

The William Cobbett Society



Cobbett's New Register

Vol.12 No.5 2021

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Front Cover Illustration: Queen Caroline. *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'm* (detail) by Theodore Lane. 1821. William Hone Collection. University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries.

COBBETT AND THE PAPER MONEY MEN

David Chun

As at March 2020, the British National Debt stood at £1,876.8 billion, 84.6% of gross domestic product (GDP).¹ The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, unprecedented, at least in peacetime, means that the National Debt is now well over 2 trillion pounds.² This staggering level of debt at this time, getting on for 200 years after his death, would have appalled William Cobbett who from about 1804, and for the remainder of his life, waged a vociferous campaign against the parlous state of the British public finances.

Regularly in the columns of the *Political Register*, he railed against both the mounting National Debt and the funding system that helped create and sustain it: ‘This vile paper-money and funding-system, this system of Dutch descent, begotten by Bishop Burnet,³ and born in hell [...]’.⁴ The references to the Dutch origins of the paper-money system trace it back to the late seventeenth century when, following the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688, William III had to take out long-term loans so as to be able to wage the Nine Years’ War against France. Thus, there was spawned what has been termed the Financial Revolution, the system of public finance that was used with increasing sophistication (and at times desperation) to raise the huge amounts required to fight the foreign wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result of these wars, the country’s debt grew exponentially. At the end of the War of American Independence in 1783, it stood at about £232M; by the end of the French Wars in 1815, the debt had risen to about £745M, getting on for 160% of GDP.⁵

Matters had become worse – not least in terms of the level of debt – when the country was forced to depart from the gold standard in 1797. This had

¹ Office of National Statistics. UK government debt and deficit: September 2020. No doubt Cobbett would have delighted in the various National Debt clocks that can be found on the internet.

² This is such a staggeringly large sum that it is difficult to entirely comprehend. Perhaps the £754M that was owed at the time of Waterloo – when £500 a year was just about a ‘gentlemanly’ income and one of Cobbett’s farm labourers received 10s. to 12s. a week, say £30 a year – would have been equally ‘ungraspable’ by our Georgian ancestors.

³ Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury (1643-1715).

⁴ William Cobbett, and Pitt Cobbett (ed.), *Rural Rides ... During the Years 1821-32, with Economical and Political Observations ...* Reeves & Turner, 1908, vol. 1, p.260.

⁵ Simon Sherratt, *Credit and Power, The Paradox at the Heart of the British National Debt*, Routledge, 2021, Table 1.1, p. 4; Martin Slater, *The National Debt, A Short History*, Hurst & Company, 2018, p. 46, fig. 4.

necessitated the passing of the Bank Restriction Act of that year which removed the right of holders of Bank of England notes to demand of the Bank gold or silver coin in exchange for its notes. With the removal of this right of conversion, there was no longer any fetter on the number of notes that the Bank could issue, as it no longer had to hold sufficient reserves of gold to support its notes and loans. The number of notes in circulation accordingly increased significantly, fuelling the inflation of the early 1800s and causing bank notes to depreciate against gold and silver. In 1811 an attempt was made, ultimately unsuccessfully, to prosecute a James De Yonge, a Dutchman, when he sold gold coins at more than their face value for exportation to France. This disparity between the value of coin and paper money understandably caused much alarm, but Cobbett argued in his *Paper Against Gold* articles written in 1810 and 1811 that it was not possible to revert to the gold standard, as the Bullion Committee recommended,⁶ as the Bank of England held insufficient amounts of gold and other tangible assets to be able to discharge the obligations that would arise from the restoration of cash payments. For Cobbett, the only alternative was for part of the debt to be in effect written off - 'the total destruction of the National Debt' - as the payments were, he thought, ultimately unsustainable. However, although the debt continued to grow, the government was able to maintain the interest payments, if only by substantially increasing the burden of taxation. In 1819, when a return to the gold standard was contemplated, Cobbett famously offered himself for a broiling alive on a gridiron if it were possible for the country to return to the gold standard, as Robert Peel's bill proposed, without default on the National Debt (Fig.1). Such a default, though forecast by Cobbett, and perhaps yearned for by him (as a trigger for reform), never materialised. Peel's bill duly became law in 1819, there was a return to the gold standard from 1820, and as a result of increased economic activity the National Debt, or at least its burden as a ratio of GDP, was gradually reduced during the course of the nineteenth century. By 1914, just before World War I, it stood at about £650 million, only about 25% of GDP.⁷

⁶ The Bullion Committee was the Select Committee appointed by Parliament in February 1810 to inquire into the depreciation of paper money against gold. In 1811, following a debate, Parliament rejected the Committee's recommendation that the gold standard be restored within two years but resolved that cash payments be returned within six months of the war, though restoration was deferred several times.

⁷ Martin Slater, *The National Debt*, p. 126. As the author points out, the ratio of the debt to GDP is more revealing of the actual burden of the debt than the figures for the debt at different points in time (p.9).



Fig. 1 Grilling the Old Sinner on his own Gridiron. An 1830 print made by George Cruikshank referring to Cobbett's 1819 Gridiron prophecy. British Museum, 1868, 0808.9175. Image used under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

This outcome meant that the views of Cobbett and the others of his contemporaries who foresaw disaster in the escalating national debt of the early 1800s ended up being marginalised. The preponderance of opinion among historians seems to be that the Financial Revolution was a 'good thing' for the country, helping it to win its foreign wars and ultimately to defeat Napoleon. Even the Cobbett scholar John W. Osborne, seemed to adhere to this orthodoxy. Writing in the 1960s, he was dismissive of Cobbett's writings about public finance:

The part that credit played in the new economic system, *which was Britain's major source of strength*, was a closed book to Cobbett and he could only visualise the notes flooding the country as so many promises to pay. All that he knew was that paper money depreciated the value of currency and consequently raised prices. His copious writings are a medley of shallow analyses, dubious advice to his readers, and attacks upon the whole foundation of government finance. Cobbett's native shrewdness prevented him from being

completely wrong, but his work is generally jejune, derivative (he showed, but seldom acknowledged, his debt to Thomas Paine and Horne Tooke), and sometimes downright silly. Cobbett was unfitted by background or training to understand the complicated paper money system which was shaping the economy. Yet he was forced to examine it and he commented decisively and confidently upon problems which few others really understood, least of all many of the government ministers.⁸ (My emphasis)

By any standards, this seems a harsh judgement, even with the two qualifications. Perhaps the reason why Cobbett's views on public credit do not get a more considered hearing is that *Paper Against Gold*, his principal work on the subject, is not the easiest one to digest. Although enlivened by the introduction of imaginary characters – Farmer Grizzle Greenhorn, neighbour Needy and Messrs. Muckworm & Co – who are endeavouring to exploit or cope with the paper-money system - and offering some interesting insights into the nature of debt, of credit and of the funding system, it displays too much its origin as a series of articles. There are frequent recapitulations and divagations. Legislation, parliamentary debates and court decisions are minutely examined. At times, it has something of the urgency of a live newsroom where discussion is suddenly interrupted or curtailed so that a new and pressing event, such as the suicide of Abraham Goldsmid in September 1810 and the subsequent failure of the Goldsmid Bank, can be dealt with.

Despite this, more recently some scholars have given Cobbett's views as expressed in *Paper Against Gold* more credence. The literary scholar Mary Poovey, for example, has argued that whilst 'Some modern historians have charged that Cobbett's critique of the British funding system constitutes a "demonology" rather than a coherent analysis', she considers that 'behind his litany of accusations lies an agenda more coherent than most critics have allowed.'⁹ And in a recently published book *Credit and Power, The Paradox at the Heart of the British National Debt*, Simon Sherratt argues that, amongst other things, Cobbett understood the signal importance of the fact that, with the suspension of convertibility by the 1797 Act, great power was conferred on the Bank of England: it could now 'print money (in the form of banknotes) without the necessity of these notes being backed by gold and silver or other tangible assets.' Cobbett was, he argues,

⁸ John W. Osborne, *William Cobbett: his thought and his times*, Rutgers, 1966, p. 142.

⁹ Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy, Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Chicago, 2008, p. 187.

‘correct to note both the novelty of this situation and, just as importantly, the power that this gave to those in a position to wield it’.¹⁰

The paradox that Sherratt discerns in the British funding system, and which is flagged in his book’s title, was that the loan-contractors – or loan-mongers in Cobbett’s parlance – though ostensibly lending huge sums of money to the government had in reality little money at all to lend and were dependent on the government (the debtor) to underwrite their own (the lenders’) solvency. It is not so much that middlemen were used to raise the money that the government required that was the difficulty. After all, attempts to raise money by public subscription were not popular because the value of the stock tended to sink as soon as it was floated, and subscribers lost money. Indeed, no individual or institution alone had the resources to provide the size of loan the government needed. Rather the heart of the problem, as Sherratt sees it, was, that by means of smoke and mirrors employed by the loan-contractors, the process by which the loans were made was obscured. In reality, the loan-contractors, with the assistance of the Bank of England and the government, employed circular credit¹¹ to create the initial money lent, often on terms that were disadvantageous to the public, and which by being sold on by the loan-contractors to genuine investors secured enormous profits for the former.

What gives Sherratt’s book at times a polemical edge is his criticism of historians who have too readily, in his view, conflated the interests of the loan-contractors and other financiers with the interests of the nation as a whole. He points out that loan-contractors often engaged in sharp practices, for example by manipulating the price of the debt on the stock market, sometimes with the connivance of the Bank of England and the government, to maximise their profits. As Sherratt points out;

This situation is made even more egregious when it is considered how the interests of the borrowers (the public) and the creditors (the loan-contractors) were diametrically opposite. In essence, the artificial depression of prices made the loans more expensive for the public while simultaneously increasing the profits of the lenders.’¹²

To make matters worse, the interest on these inflated loans had to be paid by the taxpaying public. And because the government generally favoured

¹⁰ Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. x.

¹¹ Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 13, argues that ‘The Bank of England lent money to merchants and banks (who formed the core of the loan-contractors) who, in turn, lent this money to the government, the whole process being given a veneer of respectability as it was carried out in Bank of England notes [...]’.

¹² Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 75.

indirect taxation – income tax was abolished in 1816 – the poor suffered greatly when, as a result of such taxation, items of everyday consumption became more expensive.

Of Cobbett's understanding of the funding system, he observes:

Amongst Cobbett's most perceptive and prescient observations was the fact that the funding system could only function smoothly if it was backed by the British government, the ostensible borrower in this process, as (via the suspension) the Bank of England was (in essence) being protected from bankruptcy. Cobbett also made prescient observations, in common with other observers [...], that control over the supply of money and credit had been 'devolved' by the British government to the (private) Bank of England, a circumstance complicated by the fact that this (nascent) central bank could *create* the money they lent to the British government. This latter observation, in particular, is far from being an inconsequential one, especially as this arrangement has gone on to form the basis of the modern global economic system.¹³

Admirers of Cobbett may at this point justifiably feel a slight glow of satisfaction at the apparent rehabilitation of his views on the funding system, at least at the hands of one economic historian. However, it is also worth noting that by following other strands of argument in Sherratt's book one might conclude that Cobbett - perhaps unwittingly, at least to begin with - was himself complicit in the paper-money system that he so despised. This is not to suggest that he had any involvement with government stock. He was adamantly opposed to ownership of, or dealings in, such stock. In April 1809, he objected to funds that had been subscribed for the support of a Miss Elizabeth Taylor, one of the witnesses in the Duke of York inquiry, being invested in any Indian or government stock. As he informed John Wright, 'I am fixed as a rock never to have any hand in doing any thing that shall tend to keep the damned funds and the double-damned Nabobs in countenance.'¹⁴ However, he did use accommodation paper to finance his land transactions and publishing ventures, thereby taking advantage of the greater availability of such loose credit during the period following the suspension of cash payments.¹⁵ As Sherratt points out, 'What the suspension of 1797 did allow, however, with

¹³ Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 225.

¹⁴ British Library, Add. MS. 22907, f. 144.

¹⁵ David Chun, 'William Cobbett and the Accommodation Paper – financial recklessness and retrenchment between 1804 and 1820', *Cobbett's New Register*, 12, no. 3, p. 10-23.

the pretence of having to honour paper-money with gold gone was a huge increase in this type of money'.¹⁶ Indeed, in this sense, Cobbett seems to have been just the sort of speculator that John Hill, writing in 1810, deprecated:

In the present times we have seen ... much internal mischief and distress in the nation, result[ing] from the system of extensive trading and speculation, by men who were not possessed of property or substantial capital adequate to their undertakings ... Such overtrading has undoubtedly been carried on by an excess of paper currency.¹⁷

By the time he came to write his *Paper Against Gold* articles in 1810, Cobbett must have been aware of the inconsistency of his attacking the paper-money system when he had himself been dealing in accommodation bills, and was in financial difficulties as a result. To understand the National Debt and the funding system he had read, or reread, Tom Paine's pamphlet *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*. There Paine makes a clear connection between the use of accommodation bills and the activities of government loan-contractors:

But besides these things, there is something visibly farcical in the whole operation of loaning. It is scarcely more than four years ago that such a rot of bankruptcy spread itself over London, that the whole commercial fabric tottered; trade and credit were at a stand; and such was the state of things, that to prevent, or suspend, a general bankruptcy, the government lent the merchants six millions in *government* paper, and now the merchants lend the government twenty-two millions in *their* paper; and two parties, Boyd and Morgan, men but little known, contend who shall be the lenders. What a farce is this! It reduces the operation of loaning to accommodation paper, in which the competitors contend, not who shall lend, but who shall sign, because there is something to be got for signing.¹⁸

Even as he was writing his *Paper Against Gold* articles, Cobbett was in the throes of a dispute with his former assistant-cum-business partner John Wright. This dispute, in part at least, related to Wright's alleged

¹⁶ Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 72.

¹⁷ John Hill, *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Present High Price of Gold Bullion in England* (London 1810), p.61, as quoted in Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Thomas Paine, *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, Paris and London, 1796, p. 28. This passage is cited in part in Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 40, but the above is a very slightly fuller extract from the original work.

mismanagement of Cobbett's dealings with accommodation bills. But interestingly, Cobbett does not refer to Accommodation Paper in *Paper Against Gold* – he may have felt some sensitivity about his financial difficulties and the nature of his debt – though reference to his land speculations and the wrangle with Wright do, at times, seep into his articles on the public finances.¹⁹

This disparity in Cobbett's position was not wasted on his contemporaries. In the Rare and Manuscript Collections in Cornell University Library there is a notebook into which have been pasted well over a hundred of Cobbett's bills of exchange, promissory notes and receipts dating from 1801 to 1809.²⁰ On the cover is the ironic title 'Cobbetts Paper Money', a seemingly sly reference to his writings about the public finances.²¹ The point was made explicitly in the 1819 legal action brought by John Wright against Cobbett's publisher in respect of the latter's libel against the former. As Wright's barrister informed the jury at the trial:

Mr. Cobbett, by his undue preference of land to personal property, had involved himself in difficulties, and in order to raise the money necessary to make good his several purchases in the country, he had recourse to Accommodation Paper, and used the names of his two publishers, Mr. Bagshaw and Mr. Budd; which I must say, Gentlemen, for a man who was all the while writing against the Paper System, was somewhat inconsistent. Be that as it may, he profited from the use of it.²²

¹⁹ See, for example, the postscript to his article of 20th September 1810, in which he writes that the Bullion Report has given him more pleasure than he should 'derive from being made the owner of the whole of Hampshire' (W. Cobbett, *Paper Against Gold*, [1817], cols. 75-76). And there is a strange passage in the article of 18th July 1811 where, referring to Lord King's insistence that if his tenants paid their rents in banknotes, they should be discounted, he seems to refer to his dispute with Wright, saying that in relation to 'our Debts' we should look back into books and records: 'Let us look into our *books*; let us look back into our *old accounts*, and see what our AGENTS, in succession, have done with our money. Our income they have expended, they have made prodigious loans in our name, and have charged us with interest upon them: let us see, then, to *whom* and for *what* they have paid away all this money; for, if we should find, that they have taken any part of the *money to themselves* or *given it away*, that opens to us a most interesting view of the matter.' (W. Cobbett, *Paper Against Gold*, [1817], col. 387).

²⁰ Cobbett's "Paper Money," #4629. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²¹ There is a typewritten note glued into the notebook by a George Reynolds recording that the 'Bills belong to the case of Wright v. Cobbett' and that 'The other papers I sold to the British Museum'. Assuming that the 'other papers' were the bound volumes of correspondence between Wright and Cobbett and others which are now in the British Library (BL, Add MS. 22906-7), my favourite for the person who added the title 'Cobbetts Paper Money' to the notebook was Wright's accountant, John Paul, who seems to have had access to them, and annotated them, but this is really no more than guesswork.

²² John Wright (ed.). *Report of the Action, Wright v. Clement for certain libels*, (London, 1820), p. 6.

Cobbett himself had already by then come to acknowledge, albeit tangentially, the dubious nature of his dealings in a ‘fictitious medium’ when he wrote in 1816:

If I, by the means of discounted notes, kept alive by renewals for a year or two, were to expend fifty thousand pounds at Botley, there is no doubt that the paper-money, created for my use, would set numerous hands to work, would enrich the tradesmen, and would fill the whole neighbourhood with what is called *prosperity*. But, as the expenditure would be built on fiction; as the fiction would cease at the end of the supposed two years; ruin, misery, feebleness, must then ensue; and if there were no *third* party, namely the *law*, to restrain us, we must, through the whole neighbourhood, be plunged into mutual revilings, confusion, hostility and violence.²³

Of course, what he hypothesised in this passage, he had to a large extent already done in the previous decade. He had been able to use ‘loose credit’ created by employing accommodation bills to buy land, but at overheated wartime prices. In the more difficult deflationary post-war conditions, he struggled. He was made bankrupt in 1820 and his estate at Botley was repossessed by the mortgagee.²⁴ Ironically, it was, according to Cobbett, the legislation that was to return the country to the gold standard (Peel’s Bill, or Resumption of Cash Payments Act 1819) that was the last straw.²⁵ But if his extensive use of credit ultimately contributed to his financial downfall, his participation in the credit economy may have aided his understanding of it. And that understanding, if Simon Sherratt is correct, was not insignificant. Cobbett therefore knew something of what he wrote: he had had, as Americans might say, some ‘skin in the game’.

²³ *Political Register*, January 6, 1816, cols. 5-6.

²⁴ Interestingly, in relation to Cobbett’s land purchases, Sherratt poses the question ‘What role did un-backed loose money issuing from London play in increasing land prices throughout the wars, along with the subsequent collapse of these prices with the coming of peace?’ A question to which he acknowledges we don’t yet know the answer, though he asserts that ‘the (highly profitable) ability to use un-backed paper money to purchase tangible assets (land) was, undoubtedly, greatly facilitated by the suspension.’ (Sherratt, *Credit and Power*, p. 204.)

²⁵ Chun, ‘William Cobbett and the Accommodation Paper’, p. 22.

COBBETT IN 1821: THE MAKING OF A 'COUNTRY' WRITER?

John Stevenson

1821 was a pivotal year in Cobbett's career and even more so for his reputation. It was the year he began publishing the works which are still the most widely associated with his name by the general public: *Cottage Economy* and *Rural Rides*. Both began as part works and articles, only collected and published together later, in 1822 and 1830 respectively. They have never been out of print since, contributing not only to Cobbett's place as one of the two or three most published authors in the language, but giving him his reputation as one of Britain's foremost writers on 'country' matters, including most aspects of farming, horticulture, and self-sufficiency. Even if Cobbett had possessed no political opinions or spent most of his life engaged in political campaigns of one kind or another his place on the bookshelves of innumerable homes would be assured by the works he began in this year. Why was 1821 so important?

Cobbett, of course, was not a neutral observer of rural affairs or a mere horticultural enthusiast. Approaching sixty in 1821 he had a lifetime of political campaigning behind him, most of it in almost constant opposition to the governments of the day. Famously describing himself as a former ploughboy, born into a labouring family, his views on almost everything were coloured by his concern for the wellbeing of the common labourers and small farmers from which he came. It gave him a distinctive view of corruption and sharp practice among those who exercised authority. After his discharge from the army in 1791, he had shown his mettle in attempting to have the officers of his former regiment charged with embezzling regimental funds. Though unsuccessful it showed the temerity that would become his hallmark in defending what he saw as the interests of his countrymen from corruption and misgovernment. With the growing influence of French affairs on Britain following the revolution of 1789, Cobbett as an avowed patriot and self-styled 'calf of John Bull' had no hesitation in condemning French Jacobinism and its radical supporters in England as a threat to all he held dear. Based in North America, he cut his political teeth as an ultra-loyalist journalist and pamphleteer. On returning to England in 1800 he was offered the opportunity to become a government writer, but uneasy at the growing cost of the wars against France and the way they were being financed by expensive loans and the introduction of paper money he stayed free. While remaining pro-war, he was increasingly critical of what he saw as a corrupt nexus of financiers, stock-jobbers and politicians lining their pockets through war finance and

impoverishing the common people by burdening them with taxes to pay the interest on the money being raised. He saw the country's finances being ruined by the unprecedented rise of the national debt and a disastrous paper currency. In doing so, Cobbett traded on well-established, almost traditional concerns that regularly surfaced in war-time. Jonathan Swift's strictures on the hidden perils of the National Debt a hundred years earlier during the War of Spanish Succession were certainly known to Cobbett.¹ Inveighing against 'corruption' was almost the stereotypical stance of opposition 'patriots'. So much so that the invocation of patriotism had given rise to the infamous adage that 'patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel'² In the case of Cobbett, however, cynicism had met its match, he was a genuine, one might almost say naively fierce patriot, one of the few who had opposed the temporary cessation of the wars with revolutionary France in 1801-2 as a betrayal. His weekly *Political Register* founded in 1802 was an independent voice which became increasingly critical of the management of the Napoleonic Wars and the methods of financing them and their effects upon the common people.³ These were not abstract issues for Cobbett. Visits to his family in Farnham in the early 1800s confirmed his view that oppressive taxation was literally impoverishing the labourers and small farmers among whom he had grown up.⁴

The cure he came to believe was some kind of parliamentary reform to obtain a parliament which truly reflected the interests of the people rather than serve the interests of the corrupt politicians and financiers who had control of affairs. Reform would, he believed, return the country to the prosperity he believed had existed in his youth when the labourers enjoyed a better life, a Sunday joint on the table, decent clothing, ornaments on the mantelpiece and a more harmonious relationship with the farmers who employed them. Instead, 'All was gone! How miserable, how deplorable, how changed that labourers' dwelling, which, I only twenty years before, had seen so neat and happy!'.⁵ Similarly small yeoman farmers like his brothers deserved to be able to make a decent living, not forced to sell up

¹ Jonathan Swift, *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711) contains allegations of a 'conspiracy' between 'Stock-jobbers' and corrupt politicians to benefit financially by their war policy. For Cobbett's debt to Swift, see J. Grande, 'A "Birth of Intellect": William Cobbett and Jonathan Swift' in J. Grande and J. Stevenson (eds.), *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Contexts and Legacy* (London, 2015), pp. 45-59.

² The phrase is attributed to Dr. Johnson in *Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson* (1787).

³ See J. Stevenson, 'William Cobbett: Dimensions of Patriotism' in Grande and Stevenson (eds.), *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment*, pp. 31-43.

⁴ I. Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 18-19.

⁵ Cited in G. Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend* (Cambridge, 1982), vol. 2. p. 409.

to 'get-rich-quick' stock jobbers from the City. In 1806 he thought of getting himself returned as an MP for Honiton in Devon without using the traditional methods of buying votes and using intimidation in order to demonstrate a way forward for the country as a whole. But faced with powerful vested interests in the seat, he withdrew and was forced to concentrate on his journalism and widening the demand from simple 'purity' of elections, which he had once thought sufficient, to the more radical demands for manhood suffrage and annually elected parliaments.

Cobbett maintained his criticism of the government during the long, weary and often unsuccessful war against Napoleon which was only finally brought to a successful conclusion in 1815. Fought at an unprecedented cost in terms of the National Debt, burdensome taxes, and trade disruption, it had often looked like 'war without victory', until the years after 1812 when Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia turned the tide. Cobbett was a persistent thorn in the side of government, earning a wide readership for his strictures on the blunders, scandals, and failures which littered the war years. But it earned him equally fierce enmity, making him the subject of personal attack and character assassination. The famous caricaturist Gillray was commissioned to complete an unprecedented eight-part set of prints, 'The Life of William Cobbett' to ridicule his 'progress' from ploughboy to false patriot. Writers were commissioned to attack him and his views and periodicals set up to contradict the *Register*.⁶ After several minor brushes with the law, in 1810 Cobbett was heavily fined and imprisoned for two years for having criticised the flogging of English militiamen who had disobeyed orders in a dispute over their pay.

Undaunted, though Cobbett found prison exceedingly irksome and his finances were never to recover, Cobbett reached new heights of influence as Britain made the difficult transition from war to peace amid widespread unemployment, trade disruption, and agricultural distress. Distress and disorder drew from him the now insistent message that the cure lay not in rioting or machine-breaking but in parliamentary reform. This would ensure a government prepared to slash government debt payments, reduce taxes and tackle the whole corrupt edifice of places and pensions which burdened the public funds. Preaching this message, his cheap version of the *Register*, the 'twopenny trash', published in 1816 caught the public mood and reached tens of thousands in the growing industrial districts of the midlands and the north, as well as the labourers and farmers of the

⁶ See Draper Hill, *Mr. Gillray: the Caricaturist* (London, 1965), p. 117; Gillray's caricatures of Cobbett were the subject of a talk given at the Cobbett Society AGM by Richard Thomas on 27th March 2021.

south. With the vital message that the cure for distress was parliamentary reform, he became the tribune for the mass petitioning movements for reform in 1817 and 1819. The Government of Lord Liverpool, however, proved unyielding and ready to resort to almost any means, including the use of spies and informers, the suspension of habeas corpus, and fresh legislation to suppress what it saw as a dangerous agitation which might lead to revolution. This was seen most dramatically in the brutal break-up of the peaceful reform meeting at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester in August 1819, with the deaths of eleven people and injuries to scores of others including women and children.⁷ Cobbett was out of the country when what the radicals quickly dubbed 'Peterloo' occurred. His prominence, reinforced by his 'twopenny trash', made him a marked man, and the threat of the suspension of habeas corpus meaning he could be held without trial led to his hasty departure for America in March 1817. Cobbett only felt safe to return in November 1819 but came back to an unfamiliar reform scene, traumatized by the events in Manchester and with many of the reform leaders either in prison or awaiting trial. In a situation similar to the 1790s, the unreformed Parliament was easily panicked into backing the government of the day with calls for further powers to restrict the progress of radical agitation by the likes of Cobbett. The 'Six Acts' which the Home Secretary obtained placed further restrictions on the press, one effect of which was to treble the price of Cobbett's *Register*, reducing a circulation already damaged by Cobbett's period of exile.

Indeed, all was not well with the reform cause. Cobbett had expected to resume leadership of the movement on his return, but struggled to re-establish himself amongst a younger group of journalists and radicals, some of whom resented his 'desertion' in 1817 while others suspected he might have been in government pay, a charge he would have difficulty shaking off. He had quarrelled at one time or another with most of the other reform leaders and splits and factions bedevilled a reform cause that had no central organisation or structure. 1820 opened inauspiciously for the reformers too, with the disclosure of the Cato Street conspiracy by a handful of ultra-radicals to assassinate the Cabinet while at dinner. Although a madcap scheme, almost certainly egged on by a government informer at the heart of the plot, there was sufficient substance to reinforce the government's tough line against any form of protest and the leading promoters of reform, like Cobbett. The precariousness of his position was shown by government informers naming him as a putative leader of a

⁷ For the most recent account see S. Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising* (Oxford, 2019).

radical government following a successful insurrection, while some of his own reform persuasion were not without suspicions that he was possibly a potential spy or even an agent provocateur. The evidence is that Cobbett kept his distance from the ultra-radicals involved in the Cato Street conspiracy, though he would have known them as they were part of the London radical underworld and had participated in more peaceful events.⁸

In fact, rather than participate in futile conspiracy, and with many other peaceful means of agitation blocked off by the government, Cobbett reverted to the strategy he had considered in 1806: standing for parliament in the reform cause as an independent candidate. A General election was due following the death of George III on 29th January. Indeed his options were narrowing fast. His inveterate response when nothing else offered was to found a newspaper. *Cobbett's Evening Post* was launched on the day of the King's death, perhaps an omen, because it proved a failure as Cobbett paid it little attention as he looked at the prospect of contesting a seat. The paper lasted only fifty-five issues, expiring on 1st April, another omen perhaps as it blew a further hole in Cobbett's shambolic finances which were bringing him perilously close to bankruptcy.⁹ Cobbett's choice settled on Coventry, a seat with a large electorate by the standards of the time, almost three thousand freeholders, many of them artisan silk-weavers who had shown some readiness in the past to consider 'independent' candidates. Cobbett's name had been canvassed, amongst others, for the election held there in June 1818 when he was unavailable in America. But now he was available and he had been encouraged by his reception there when he had gone through it on his return to England in 1819 on his journey from Liverpool to London.¹⁰ He threw himself into the fray, but estimated he needed to raise several thousand pounds to cover his election expenses, especially as a significant proportion of the electors lived outside Coventry and would expect, as was customary, their expenses for returning to Coventry to vote to be met by the candidate for whom they promised their vote. Desperate for money, Cobbett converted a general fund he had advertised in the *Register* over the New Year into an election fund. With meagre results, he was forced in late February to mail a printed letter to seventy people asking for £10 each. With just sufficient funds he

⁸ For Cobbett's position see J. Stevenson, 'Joining up the dots: contingency, hindsight and the British insurrectionary tradition' in J. McElligott and M. Conboy (eds.), *The Cato Street Conspiracy: Plotting, Counter-intelligence and the revolutionary tradition in Britain and Ireland* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 43-6.

⁹ For *Cobbett's Evening Post* see M.L. Pearl, *William Cobbett: a Bibliographical Account of his Life and Times* (Oxford, 1953), p. 112.

¹⁰ For the Coventry seat see R.G. Thomas, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1790-1820* (London, 1986), pp. 401-4.

visited the seat amid widespread attacks in the ministerial papers, referring to the 'calumnies which have been heaped on me by the atrocious daily press of the metropolis'. He replied as he knew best, with a sentimental account in the *Register* of his early life and his devotion of his whole career to 'great public objects'.¹¹

Cobbett's hopes for the Coventry election proved misplaced. Accompanied by his daughter, he was met by the full force of the unreformed electoral system ranged against him. His voters faced well-orchestrated attacks by what Cobbett called 'savages' as they tried to register their vote, and he too was assaulted and had to defend himself with the sharp corner of his snuff box as they tried to beat him to the ground. The house where he was staying was repeatedly attacked, at one point he had to defend himself and his daughter sword in hand when the mob broke in, only the belated arrival of the constables and the reading of the Riot act saving them from harm. Ill and well behind in the polling after eight days, he retreated to an inn outside Coventry, but even there the landlord found himself threatened with the loss of his licence for putting him up. Cobbett admitted defeat and returned to London, his hopes of a parliamentary platform for the reform cause dashed. Indeed by late spring 1820, the political and personal outlook for Cobbett looked bleak. Parliamentary reform seemed frustrated at every turn. Fear of revolution still dominated Parliament and further revolts on the continent served only to intensify the alarm raised by the Cato Street plot whose members were executed in May, their main leader, Arthur Thistlewood defiant to the end.¹² At a personal level Cobbett's finances were in ruins and he was forced to declare himself bankrupt and surrender as a debtor to the restrictions of living with two of his children within the 'Rules' of the King's Bench prison in 'a dirty place' on the Lambeth Road and reduced to eating the cheapest food available.¹³ The falling off for the once proud yeoman farmer of Botley, surrounded by a large and loving family was painful. The man who in 1816 was, according to Samuel Bamford, the 'great authority' who had converted the workers of the north and midlands to the cause of reform, was now rendered almost impotent by the collapse of the extra-parliamentary agitations he had done so much to bring about and his personal financial mess.

New hope, however, came in the unlikely shape of the estranged wife of the new King, George IV, Caroline of Brunswick. She had been living

¹¹ See Spater, *William Cobbett*, p.392.

¹² Spater, pp. 392-7.

¹³ Spater, p. 398.

abroad since 1814 but decided to return to England in June 1820 to claim her 'rights' as Queen. She was encouraged by those who sought to embarrass the government and most thought she was manoeuvring to obtain a pension. But accompanied on her return by the radical Lord Mayor of London, Matthew Wood, her cause quickly took fire, attracting a popular following as a symbol of opposition to an unpopular government and a despised monarch.¹⁴ The opposition Whigs undoubtedly saw her as an opportunity, but Cobbett adopted her cause wholeheartedly, having taken her side against the then Prince Regent before she left England in 1814.¹⁵ She touched his sense of chivalry and her cause as the 'injured Queen' struck a remarkable chord of sympathy amongst women, provincial workmen and London artisans and tradesmen. The attempt by the government to mount what were in effect divorce proceedings through a public investigation of her conduct while abroad at a public trial in Westminster Hall only inflamed the atmosphere. A parade of witnesses giving salacious details of what she had been doing on a boat in the Mediterranean, not only gave the caricaturists a field day, but raised acutely the behaviour of the new King himself, hardly a paragon of domestic fidelity. Cobbett urged Caroline not to accept a pension and wrote the public letter in early August in which she catalogued the King's ill-behaviour towards her and which *The Times* thought 'calculated to rouse every generous and manly moral feeling'.¹⁶ A tumultuous petitioning movement in her favour saw the government's majorities on the issue in parliament fall away until they finally admitted defeat in November and dropped the proceedings against her. Cobbett could take much of the credit for the wild celebrations which greeted her acquittal. He had devoted issue after issue in the *Register* to her cause, some 1500 pages in all, plus addresses, handbills and pamphlets. But hopes that the Queen's triumph would bring about a change in government and an opening for reform proved hollow. Once the government conceded it closed ranks, while the broad coalition from the Parliamentary Whigs to the streets quickly fell apart. Attempts to get the Queen's position officially recognised failed, and her attempts to force her way into the Coronation in April 1821 proved a humiliation when she was refused entry and left looking a forlorn figure who had outlived her usefulness. In early August, worn out and ill, she

¹⁴ On the Caroline affair generally, see J. Stevenson, 'The Queen Caroline Affair' in J. Stevenson (ed.), *London in the Age of Reform* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 117-48; for Cobbett's role see Spater, *William Cobbett*, pp. 398-408 and J. Grande, *William Cobbett, the Press and Rural England: Radicalism and the Fourth Estate, 1792-1835* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 114-47.

¹⁵ Spater, *William Cobbett*, pp. 399-400.

¹⁶ Spater, p. 403.

died. Cobbett and his daughter Anne were deeply and genuinely affected by her death, Cobbett writing 'I have never before known what depression of spirits was; but I really feel it now'.¹⁷ But, in truth, Cobbett had already had to face the fact that the Queen's cause, however right and worthy, was not going to bring about reform. But otherwise his personal situation was improving. Through the agency of friends, Cobbett's financial affairs were repaired and he was able to discharge his bankruptcy late in 1820. Another threatening call on his finances following a law suit was also settled by a friend, and he was able to set up house at Kensington on a small acreage on which he was able to construct a horticultural business and begin to reassemble his scattered family.

Thus Cobbett's 'country turn' in 1821 came after a frustrating time since his return from exile in America. He had set out for England hopefully in 1819 hoping to resume the leadership of the reform movement just as news came filtering across the Atlantic of the Peterloo massacre. He arrived back in England with a plan to inter Tom Paine's bones as a memorial to someone he now thought of as a perceptive critic of the hated 'funding system'. His plans were almost irrelevant to reformers reeling from the events in Manchester and fierce government repression. Cato Street was an indication of how desperate some had become, but the executions that followed also served as an awful warning that the government meant business in thwarting any sign of a threat. Coventry had proved that the system would not allow independent reform candidates a route to parliament, while the cause of Queen Caroline brought no lasting gain. Had Cobbett but known it, reform lay more than a decade away in 1832. The post-war reform agitation was spent.

Cobbett, however, retained his faith that the government would pay the price for its cumulative mismanagement of military and financial affairs since the 1790s. The unprecedented mountain of debt it had created was real, and Cobbett believed it to be the direct cause of the poverty and hardships of the labouring poor as well many small farmers and manufacturers. He believed the interest payments on the national debt were directly responsible for the high taxes on so many articles of common consumption and which depressed the living standards of the poor almost to the point of mere subsistence. The figures were genuinely staggering: government expenditure in 1821 was £58 million compared with only £17 million in 1790 before the wars began. £32 million of the 1821 expenditure was accounted for by servicing the debt; another £5 million

¹⁷ Spater, pp. 407-8.

went on places and pensions.¹⁸ Cobbett was aware that many of the rural poor were in a desperate condition and on the edge of violence, while the farmers themselves complained bitterly of falling prices, heavy poor rates, and the burden of tithes. It would all collapse in due course he believed, but in the meantime he sought to both ease the plight of the labourers and mobilise the farmers in the reform cause. For the labourers he offered a more practical solution to riot and disorder. In the first of seven monthly parts in August 1821, his *Cottage Economy* offered advice on the brewing of beer, the baking of bread, the keeping of animals, and other hints at self-sufficiency. His aim was to allow the labourer to attain greater independence, avoid the excise taxes on such items as spirits and tea, and provide his family with a more wholesome and satisfying existence than as a factory hand or mere hired, landless labourer. It proved a runaway success with reported sales of 30,000 within a few months and was Cobbett's lasting contribution to the attempt to stay the tide of pauperisation which he felt threatened the class from which he had sprung.¹⁹

Cobbett felt much of the farming interest was as much sinned against as sinning. He had been a farmer and longed for more land to manage than the four acres at Kensington. Their natural reaction to falling prices after the Napoleonic Wars was to seek protection and maintain high and stable prices. The Corn Law of 1815 had introduced a high protective tariff on grain, but they wanted more of the same which Cobbett believed could only pauperise the rural labourers still further and drive them to violence. In January 1821 he used the first issue of the *Register* to urge the farmers to support reform and use their power to force a reduction of the interest payments on the National Debt rather than support further protection. He hammered away at that theme throughout the year, inveighing against paper money and the debt in a re-issue of earlier wartime articles and offering to have himself grilled on a grid-iron if the Government was able to go back to gold currency without an economic collapse.²⁰ He also knew that he had to talk directly to farmers to get his message across and that county meetings and meetings of agriculturalists were occurring all over the country. So it was that in November 1821 he set out on the first of his rural 'rides', accompanied by his son, to examine for himself the state of

¹⁸ The figures are cited in Spater, p. 410.

¹⁹ For the publication history of *Cottage Economy* see Pearl, *William Cobbett: a Bibliographical Account* pp.119-21.

²⁰ For the gridiron pledge see Spater, pp. 412-13 and for Cobbett's transfer of his campaign against the debt into his 'rides' see I. Dyck, 'Introduction' in I. Dyck (ed.), *Rural Rides* (London, Penguin Classics edn., 2001), xi-xix.

rural England and to encounter the farmers to persuade them to follow his course and make common cause with their labourers in seeking parliamentary reform and a radical overhaul of the economic and fiscal system which harmed all of them, the terrible burdensome debt and the legacy of 'old corruption'. For Cobbett both *Cottage Economy* and what became *Rural Rides* represented a return to his roots. Cobbett's 'rural turn' concentrated on the labourers and farmers of the rural southern counties rather than London and the industrial districts. In many ways it marked a strategic shift after the frustrations of the years 1817-21 and it would have the effect of transforming Cobbett's reputation from that of a largely metropolitan journalist to the 'country writer' he is more widely known as today.

COBBETT VERBATIM

Given that this year is the bicentenary of the first Rural Ride, it seems appropriate to remind ourselves why Cobbett undertook the rides, and what he felt they had achieved.

Thus, Sir, have I led you about the country. All sorts of things have I talked of, to be sure; but there are very few of these things which have not their interest of one sort or another. At the end of a hundred miles or two of travelling, stopping here and there; talking freely with everybody; hearing what gentlemen, farmers, tradesmen, journeymen, labourers, women, girls, boys, and all have to say; reasoning with some, laughing with others, and observing all that passes; and especially if your manner be such as to remove every kind of reserve from every class; at the end of a tramp like this, you get impressed upon your mind a true picture, not only of the state of the country, but of the state of the people's minds throughout the country. And, Sir, whether you believe me or not, I have to tell you that it is my decided opinion that the people, high and low, with one unanimous voice, except where they live upon the taxes, *impute their calamities to the House of Commons*. Whether they be right or wrong is not so much the question in this case. That such is the fact I am certain; and having no power to make any change myself, I must leave the making or the refusing of the change to those who have the power. I repeat, and with perfect sincerity, that it would give me as much pain as it would give to any man in England, to see a change *in the form of the Government*. With *King, Lords, and Commons*, this nation enjoyed many ages of happiness and of glory. *Without Commons*,

my opinion is, it never can again see anything but misery and shame; and when I say Commons I *mean* Commons; and by Commons, I mean men elected by the free voice of the untitled and unprivileged part of the people, who, in fact as well as in law, are the Commons of England.

Rural Rides, Worth (Sussex), December 2, 1822, William Cobbett, 1830.

MY COBBETT INTEREST FROM NEW YORK: A VISIT, AND A COLLECTION'S CARE AND HISTORY

Elayne Gardstein, Senior Adjunct Professor, Adelphi University Libraries

During the summer of 2000, Molly Townsend visited Adelphi's Special Collections while researching Cobbett's sojourns in the United States. Molly, a direct descendant of William's older brother George, sent a long list of American imprints to study. She was delightfully interested in all that we had to show her. Two of the librarians drove Molly to the site of Cobbett's farm in North Hempstead during his Long Island stay (1817-19), only a few miles away. How did they know where it was? Our archival files hold histories of collections and have fascinating documentation. Fortunately, there was an old photostat copy of Frederick Van Wyck's 1918 article in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, "Gov. Dongan's Farm on Long Island." It included a map with the exact location of Cobbett's farm. We added a copy of Molly's book, *This Happy Land: William Cobbett on America 1797-1835*, to the collection after its publication in 2007. Librarian Donald Kelly, who accompanied Molly to the farm site and was instrumental in building Adelphi's Cobbett Collection for half a century, died the previous year. I wrote to Molly with the sad news and she sent a reply in remembrance of Donald.

A few years after Molly's visit, University Archives and Special Collections moved to a space next door to the main library. One priority was the rearrangement of larger collections. Beginning with the William Hone Collection, titles were shelved in call number order within that collection. As Hone was a contemporary of Cobbett, logic prevailed in the arrangement of hundreds of Cobbett titles. I created a list from the online catalog, and student assistants retrieved items from the general Special Collections shelves and relocated them to rows reserved for the William

Cobbett Collection. Flat files with drawers stored larger sized prints and broadsides. There was a lot of processing to complete as well. Many of the Cobbett books were stored in paper envelopes that became acidic over time. Sturdier items could now rest safely on steel shelves, with acid-free identification book flags. Pamphlet holders and made-to-measure book boxes enclosed fragile titles, all with new labels. Clear polyester sleeves protected oversized paper items. This hands-on endeavor led to thinking about the collection's origin and growth and then writing an article for the Cobbett Society.

My 2016 article for the *New Register*, "Cobbett in America", practically wrote itself thanks to the wealth of information in the files. What a surprise it was to learn that Professor Owen Groves, who began our Cobbett Collection after World War II, was the older brother of Lieutenant General Leslie Groves, director of the wartime Manhattan Project's development of the atomic bomb. In 2017, I turned to "Cobbett on Long Island." Having crossed the Atlantic by ship from New York to Southampton in only five days, I cannot imagine Cobbett's weeks at sea to reach New York in 1817. From this research, I learned about local history through Cobbett's Long Island neighbors, the Tredwells. Cobbett dedicated *The American Gardener* to Maria Elizabeth Tredwell. John Tredwell was a direct descendant of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins, who came to America from England on the Mayflower in 1620. One wonders if John told William about his family history.

The collection constantly presents new avenues for research, from the Reniers' related Cobbett items in our Hone Collection, to gardening, to anti-Jacobin pamphlets, and to caricature prints. Thanks to bibliographies by Pearl and Gaines, archival files and online resources, writing about Adelphi's Cobbett Collection is possible even in these challenging times.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN: A CARICATURIST'S VIEW OF COBBETT AND QUEEN CAROLINE 200 YEARS AGO

Elayne Gardstein, Senior Adjunct Professor, Adelphi University Libraries

This year marks the bicentennial of the death of Queen Caroline on August 6, 1821. Early last year, Special Collections at Adelphi University acquired a hand-colored etching, *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'em*, with Caroline as its subject (figure 1). Cobbett's contemporary, the Radical writer and publisher William Hone (1780-1842), has his own collection within Special Collections at Adelphi University. *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'em* is in the Hone Collection as an accompaniment to the wealth of Queen Caroline material within. To view this rare caricature print in context, diverse sources include detailed studies of "The Queen Caroline Affair", Cobbett's advocacy for the Queen in the *Political Register*, as well as a current blog and an online exhibition. Here are five important questions to answer about the etching: What was "The Queen Caroline Affair"? What roles did Cobbett and other Radicals play? What was the unique role of caricature at the time? Who were the publisher and artist? What was this caricature's message?

"The Queen Caroline Affair"

Caroline Amelia Elizabeth of Brunswick (1768-1821) was the cousin and wife of the Prince of Wales (1762-1830). He became Prince Regent in 1811 and then King George IV upon his father King George III's death on January 29, 1820. Caroline and George married in 1795 and had a daughter, Princess Charlotte (1796-1817). The couple was estranged from 1796 to Caroline's death in 1821, their relationship marred by infidelities on both sides. Caroline traveled on the European continent from 1814 to 1820 and had a lengthy affair with her chamberlain Bartolomeo Bergami. Following George's ascension to the throne, Caroline decided to return to England to claim her position as Queen, refusing a £50,000 annual stipend to stay away from England and renounce her title. She returned to England on June 5, 1820. Thus began the scandal called "The Queen Caroline Affair" and the King's quest for divorce and renunciation of her title as Queen.¹ Additionally, the King had her name removed from the Anglican

¹ Sources from recent decades about "The Queen Caroline Affair" include: Anna Clark. "Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820." *Representations*. No. 31. Summer, 1990. 47-68; Jonathan Fulcher. "The Loyalist Response to the Queen Caroline Agitations." *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 34, No. 4 (October 1995), 481-502; Tim Fulford. "Cobbett, Coleridge and the Queen Caroline Affair." *Studies in Romanticism*. Vol. 37, No. 4 (1998), 523-543; John Gardner. "Cobbett's Return to England in

liturgy. In July, the King's directive for the Bill of Pains and Penalties against Caroline was read in the House of Lords, leading to a trial of three months beginning in August, and a guilty verdict of adultery. There was almost immediate suspension of the case on November 10, 1820 due to close votes and potential failure of the bill's passage in the House of Commons. Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register* of November 11, 1820 proclaimed "Victory!", and Cobbett wrote the latest news at the issue's end, "I have only a moment to say, the THE BILL IS THROWN OUT! Thus are the Queen's and People's enemies defeated!" By the following week's issue, he exclaimed, "It was THE PEOPLE'S TRIUMPH over those who had so long triumphed over them."² What was Cobbett's involvement in this?

Cobbett, the Radicals, and Queen Caroline

John Gardner's chapter on "Cobbett's Return to England in 1819" elucidates the political/economic and personal circumstances generating Cobbett's and the Radicals' support for Queen Caroline. Three issues of the day had great effect. First, the Peterloo Massacre at St. Peter's Field in Manchester on August 16, 1819 marked the end of peaceful protest. Second, the Tory government passed Six Acts on November 23, 1819 including legislation against blasphemous or seditious publications and newspaper and stamp duties on radical papers for printing editorials. Third, the Radicals' Cato Street Conspiracy of February 23, 1820 failed to murder the government ministers. Cobbett himself went through difficult times after he returned to England from America on November 22, 1819: failure to bury Thomas Paine's bones; loss of an election to stand as MP for Coventry; loss of subscribers to the Register, bankruptcy and imprisonment; and Radicals' distrust for his Tory leanings concerning the

1819." In *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Contexts and Legacy*, edited by James Grande and John Stevenson. Taylor & Francis Group, 2015, 61-75, 183-185, accessed from ProQuest Ebook Central; James Grande. "Cobbett and Queen Caroline." *William Cobbett, the Press and Rural England: Radicalism and the Fourth Estate, 1792-1835*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 114-147; Tamara L. Hunt. "Morality and Monarchy in the Queen Caroline Affair." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*. Vol. 23. No. 4 (Winter, 1991), 697-722; Thomas W. Lacquer. "The Queen Caroline Affair.: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV." *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 54. No. 3 (September 1982), 417-466; Kristin Samuelian. *Royal Romances: Sex, Scandal, and Monarchy in Print, 1780-1821*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; John Stevenson. "The Queen Caroline Affair." In *London in the Age of Reform*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1977, 117-148; Margaret Ann Swanson. *George & Caroline: The Gendered Discourse of a Royal Scandal*. Master of Arts thesis, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 2007, accessed from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

² Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*, vol. 37, no. 17, column 1198, Saturday, Nov. 11, 1820; vol 37, no. 18, column 1215, Saturday, Nov. 18, 1820.

Cato Street Conspiracy.³ Queen Caroline's return to England on June 5, 1820 was well timed indeed.

Cobbett immediately volunteered to influence public opinion for Caroline's quest to claim her title as Queen. Within days of her arrival, Cobbett wrote to her:

Her Majesty knows, perhaps, little of what is passing amongst the public. Already are the windows of the shops exhibiting her Majesty's Person, attired in Royal Robes, with a Crown on her head and a sceptre in her hand. And the person who humbly submits this paper to her Majesty assures her, that the united soul of this loyal and just nation is poured out in prayer, that she will not yield, either to threats or entreaties, any portion, or particle, of her rights as *Queen of this kingdom*.⁴

If successful, in return, Cobbett and the Radicals would receive her support. According to Gardner, over 1,500 pages of the *Register* were devoted to her cause at the time. In the June 24 issue, Cobbett proclaimed, "But this I know, that she has certain rights, privileges, and powers, given to her by law, and that she can exercise these...."⁵ He penned letters to the House of Commons on her behalf and others published addresses to the Queen and created poems in her honor. A famous Cobbett piece was *The Queen's Letter to the King*, printed in the *Times* on August 14, 1820. That July, Henry "Orator" Hunt (1773-1835) defended her from prison and William Benbow (1787-1864) provided a poem for Thomas Wooler's radical paper *The Black Dwarf*.⁶ In gaining public support for the Queen, Cobbett and the Radicals appealed to women throughout England. However, after Caroline's triumph in Parliament, sentiment was fickle and changed to loyalism in the months leading up to King George IV's coronation on July 19, 1821.

Caricature's Unique Role

Unlike newspaper writers, pamphleteers and their publishers, caricaturists and printsellers were immune from prosecution and imprisonment. The Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act, one of the Six Acts passed in late November 1819, specifically targeted the press. Ian Haywood has

³ Gardner, "Cobbett's Return", pp. 61-69.

⁴ John Gardner (2012). "Caroline and Cobbett." *CPELAC International Journal*, 1 (2), p. 134, citing E. A. Smith, *A Queen on Trial: The Affair of Queen Caroline* (Avon: Alan Sutton, 1994), p. 39.

⁵ Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*, vol. 36. No. 15. column 1079, Saturday, June 24, 1820.

⁶ Gardner, "Cobbett's Return", pp. 70-74.

explained the popularity of Georgian caricature in his current online blog, “Queen Caroline in Caricature”. “It was a unique art form which combined political reportage with unbridled and entertaining fantasy; it was able to respond quickly and memorably to political events and it operated outside of conventional aesthetic and ethical norms. This imaginative freedom created a parallel visual universe in which public figures re-enacted and reconfigured newsworthy incidents according to a satirical logic of inversion, irony, allusion and parody.”⁷ Clever titles, captions, cryptic plays on words and the like did not give the government censors much in the way of concrete evidence. According to Swanson, interest in politics, scandal and gossip produced a successful print market from the 1780s to the 1820s. Well over 400 prints concerned The Queen Caroline Affair. Moreover, caricatures were readily available to all classes thanks to their display in printsellers’ shop windows.⁸

Printseller/Publisher and Artist

Grand Entrance to Bamboozl’em, was published in February 1821 by George Humphrey (1773?-1831?), the nephew of Hannah Humphrey (1745-1818). Hannah was the well-known publisher of James Gillray’s prints. Following her death, George took over her business and shop at 27 St. James’s Street near Pall Mall. Yale University’s Lewis Walpole Library in Farmington, Connecticut acquired the Humphrey Shop Album in 2014, containing 130 prints from which clients could select copies for purchase. Most of the subjects concerned The Queen Caroline Affair and its aftermath and date from June 1820 to May 1821. Yale Library’s online exhibition, “Trial by Media: The Queen Caroline Affair”, offers a wealth of details about the shop album.⁹ A sample copy of Adelphi’s etching is on page 18 of the album. It is one of a number of prints attacking the Queen published and sold by George Humphrey in 1821. Tamara Hunt, in her doctoral dissertation chapter “Political Caricature in the Queen Caroline Affair, 1820-21”, speculates that Humphrey’s campaign against the Queen

⁷ Ian Haywood. “Queen Caroline in Caricature: June 1820.” *Romantic Illustration Network*. Blog link: <https://romanticillustrationnetwork.com/2020/06/05/queen-caroline-in-caricature-june-1820/> In addition to this ongoing blog, see also Ian Haywood. *Romanticism and Caricature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁸ Margaret Ann Swanson. *George & Caroline: The Gendered Discourse of a Royal Scandal*. Master of Arts thesis, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 2007, pp. 20, 22.

⁹ <https://walpole.library.yale.edu/news/humphrey-shop-album-conserved-and-cataloged> The website has a link to browse images of the shop album online. The album is also part of an online exhibition, “Trial by Media: The Queen Caroline Affair”: <https://onlineexhibits.library.yale.edu/s/trialbymedia/page/intro> .

was inspired by the new pro-government newspaper *John Bull*.¹⁰ Humphrey's star caricaturist echoed this sentiment.

The artist Theodore Lane (1800-1828) created 54 of the shop album prints, including *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'em*. While Lane was best known for his humorous illustrations to Pierce Egan's book *The Life of an Actor* of 1825, he was also a talented painter and caricaturist. Born in Isleworth in 1800, Lane's career was tragically cut short when he fell to his death through a skylight at a horse fair in Gray's Inn Lane on February 21, 1828.¹¹ His collaboration with George Humphrey in 1821 created a market for loyalist caricatures. According to Kristin Samuelian, the consistently anti-Caroline theme of Lane's satirical prints was not necessarily a reflection of his own political agenda, as artists often changed sides according to popular demand.¹² In a rare example, Cobbett and the Radicals made their appearance.

This large hand-colored etching (**figure 1**) measures 35 x 44 cm (13¾ x 17½ in). Below the image is a band bearing the publication line: "Published by G. Humphrey 27 St James's St. Feby. 1821". Although the print is not signed, it was attributed to Theodore Lane in the British Museum catalogue.¹³ This lively parade is a caricature of multiple processions honoring Caroline. When she traveled abroad, *The Queen's Entry into Jerusalem* was painted by an artist from Milan in 1816 and later exhibited in Pall Mall to great popularity in August 1820. The Queen participated in lively processions upon entering London on June 7 and again upon her triumphant ride to give thanks at St. Paul's on November

Fig 1. (overleaf) *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'em*, by Theodore Lane, 1821. William Hone Collection. University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries.

¹⁰ Tamara Lisa Hunt. "To Take for Truth the Test of Ridicule": Public Perceptions, Political Controversy, and English Political Caricature, 1815-1821", p. 365. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 1989. Accessed through ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. The first issue of *John Bull* appeared on December 17, 1820.

¹¹ Graham Everitt. *English Caricaturists and Graphic Humourists of the Nineteenth Century: How They Illustrated and Interpreted Their Times*. Second edition. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893, pp. 80-82. [reprint edition, Filiquarian Publishing, LLC / Qontro, 2010]. Graham Everitt was the pen name for William Rogers Richardson,

¹² Kristin Flieger Samuelian. *Royal Romances: Sex, Scandal, and Monarchy in Print, 1780-1821*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 213, note 27.

¹³ M. Dorothy George. *Catalogue of prints and drawings in the British Museum. Division I. Political and Personal Satires*, Vol. 10, No. 14122. Information about the characters depicted in this print is available from this catalogue and from the British Museum collection website: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1935-0522-12-183

29, 1820. Lane's message is an about-face from reality toward confusion, deception, trickery and bamboozlement.

Unlike the humorous caricatures dating from the Queen's peak of popularity in 1820, Lane's depiction now takes an ugly turn with Caroline as a strumpet bearing an oval portrait of her paramour Bartolomeo Bergami. She rides in with her companions, seated on braying donkeys. Notes beneath the image, separated by vertical lines, identify most of the characters. An oval beneath the title describes her as "Her most Graceful M.....y Columbine B.....i alias Mother Red Cap 2nd Queen of all the Radicals, Whigs, Hoaxers B.....i in all her looks and Brandy in her eye." She wears the red cap of liberty, a prominent motif throughout the scene. (figure 2). Columbine is a reference to the Italian Commedia dell'Arte character, Colombina. The royal retinue is primarily clad in the Queen's colors of red and gold. The British Museum catalogue refers to "...a catch-phrase (old in 1874) 'Red and yellow, Tom Fool's colours'." Leading the way is Sir Matthew Wood, also known as Alderman Wood (1768-1843), the Whig politician who was Mayor of London (1815-1817) and then MP for the City of London (1817-1843). He was her advisor throughout The Queen Caroline Affair, but now he appears as a jester. His son, John-Page Wood (1796-1866) in top hat, carries the "All Majesty & Grace" banner; he was the Queen's private chaplain and secretary. The women companions include Lady Ann "Bagpipe" Hamilton (1766-1846) in a feathered Scots cap and Countess Oldi, the sister of Bergami. The procession makes its way to the left, where Cobbett and the Radicals await Queen Caroline. According to George, they are "more realistically drawn than the other figures."

At the extreme left is Henry "Orator" Hunt (1773-1835), waving his hat, with caption "The Hero of Spa and Peters Fields with a day rule from Ilchester". Hunt, pictured wearing a broken wrist chain, was imprisoned at Ilchester following the Peterloo Massacre. Sir Robert "Lavalette" Wilson (1777-1849) stands next to him. Wilson was a distinguished military general and liberal MP for Southwark from 1818-1831; he aided the Bonapartist Count of Lavalette escape execution in France. "Jack Cam Westminster's Darling" stands beside Wilson; he is John Cam Hobhouse, 1st Baron Broughton (1786-1869). Clad in a high wing collared white shirt, Hobhouse was a Radical MP for the City of Westminster who advocated parliamentary reform. "The Legislative Attorney for Brummiggum with a day rule from St. Luke's" stands in front of Hobhouse, wearing a striped straight-jacket. He is Sir Charles Wolseley, 7th Baronet (1769-1846) from



Fig. 2 Queen Caroline. *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'm* (detail) by Theodore Lane, 1821. William Hone Collection. University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries.

Staffordshire, an insurrectionist, a supporter of Queen Caroline and reformist in Birmingham. St. Luke's is a reference to an asylum.

Next and just behind Wolseley is "William Tompaine Cobt. Weathercock" (**figure 3**). Theodore Lane's caption refers to Cobbett's changeable politics, as a weathervane spins, especially as regards Thomas Paine (1737-1809). By February, 1821 fifteen months had elapsed since Cobbett returned to England from America, Paine's disinterred bones as yet not



Fig. 3 William Cobbett and the Radicals. *Grand Entrance to Bamboozl'm* (detail) by Theodore Lane, 1821. William Hone Collection. University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries.

reburied. According to Claribel Young, “If Cobbett meant to undo the injustice he had done Paine’s reputation in the eighteenth century, he accomplished his purpose; for he reawakened the interest which brought a renewed appreciation for ‘Old Common Sense.’”¹⁴ Cobbett attended Lane’s fictional parade as an advocate for the Queen. However, in the months following her triumph in Parliament, Caroline lost popular support. Cobbett advised against her acceptance of an annual pension of £50,000

¹⁴ Claribel Young. “A Reexamination of William Cobbett’s Opinions of Thomas Paine.” *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*. Vol. 39, No. 1 (1977), p. 26.
<https://jrul.libraries.rutgers.edu/index.php/jrul/article/view/1560/3000>

that March and her less than genteel ways in London society.¹⁵ According to James N. McCord Jr., “A loyalist reaction began in early 1821, galvanized in part by the trial but also by Caroline’s acceptance in March of a government annuity of £50,000, which she had previously vowed to refuse unless her name were restored to the Anglican liturgy—which would have meant recognition of her as queen.”¹⁶ Cobbett renewed interest in Caroline following her death that summer. The August 11, 1821 issue of *Cobbett’s Weekly Register* contained his account the “Death of HER MAJESTY, the Queen” on August 7, and the August 18 and 25 issues described the “Funeral of HER MAJESTY, the Beloved Queen Caroline.” These papers bore black-bordered front pages. Cobbett concluded with “The QUEEN’S ADVISORS”, published on September 1, 1821 and proclaimed, “The Queen’s cause was the *people’s cause*. The Queen triumphed, and the people triumphed.”¹⁷ In the caricature print, three more companions near Cobbett cheer the procession on.

A balding Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844), the Radical leader in the House of Commons, stands next to his friend Cobbett; his caption reads “Sir Frank Demagogue Westminster’s Jewel”. A dwarflike “Little Wadd” Samuel Ferrand Waddington (1759-1829) is in front of Cobbett and Burdett and holds a “Long Live Mother Red Cap” sign.

Last is “Parson Har..s.n Founder of the Sect of Radical Methodists, with a day rule from Durence Vile”. Harrison holds a “Rallying Point” pike with “Revolution” and “Radical Reform” banners, red hat and a wig (for the Whig Party). The Rev. Joseph Harrison (1779-1848) of Stockport was tried with Sir Charles Wolseley for sedition and conspiracy in 1820. Lane’s vision encompassed a wealth of details: spectators, shops, street signs (“Bridge Street” and “Canon Row”), political banners, to humorous characters (sailor and woman in the foreground), to Bacchus on the right. Three angels above fall from the sky: they are “Decency”, “Modesty”, and “Delicacy”. A violent thunderstorm moves above the Queen’s retinue. Hand-coloring in blues, reds and gold enlivens the frenzied scene.

A Fitting End to the Cobbett and Caroline Story

¹⁵ James Grande. “Cobbett and Queen Caroline.” *William Cobbett, the Press and Rural England: Radicalism and the Fourth Estate, 1792-1835*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 141-146.

¹⁶ James N. McCord Jr., “Taming the Female Politician in Early-Nineteenth-Century England: John Bull versus Lady Jersey.” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Winter 2002, pp. 39 and p. 51 note 60 with reference to Fraser, *Unruly Queen* p. 452. Accessed online from Project Muse.

¹⁷ Cobbett’s *Weekly Political Register*, vol. 40, no. 7, column 437, Saturday, Sept. 1, 1821.

Another item in the Hone Collection attests to Cobbett's influence following Queen Caroline's death. The December 1821 issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published "Ancient National Melodies. I", written by a "Thomas Pipes of Chantington" on November 25, 1821 addressed to a "C. North, Esq." Thomas Pipes was a pseudonym for John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854), the son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott, and C. (Christopher) North was a pseudonym for John Wilson (1785-1854). Both men were critics on the *Blackwood's* staff. Lockhart's contribution highlighted the revival of "old National airs" and provided two songs as examples with intention "to alter the words a little, so as to suit the occasions and sentiments of the day."¹⁸ Song II, with accompanying music, was entitled "Cobbett's Complaint. A Dirge" and subtitled "To the Tune of 'O Hone, O Hone.'" The eleven verses have contemporary references to the Queen's supporters. Verse 1 speaks for Cobbett and all the Radicals, "Now let no eyes be dry, O Hone, O Hone! Now let all lament and cry O Hone! For Caroline is dead, And with her our hopes are fled. For by her we all were fed, O Hone, O Hone!"

COBBETT AND ALLSOP AT THE CHOPSTICK FESTIVAL

Katharine Stearn

Cobbett celebrated the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832 with great enthusiasm, in exactly the way he thought a celebration should be held: with a huge party in the open air. Everyone present, rich and poor, was catered for heartily with the abundant fruits of the earth, supplied, cooked and served by good friends who had been part of the long fight for political representation. Cobbett's account makes for very good reading, and is full of genuine pleasure and joy. It is darkened, however, by the still raw memory of Henry Cook, the 21-year-old hanged for knocking off the hat of a local landowner, William Bingham Baring, in the Swing riots that preceded the passing of the Act. Cook's parents lived at Micheldever, about three and a half miles from Sutton Scotney where the celebrations were held.

¹⁸ Thomas Pipes [John Gibson Lockhart]. "Ancient National Melodies. No. I." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 10, No. 58, December 1821, 554-556. Online access available from HathiTrust Digital Library <https://www.hathitrust.org/>

While researching the story of this celebration for a Rural Ride a few years ago, I was astonished to find an account of the festival written by one of Cobbett's guests. Not only did this person take part in the Chopstick Festival, but he joined Cobbett at Micheldever the following day, to visit the grave of Henry Cook, and adds some very moving details which Cobbett omits. Even more astonishingly, the person who wrote it, and who leaves his name mysteriously absent from the book that he published it in, appears to be addressing his account to the children of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a person not associated with the warmest affections for Cobbett. Further examination revealed that the book, *Letters Conversations and Recollections of S.T. Coleridge. In two Volumes*, published 1836, was in fact edited and, in part written, by Thomas Allsop, a friend of both Cobbett and Coleridge, although his name was only added in the second edition of 1878. Allsop is an interesting character: described as a "stockbroker and author", he seems to have been a quite considerable radical, and to have known most of the prominent men of his age. He was connected with the plot of Orsini, the conspirator against Napoleon III, and provided Feargus O'Connor, the Irish born Chartist leader, with the property qualification he needed to stand as MP for Nottingham. He comes across in the book as a warm, passionate, and disarmingly unassuming man. The extra light he sheds on the plight of the grieving parents of Henry Cook is utterly heart-breaking. I have preserved his enthusiastic capitals.

Who was Henry Cook?

Henry Cook was a young labourer from the village of Micheldever in Hampshire, who was hanged in Winchester for his part in the Captain Swing Riots which began in 1830. The riots were country-wide. Labourers invaded farms to destroy the new threshing machines which were depriving them of their jobs and income. In one such confrontation near Micheldever, Cook allegedly took a swing with a sledgehammer at William Bingham Baring JP, knocking him to the ground. Cook was hanged on 15 January 1831 despite a petition signed by 700 gentlemen of Winchester including members of the Baring family. Cook's case became a national story. There were claims and counter claims about what happened. *The Times* wrote: 'The fate of Henry Cook excites no commiseration ... justice has seldom met with a more appropriate sacrifice.' The attorney general, Thomas Denman, falsely stated in the

House of Commons three weeks after Cook's death that he had been a well-paid carpenter and had only just been stopped from killing his victim.

Cobbett took the trouble to look into the case, and at his Trial for Seditious Libel in 1831, took issue with the Ministry for their willingness to believe lies in the press when it suited them. He got witnesses to affirm that Cook had only swung the hammer at Baring's hat, that he had only swung once, and that the hammer only hit the brim of his hat, and that Baring was seen later that evening, out and in perfectly good health. (*The Times* had claimed that Cook had swung at Baring twice, and had to be restrained, and that he'd broken the arm of his restrainer. It also maintained that Cook was 30 years old and earning a salary of 30 shillings a week, so not even a "necessitous agricultural labourer.") Cobbett exposed these lies, and took great pains to ensure that the truth came out.

To share this double account of the Chopstick Festival, as Cobbett called it, with readers of the *New Register*, I have taken extracts from Cobbett's account, followed by extracts from the account by Thomas Allsop.

Dates and times

Cobbett tells us that he arrived at Sutton Scotney "early on Friday" that is, on Friday 6th July. The Festival took place on Saturday 7th July, and he wrote his account at Micheldever on Sunday 8th, while waiting for the evening church service.

Both Cobbett and Allsop seem to have got up that Sunday after the party at the ungodly hour of 3.30am, (quite normal for Cobbett, it has to be said), and met each other while out for their morning constitutional. They met again, at around 6am the same morning, when they arrived by chaise (Cobbett) and post-chaise (Messrs. Allsop, Beck, and Swain) at Micheldever, to pay their respects to the grave of Henry Cook.

Cobbett's Account of the Chopstick Festival, 7th July 1832

Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, London. Saturday, July 14th, 1832.
'Chopstick Festival.' At the Hamlet of Sutton Scotney, in Hampshire.

Micheldever, 8th July 1832

I have had so many hundreds of happy days in my life that it would be, perhaps, too much to say that yesterday was the happiest; but certainly it was as happy a day as any one that I ever have known.

Everything was right; everything was pleasant. The weather, a bright sun and a gentle summer breeze, after a shower in the night, which had laid the dust. The company precisely that in which I have, all my life long, most delighted: the accommodation the most convenient, and the supplies all abundant and all of the very best; and, above all the rest, the feelings of exaltation which were depicted upon every countenance.

[There follows an account of the various donors of meat, including the Nottinghamshire ham cooked by Mrs Cobbett (of which “more than 400 people” partook...), another, weighing 40 lb, from Mr Nicholson, the tea merchant, a fat Lincolnshire sheep from a certain Mr Scales, thirty lbs of bacon from a farmer at Wherwell, a sucking pig from Mr Budd from Burghclere, and the list goes on...]

When we come to the carving of the meat, we get the first mention of the presence of Mr Allsop.]

The booth, which had been duly erected the day before, which had two tables capable of holding about three hundred people, leaving a broad passage between the tables and none on the outside of them, had, in the first place, to have all the petitioners¹ who were present upon the spot, every one dressed in his smock-frock and with a blue riband in his hat. These, amounting to about a hundred and thirty in number, sat at the two ends of the two tables. The rest of the tables were filled by visitors from Winchester, from Portsea, from the Isle of Wight, and in short from everywhere. I sat at the head of the tables during the time that I was present. Mr Swain, Mr Beck, and Mr Allsop, who went from London, and several other gentlemen, did nothing but carve. Those at the tables, receiving always an instant supply of bread and meat, handed hunches out to their relations who were outside of the tent. When one got supplied, he gave way to another. I myself cut off and gave lumps of victuals to about thirty or forty. The puddings took the same sort of distribution. The goodness

¹ In the *Weekly Political Register* of June 16th 1832, Cobbett announced that he intended to “give a dinner at Sutton Scotney, to all the hundred and seventy-seven men who have not been transported, and who signed the above petition.” The petition he refers to was signed in September 1830 at the White Swan at Sutton Scotney; it outlined the miserable condition of the farm labourers, and asked for proper representation in Parliament. It was carried to the King at Brighton by Joseph Mason, who, along with his brother Robert and five other men from Sutton Scotney and the surrounding villages were afterwards transported. Cobbett was earnestly engaged in the campaign to have them brought home.

of the farmers and tradesmen who were present, I can never sufficiently admire....

...I, who went to bed early on the 7th, got up at half-after three on the Sunday morning, when the hamlet was as still as it ever had been since the first day of its creation. The booth was taken down completely, and gone. The morning was rather wet, but very pleasant; and thus ended one of the pleasantest things that ever was seen in this world...

At six o'clock this morning (Sunday), I set off in my chaise from Sutton Scotney, to come to this village, in which, as my readers will recollect, Henry Cook lies buried... When I got to Micheldever I found that Messrs. Allsop, Beck, and Swain, had come this way in a post-chaise, on their way to Popham Lane (which is the London Road from Winchester), in order to cover the grave of Cook with flowers, which I found they had done. When I arrived at the public-house I found that there was no Church-service this morning, but that there will be in the afternoon. Therefore, being compelled to wait so long, I have set to work, seeing that I shall have no time to lose. It is now pretty nearly Church-time, and, therefore, I here break off.

Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, London. Saturday, July 14th, 1832.

Thomas Allsop's Account of the Chopstick Festival

From: *Letters Conversations and Recollections of S.T. Coleridge, In two Volumes. Vol. II*, London, 1836, edited by Thomas Allsop

Goldsmith makes one of his characters say of the Magazines or Reviews of his day, "They hate each other, but I like them all." I have known, with less or greater intimacy, many men of note and great attainments, who have hated or mistaken (if indeed these are not convertible terms) each other, and yet I have found something not only to admire, but something to *love*, in them all. You have seen the expression applied to Cobbett, and you will see what is said of Hazlitt, O'Connell, and Owen, in the subsequent portion of these reminiscences. Now first of the First.

With William Cobbett, I once passed three days; three days of the most delightful interest throughout. He was, perhaps, at the zenith of his influence (it was before he *sunk* into Parliament), and in the

meridian of his powers. It was in the Five Hard Parishes, as he always called them, in the stronghold of the Parsons – the large sheep and arable farms...

...The first day the fine and sturdy Yeoman, with his bold, and, it may be, somewhat burly, bearing, feasted under an immense Tent, more than a thousand Visitors, to whom he gave Food and Drink in ample quantities, a speech after dinner, and a dance in the evening. The gathering came far and near; the best proof, if any were needed, of the favourable impression he had made in his own neighbourhood.

The following morning I was up about half-past three, and was shortly after joined by this very noticeable Man, with whom I walked across the Fields in the direction of Micheldever. It was delightful at that hour of a fine summer's morning to see him quiet, calm, like the time. Nothing escaped him. Not a flower – especially a honeysuckle – which he did not figuratively sniff up if he could approach it; not a feature of rural beauty which he did not notice, and explain in what lay its distinguishing excellence. Although living at that time constantly in the country, he seemed, in the freshness of his joy and enjoyment, like one who had 'been long in dismal cities pent.' My pencil recollections of that day are few and scant.

On the morning following, I was one of a party which proceeded to the Church-yard of Micheldever, and strewed the grave of Henry Cook with flowers. Ill-fated youth! hadst *thou* been struck even to the earth, a small gratuity would have been offered to thee, and thou wouldst have been envied by thy poor comrades for thy luck. In what, then, consists thy crime? Truly *thou wert poor*. Had a Prince struck Bingham Baring, he might have been made a Baronet, as his father has since been made a Baron, and the blow would have been esteemed fortunate, and have been added to the Escutcheon of a Loan-Jobber; but to be struck a Ploughman or a Carpenter, *that* is the difference. What matter whether it was in self-defence or in the resistance of wrong done? Fear is ever cruel, is only appeased with Blood!

It was touching and painful, an hour after, to find the mother of this ill-fated victim of the panic of property, so utterly prostrated by the

fear of offending the owner of Stratton², employed in removing the flowers from her son's grave, fearful lest the wrath of these Parvenu's should follow her and her husband even unto the Parish Workhouse, in which they had taken refuge, and that this touching tribute to the dead, should be remembered in vengeance against the unoffending bereaved Parents, driven by the death of their son, in old age, to the wretched Workhouse of Micheldever. Again, on the arrival of Mr Cobbett, were flowers strewed on the Grave; again and more quickly were they removed by the *in soul affrighted* Parent. I do not know when I have been more affected.

Allsop's description of the desperate parents clearing away the flowers from their son's grave, terrified that the powerful Baring family would see these tributes to their son as acts of rebellion, is heart-breaking. But that local feelings ran high over the death of this young labourer is attested over and over again: in almost every retelling of these events, local villagers are quoted as saying that snow never lies on the grave of Henry Cook.

MINUTES OF THE AGM

Held virtually by Zoom on Saturday, 27th March, 2021.

The meeting, attended by approximately twenty members, began at 11.00am. The Report which follows is, like the meeting itself, shorter than usual.

The Chairman welcomed members to the AGM and pointed out that using Zoom had some advantages in that we were joined by Elayne Gardstein from the USA, Jorgen Kragh from Denmark, and Donald Rafferty from South Uist. Unfortunately our President, John Stevenson, who comes from rural South Devon was not able to join us as his broadband cannot take the strain.

1. Minutes of the last AGM The 2020 AGM was cancelled owing to coronavirus. There were no matters arising from the Chairman's Report for 2019-20 as published in the Cobbett New Register 2020.

² Stratton Park was the home of the Baring family. It was bought in 1798, by the founder of Barings Bank, Sir Francis Baring, Lord Northbrook. Between the wars it was briefly a school for girls, before it was bought back by Barings Bank in 1939, becoming for a while the bank's headquarters. The house and estate remained in the hands of the Barings until 1960, when the house was demolished by John Baring, Lord Ashburton. Sources are silent as to the current owner, though it is still in private hands.

2. Acting Chairman's Report by Richard Thomas:

The Chairman's Report was essentially contained in the Letter sent to all members with additional membership information in mid-February 2021. It is given here:

Dear Cobbett Society Member,

What a year this has been. Last January there were reports of a flu-like outbreak in China but not to worry since, like SARS, it would soon fizzle out. Brexit was going swimmingly since our Prime Minister, recently elected with a substantial majority, had an 'oven ready' deal to present to Brussels. And, on the sporting front, we were all looking forward to a season of Rugby, Cricket, Tennis and the Olympic Games in Japan. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, plenty did and we are still dealing with the effects of Covid-19 on all of our lives - and on the Cobbett Society.

We had to cancel the AGM in March, the Rural Ride in June and the Annual Lecture in October. The only bright spot was a splendid Register edited by Katharine Stearn and Penny Young - with help from a number of people but especially David Chun.

This year we, the Committee, are determined to keep the Cobbett flame alive and to have a number of events during the year - even if some of them have to be on Zoom.

Our plan is as follows:

- i) We have decided against the usual Rural Ride but are planning a guided walk around Farnham, calling in at the prime Cobbett sites - the Pub, the Church, Farnham Castle, and more. We hope to end the walk with Tea at the Museum (where we usually have the AGM). The date almost certainly be late June (possibly the 27th).
- ii) We plan to hold the Annual lecture on Friday, 8th October at the Maltings. This depends, of course, on the world reverting to something approaching normal by then. The subject will be on a theme connected to the Rural Rides - which started in 1821. John Stevenson, our President, and others are investigating ways to make this event even more interesting than usual.

- iii) The one regular item (relatively untouched by Covid) this year will be the Annual Register. It will again be edited by Katharine and Penny; however, the hiatus in our activities has meant that there is less material than usual.

Finally, I hope you will renew your enthusiasm for Cobbett by paying your subscription and by joining us at the events we are planning for this year.

I look forward to seeing you, if only virtually, in 2021.

Richard Thomas, Chair, William Cobbett Society

The key future events - the Rural Ride and the Annual Lecture - are also discussed below.

Hon. Treasurer's Report:

Overall, the Accounts show some £5000 balance which does give the Society a capability in the future to steer some money towards any project which will help further the Society's objectives. Membership continues to decline – not a surprise in Covid year, but a concern. The accounts were adopted.

Election of Committee:

All the existing Committee offered themselves for re-election and their offer was quickly accepted by the members. However, the post of Secretary remains open and the suggestion that two or three people might agree to take on a part of the secretary's duties was accepted in principle but no volunteers were forthcoming. Nevertheless, the fact remains that filling this role in the near future is crucial to the prosperity of the Society.

The New Political Register:

Last year's Register was the only high spot of the year for the Society, since everything else had to be cancelled. Katharine has agreed to continue as Editor but, as usual, the Register depends on a continuing flow of contributions from the Membership.

Rural Ride:

This year the plan is for a 'Rural Walk' around the site associated with Cobbett in Farnham, namely the Castle, the William Cobbett Pub, the Cobbett statue, the churchyard and the Bush Hotel where we plan to have Tea. We hope also to visit the Museum which should, by then, have completed the recording for the Citizens Project. The original date for the Rural Walk was July 10th or 11th. However we had failed to realise that

this was the Wimbledon Finals weekend. We have now moved the Walk and the Tea to Sunday June 27th.

Annual Memorial Lecture:

This has been confirmed for Friday 8th October. It will be a discussion of aspects of the *Rural Rides* which began exactly 200 years ago in 1821. Professor John Stevenson and Dr James Grande have agreed to take part in what will be a 'discussion' rather than a formal lecture. The topics and the structure of the evening are currently under discussion.

Other Issues:

i) The Citizens/Museum Project

Stewart summarised the objectives of this national project, managed by Royal Holloway College. The 'Citizens Project', which started in the Magna Carta anniversary year, chose Cobbett at Farnham Museum as one of 15 topics selected to celebrate the history of 'Liberty, Protest, Rebellion and Reform' in the UK. The main outcome of this project for us will be a video for the Farnham Museum on Cobbett's contribution to reform in the UK. It is hoped that this video will be completed in time for the June event described above. In addition to the video, we hope to get a 'Quotations of Cobbett' recording and a visibility of Cobbett at the Museum which has been lacking in recent years.

ii) The Website

Stewart explained the difficulties with the website – some of which still continue (in the form of 'bugs' for some users). These need to be resolved and members' comments reinforced the need for this to happen as soon as possible.

Any Other Business:

There was a general discussion about how the Society could increase its membership. Persuading a friend to join was suggested, as was the idea of giving a year's membership as a gift to a young person in the hope that it would generate enthusiasm for the great man. After all, many of the issues he was concerned with are relevant today.

Illustrated Talk:

After the AGM the Chairman, Dr Richard Thomas, gave a talk, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation, on the Eight anti-Cobbett cartoons by James Gillray commissioned by the Tory Government in 1809. The talk lasted for about 35 minutes and was followed by questions.

The AGM and discussions finished at about 12.45.

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.*** Written by Cobbett when he was living in America, this is a faithful reproduction of Cobbett's 1809 edition by member Trevor Purnell. £4.50 + £1.50 p&p
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Printed by TreloarPrint
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