck, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century miniaturist and engraver, will be published by the Cobbett Society in pamphlet form later this year, if all goes to plan.

The **Rural Ride** was an unusual one in that it was following a theme – 'The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the **Great Hampshire Petition** of 1817'. The day was organised by Richard Hinxman with military precision (which, like military intelligence, is often an oxymoron but in this case it all worked extremely well). The visits and the Readings were closely linked to people, places or events which were important in the 'fateful year' of 1817.

A short summary of the Rural Ride, prepared by Katharine, can be read in this year's *Register*. It has been decided by the Committee that since the readings were unusually extensive this time, and space could not be made

in the *Register* for all of them, a full online version will be made available instead. The location will be announced once the webpage has been completed.

**The Annual Memorial Lecture** this year was on October 6<sup>th</sup>. It was given by Patrick Wright, Professor of Literature and Visual and Material Culture at King's College London and presenter of the Radio 4 programme 'The English Fix.' It was a stimulating and informative evening in which the speaker made very effectively the links between the issues of Cobbett's day and some Brexit-driven concerns of today. A summary of the talk, produced by Stewart Edge, can be read in this year's *Register*.

Some additional points:

i) As last year we had a stand at the Maltings Retirement Fair which was held on Feb 26<sup>th</sup>. We, along with perhaps 50 societies in and around Farnham, advertised our existence and attracted some interest. We gave out a number of membership Forms and sold a couple of the *William Cobbett: A Celebration* booklets.

ii) I have mentioned before the success of the *Celebration* booklet. It continues to sell well, indeed we have just had 200 more printed. They are part of a display at Waterstones of books and booklets covering local people and places. *William Cobbett: A Celebration* is in pride of place - or at least it is now because I re-arranged the display. Waterstones have also purchased copies of the *The Opinions of William Cobbett* and have put them on the cash desk. They are selling it for £16.00 - having purchased the books from us at a discount. You can buy them from the Society directly for £15 and you can also get the *Celebration* booklet for £2.50 (£10 for five) - excellent birthday or even Christmas presents.

iii) A number of talks have been given by Committee members during the last 12 months. I have given my talk on '*Cobbett and Gillray*' to four Nadfas (now the Arts Society) groups and have at least one more coming up in the next few months. Katharine Stearn continues to give talks in the Far East - i.e. beyond Guildford. She gave a talk on the '*Life and Times of William Cobbett*' to the Shamley Green History Society on February 8<sup>th</sup> this year, and she will be giving another one on May 1, to the Crosslanes Club at Merrow.

iv) We have nothing to report on the Museum/Royal Holloway 'Citizens' Project' which, we believe is to include a case study on William Cobbett. We are still not sure what our contribution might be.

v) Website: The William Cobbett Society website was redesigned, with professional help, during the last year. It is much improved but still needs work. Please have a look at it and send any comments to Stewart Edge. If you want to help maintain and develop it, so much the better.

vi) Cobbett's Grave: We have also obtained a number of quotes to refresh Cobbett's Grave in St Andrews Churchyard - particularly to make the excised and lead filled writing legible. Thanks to Stewart Edge, we have recently obtained a grant from Farnham Town Council which will cover most of the cost. We now need the go-ahead from the Diocese before we can proceed.

**Looking ahead:** Starting with Lunch today: Gloria has not been well and, although she has helped with organising the lunch, she is not able to join us today to oversee the proceedings. We are therefore particularly grateful to Frauke Stuart and Steve Wingent for doing most of the work and for ensuring that it all goes well.

Further in the future is the Rural Ride on July 1. The highlights include a visit to Gilbert White's House at Selborne, where we stop for morning coffee, and then on to Rotherfield Park which was, in Cobbett's day, and still is, the home of the Scott family. We will also visit and have lunch and a cream tea at Petworth House, a National Trust property in West Sussex.

And, of course, we have the Annual Memorial Lecture on Oct 5<sup>th</sup>. The lecture this year will be given by Anna Pavord, the author of several books including *Landskipping* which I mentioned last year. It is a delightful book with a chapter on Cobbett and his understanding of the countryside and how it worked. She pointed out that she could not do the political 'stuff' like Owen Jones or Patrick Wright and was relieved when I explained that we had all agreed that a break from politics and a return to Cobbett's early roots was just what we needed. She is an experienced speaker who has been Gardening Correspondent for *The Independent* and wrote for *The Observer* for 20 years. She presented a 10-part TV series on Channel 4 and was awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1991. She was the guest on Desert Island Discs late last year (Nov 2017).

She has given us a summary of her chapter on Cobbett to put in the forthcoming *Register*. It will act as a taster for members. I think her talk will be a treat. If you have any ideas about how we might publicise her talk – for example at Gardening Clubs or Garden Centres - please let the Committee know.

**In Conclusion:** We are, each year, forced to remind you about the need for new committee members. Charles continues to crack the whip as Secretary and Stewart not only looks after the accounts and the membership but also oversees the website. Our thanks to Mike Clements for all his sterling work in the past. Charles has masterminded the Rural Ride this year. It may be a labour of love but is nevertheless extremely hard work. Robert Sykes is a relatively new member of the committee and is giving the after-lunch talk. That does not, however, let the rest of you off the hook and we do need help. Thank you all for coming.

Next we have the Financial Report from our Treasurer, Stewart Edge.

**4. Hon. Treasurer's Report and Adoption of Accounts:** The accounts for 2017 show the usual expenditure and income items leading to a satisfactory end balance, slightly increased to £3,543. Fully paid membership at the time of the meeting was 118. Though this is similar to last year, there is a slight long-term decline in membership. We are seeing a small income coming through from the sale of the *Celebration* booklet. Though there was no large grant this year (there was a 100 US Dollar donation, received with thanks), the Farnham Town Council grant for the Cobbett grave renovation in 2018 will enable us to carry out that project. The Annual Memorial Lecture cost/income does vary, mostly with the cost of the speaker. And finally, printing was £120 higher because of a special print of very good former Museum notes, which in the longer term we plan to use in a much better Museum exhibition.

The report was unanimously approved.

#### **5. Election of Committee and Officers**

- Dr John Stevenson is happy to remain as President.
- Stewart Edge was re-elected as Treasurer and as Membership Secretary.
- Dr Richard Thomas was re-elected as Acting Chairman.
- Gloria Dyche is happy to stay on as Publicity Officer.
- Charles Stuart was re-elected as Hon. Sec. He commented that he is very happy to do this, but for only another year.
- Katharine Stearn was re-elected to the committee. Katharine and Penny Young are editing this year's Cobbett's New Register and are steaming ahead with this.
- Dr Robert Sykes CBE was re-elected to the committee.

- Richard Thomas, as in every year, stressed the importance of recruiting new members, particularly younger members. He suggested that everyone take an application leaflet with them and sign up a new member during the year. He advised that there are 118 paid-up members.

**6. The 2018 Rural Ride:** This will be on Sunday, July 1, organised by Charles Stuart. Members will have received details of the ride and application forms by mail, and some members additionally by email. Details of the itinerary are in the Chairman's Report (above).

**7. Cobbett's New Register:** This is now under the joint editorship of Katharine Stearn and Penny Young. Katharine said that they were thoroughly enjoying it and it was proceeding well. The deadline for members' submissions is March 30. Members' articles are very welcome.

**8. The Website:** Stewart Edge, who is now looking after the website, advised that more work has to be done. The Chairman thanked Michael Clements for all the work he did on the website in the past. If anyone has a contribution for the website they should contact Stewart Edge (stewartdedge@hotmail.co.uk).

**9. Other Society activities:** The Rural Ride and the Annual Memorial Lecture for this year are included in the Chairman's Report, as are the plans for the restoration of the Cobbett tomb.

**10. Museum of Farnham:** On the Cobbett front, the Museum has no further information from the Royal Holloway 'Citizens Project'. The museum is a very active hub for the community and is undertaking fundraising during the year.

### **11. Any other business**

- Mark Richmond enquired as to what happened to the suggestion regarding a patron. The chairman reported that the issue had been discussed at a subsequent Committee meeting but that no agreement had been reached, either about what names sprang to mind or about how to proceed. It was felt that, unless future patrons could use their influence to generate new members, the effort might not be worth it.
- It was suggested by Pam Taylor that there should be some form of competition organised in the primary schools.
- It was also suggested by Pam Taylor that perhaps there could be some joint activity undertaken with the Rural Life Centre.

- A children's book was suggested by Bahri van Veen: Katharine Stearn and Judith Edge agreed to develop this idea.
- A Cobbett 'Rural Ride by bicycle' was offered by Stewart Edge.
- Robert Sykes reported that a major film is being made on the "Peterloo Massacre." The bicentenary of this event is on August 16 next year. There is a possible opportunity for a Cobbett connection: Robert will investigate.
- Jorgen Kragh suggested contacts be made with the Thomas Paine Society in the UK and the USA, with a view to mutual assistance. All of these will be discussed at a subsequent Committee meeting.

**12. Thanks to the Chairman:** Richard Thomas, who edited the upgraded 2017 *Cobbett's New Register*, was given a big thank you by all members for his contribution during the past year.

**13. Closure of meeting:** There being no further business the formal part of the meeting closed at 12:00 hours.

Following the meeting, everyone enjoyed a fine sandwich lunch organised by Gloria Dyche, with the wine selected and supplied by Stephen Wingent.

After lunch Robert Sykes presented an extremely interesting illustrated talk on Cobbett's election to the Parliamentary seat of Oldham. He was given a hearty round of applause. The talk can be read in this year's *Cobbett's New Register*.

*We are grateful to Emma Sutcliffe, the Deputy Curator of the Museum of Farnham for helping to set up the equipment for this talk.*

## BOOKS FOR SALE

1. ***William Cobbett in America 1794-1835: This Happy Land*** by Molly Townsend. This book documents Cobbett's thoughts about America and his attitude towards the Americans. £15.00, £10.00 to members + £3.00 p&p
2. ***The Life of William Cobbett by Himself: Intended as an encouraging example to all young men of humble fortune; being a proof of what can be effected by steady application and honest efforts.*** This booklet was written by Cobbett when he was living in America. A faithful reproduction by member Trevor Purnell of Cobbett's 1809 edition. £4.50 + £1.50 p&p
3. ***The Jolly Farmer? William Cobbett in Hampshire 1804-1820*** by Barbara Biddell. *Hampshire Paper No 15*, published in 1999 by the Hampshire Record Office. This a detailed study of Cobbett's life in Hampshire and of his own farming policies, tree planting and relationship with his labourers and with the poor in the parishes. £3.00 + £1.50 p&p
4. ***Account of the Family*** by Anne Cobbett. Anne, Cobbett's eldest daughter, provides a fascinating account of the financial hardship and difficulties which the family endured. £3.00 + £1.50 p&p
5. ***William Cobbett 1763 - 1835: A Celebration: Writer, Radical. Reformer, The Greatest Journalist of his Age.*** Stewart Edge, Katharine Stearn, Charles Stuart and Richard Thomas £2.50 + £1.50 p&p
6. ***The Opinions of William Cobbett.*** James Grande, John Stevenson and Richard Thomas. Ashgate, 2013. Commentary on the main themes of his life with extended extracts from his writing. £15 + £2.50 p&p
7. ***William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment.*** Edited by James Grande and John Stevenson. Published by [Routledge.com/9781848935426](http://Routledge.com/9781848935426).  
20% discount to members – use the code WCS15 at checkout.
8. ***The Cobbett Club*** by Penny Young. Benjamin Tilly served Cobbett as secretary and factotum, and was instrumental in founding the Cobbett Club in 1838. This newly discovered record of the Club's objectives and rules, as well as its published letters and articles, meticulously preserved by Tilly, is examined in this short pamphlet. £2.00 + £1.25 p&p

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**Back Cover:** William Cobbett in 1800 by John Raphael Smith by kind permission of The Museum of Farnham.



For further information on the William Cobbett Society:  
[www.williamcobbett.org.uk](http://www.williamcobbett.org.uk)

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