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The *Manchester Observer*: Biography of a Radical Newspaper

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Abstract
The newly digitised *Manchester Observer* (1818–22) was England's leading radical newspaper at the time of the Peterloo meeting of August 1819, in which it played a central role. For a time it enjoyed the highest circulation of any provincial newspaper, holding a position comparable to that of the Chartist *Northern Star* twenty years later and pioneering dual publication in Manchester and London. Its columns provide insights into Manchester's notoriously secretive local government and policing and into the labour and radical movements of its turbulent times. Rich materials in the Home Office papers in the National Archives reveal much about the relationship between radicals in London and in the provinces, and show how local magistrates conspired with government to hound the radical press in the north as prosecutions in London ran into trouble. This article also sheds new light on the founding of the *Manchester Guardian*, which endured as the *Observer*'s successor more by avoiding its disasters than by following its example. Despite the imprisonment of four of its main editors and proprietors the *Manchester Observer* battled on for five years before sinking in calmer water for lack of news.

Keywords: Peterloo; press; newspapers; radicalism; Manchester; Guardian

> London has been called the strong hold of the liberty of the press; but Manchester is assuredly the centre and strong hold of the Parliamentary Reformers. (*Manchester Observer*, 1 September 1821)

Early in 2017 the John Rylands Library accepted into its collections two bound volumes: the only complete set of the *Manchester Observer* (1818–22), the radical predecessor of the more famous *Manchester Guardian*. Until the late 1950s they had been housed in the office of the *Guardian*'s mid-twentieth-century editor A. P. Wadsworth. Not long before the paper's move to London the two volumes were loaned out to Wadsworth's neighbour in Didsbury, the young historian Donald Read, to assist with his 1958 history of Peterloo. On Read's retirement they were passed to the present writer, and finally returned to sit alongside the A. P. Wadsworth Peterloo Collection in the Rylands.[1] Use in the past has been inhibited by incomplete bound sets and poorly imaged microfilms. Now high-quality digital images have been made of the whole set, and these are freely available as part of the library's online Peterloo Collection, in a format that allows it to be not merely searched but read.[2]

Studies of the radical press and its culture have featured prominently in scholarship on romanticism and radicalism. These have focused mainly on London, whose 'radical underworld' has been extensively explored, assisted by the ready availability of editions of metropolitan periodicals.[3] The later Chartist press also has a lively historiography, particularly the Leeds-based *Northern Star*.[4] The *Manchester Observer* was the *Northern Star*'s Regency equivalent. E. P. Thompson described it as 'easily the most impressive' provincial radical periodical, with 'a greater sense of the *news*

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of the movement than any competitor'.[5] Donald Read noted that the *Observer* was 'one of the leading radical organs', unusual in being published in the provinces and in having a circulation in the thousands. He identified its reporting of Peterloo as an early example of national influence exerted by the provincial press.[6] Unlike other well-known titles like Cobbett's *Twopenny Trash* and the *Black Dwarf*, which did not pay the newspaper tax and could therefore carry only commentary, the *Manchester Observer* was a full-price stamped and taxed newspaper carrying both local and national news. At its peak in 1819–20 it had the highest circulation of any provincial newspaper (4,000). It did not merely report but actively shaped the radical campaigns of these years, and indeed was the principal organiser of the 'Peterloo' meeting of 16 August 1819 and of the campaign for justice which followed.

The *Manchester Observer*'s own columns provide much of the material for a history of the paper, supplemented by material in Manchester Central Library, Chetham's Library, and in the Rylands. But the paper's ability to provoke the authorities created a great deal of further correspondence in the Home Office papers in the National Archives in Kew – much of it in uncatalogued cardboard boxes, subsequently muddled by a generation of social historians with an interest in public disorder. A recent project to begin re-imaging and cataloguing has proved helpful in identifying much of this scattered material.[7] The Manchester police office was probably the paper's best customer, often buying multiple copies in search of incriminating material and stamp duty evasion. From all these materials it is possible to write the history of Regency England's most successful, and most persecuted, radical newspaper.

For nearly five years, with occasional interruptions, the *Manchester Observer* was a noisy radical voice in a commercial-industrial town dominated by a high Tory regime ruling through an antiquated jumble of parish and manorial institutions. It was regarded by the authorities as 'the Official Journal of the Radicals' and treated accordingly.[8] Founded in January 1818, as the repressive government measures of 1817 were lifted, the *Manchester Observer* reported on the reviving campaign for parliamentary reform, the regional strike wave in the summer of 1818, the popular reform movement of 1819 that culminated in Peterloo, the period of protest and repression that followed, the Queen Caroline agitation of 1820–21, and the prolonged campaign for an inquiry into Peterloo. Its contacts with both Henry Hunt and the London ultra-radicals helped to create a national movement committed to a 'mass platform' strategy of rallying an irresistible force of numbers behind a radical reform of Parliament. At the same time it reported with unmatched richness on the inner workings of Manchester's secretive and corrupt local government. E. P. Thompson wrote in 1963 that 'we can no more understand the significance of Peterloo in terms of the local politics of Manchester than we can understand the strategic importance of Waterloo in terms of the field and the orders of the day'.[9] Nor, however, can we understand Peterloo without the Manchester dimension, particularly given the close collusion between the Manchester authorities and the Home Office over many issues including the press.

The *Observer* covered all the high-profile trials of the day and campaigned on behalf of political prisoners, at the same time fighting for its own survival through the courts as one editor and proprietor after another faced prosecution, imprisonment

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and bankruptcy. The appearance of the *Manchester Guardian* in May 1821 helped to finish off the *Manchester Observer* as a local paper, yet it survived for a year longer by pioneering another strategy later followed by its younger rival: a move to a dual base in Manchester and London. The history of the *Manchester Observer* provides a vantage point for a Manchester-based history of the post-war mass platform radical movement and of the government's campaign against the radical press. It is also a way into the murky inner history of Regency Manchester.[10]

After a first section assessing the place of the *Manchester Observer* in the publishing world of Regency England, sections two to six each cover one of the *Manchester Observer*'s five principal editor/proprietors: the founder Mark Wardle (January 1818–January 1819); the businessman Thomas Chapman (January–May 1819); the radical bookseller James Wroe, who led the paper at its peak in the Peterloo period (May 1819–January 1820); the former Spencean revolutionary Thomas Evans of London (January 1820–March 1821), continued for a further three months by his colleague on the Metropolitan Relief Committee, G. W. Service; and last of all John Thacker Saxton who, after a hiatus and in association with the battle-hardened London publisher T. J. Wooler, kept the paper alive until its improbable death by natural causes in September 1822. A seventh section discusses the founding of the *Manchester Guardian*, in some respects the *Observer*'s successor, and the way in which the character of the *Guardian* was formed by the experience of the *Observer*. The conclusion focuses on the relationships between the *Manchester Observer* and the radical movement, between London and Manchester, and between the law and the press.

1. Introduction: The Radical Press in Regency England

An early issue of the *Manchester Observer* reprinted an article by the London writer and reformer Sir Richard Philips, about a 'mighty engine': the newspaper press.[11] There were at this time altogether 423 newspapers in Britain with a total weekly circulation of half a million: around 1,200 per copy on average, with the typical weekly local paper getting by on fewer than a thousand. Newspapers were still a craft production, their printing done sheet by sheet on manual, iron-framed presses costing only £10–15 and capable of turning out, at most, 200 copies an hour. Their set-up costs were modest but their running costs were high, and their price was then doubled by taxation. One in eight titles was produced in the capital, but in 1821 these accounted for two-thirds of the national circulation of legal, stamped newspapers. The remaining one-third was shared between 119 provincial weeklies, and another three that appeared twice-weekly; there were not yet any provincial dailies. Much regional and national news was disseminated via the capital by simply copying it from paper to paper and sending it to and fro on the remarkably efficient mail coach system (the stamp tax included postage). 'In the provinces in 1821', writes Donald Read, 'most newspapers were still no more than a mixture of advertisements, local news and clippings from the London press, without any pretension to express or to influence local opinion through systematic editorial writing.'[12]

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Philips classed twenty-eight of these provincial titles as 'independent', which meant critical of government, including the *Chester Guardian*, the *Sheffield Iris*, Baines's *Leeds Mercury*, Smith's *Liverpool Mercury* and the long-established *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*. There was generally little pretence at balance. Most large towns had both a government (or 'ministerial') paper and an opposition one. They were usually deeply partisan; opposing views or inconvenient facts were simply ignored, and debates were conducted by papers shouting past each other. Out of every seven newspapers, reckoned Philips, two were strongly ministerial, three were 'moderate supporters of government', and two were independent. Nearly all were subject to some government influence, if not by direct bribery and personal influence then by the selective distribution of government advertising.

The Regency press was far from free and there was no consensus that it should be. Newspapers were regarded with suspicion, their circulation restricted by the Stamp Act of 1712 which required that every regular publication carrying news be printed on paper with an official stamp, which rose to a hefty 4*d*. per newspaper by 1815. This provided a legal definition of a newspaper, and gave force to the assumption that the circulation of news should be restricted to propertied citizens with a legitimate interest in public affairs. As the Prime Minister Lord North had put it in 1776, reading the news arose largely from idle curiosity and 'was a species of luxury that ought to be taxed'.[13] Book publishing in this period, writes William St Clair, operated under a 'regime of high prices, small sales, and modest readerships', with new books beyond the pockets of working-class readers.[14] The common assumption that literacy was expanding along with everything else in the industrial revolution period is not borne out by closer examination. Thanks in part to conservative measures to block the spread of literacy to the lower orders, the early nineteenth century saw an overall decline in literacy levels, particularly in the industrial districts whose migrants came with lower levels of literacy. On the other hand, rapidly rising populations increased the total number of readers, and towns like Stockport with good Sunday schools acted as engines of literacy.[15]

Restrictions tightened markedly in response to the French revolution and the subsequent wars against France (1793–1815). The 1798–99 legislation 'for preventing the mischiefs arising from the printing and publishing newspapers' forced the registration of every printing press, newspaper, printer and publisher in the country. The operation of the laws on libel and sedition was extended to include distributors and sellers. The government-supported *Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1801 denounced the wide circulation of newspapers as 'a calamity most deeply to be deplored'. Cobbett, when a loyalist in 1807, had regarded newspapers as 'vehicles of falsehood and bad principles', and argued that labourers should not be educated to read them. 'You must curb the press or it will destroy the constitution of the country' declared the Poet Laureate Robert Southey in 1810. The press, he argued, gave rootless people a dangerous sense of empowerment: 'they know enough of what is passing in the world to think themselves politicians . . . they are aware of their own number'.[16]

For the Tory minister William Windham, press reporting of Parliament played to 'the propensity of vulgar minds . . . to form premature and intemperate decisions'

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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without attending to serious debates. The Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, complained that the press was 'the most malignant and formidable enemy to the Constitution', and as soon as the Napoleonic wars were over the stamp duty was increased.[17] Even opposition Whigs equated the popular press with the clamour of the crowd. *The Times* itself complained in 1817 that reading Cobbett's *Register* made poor people 'the dupes . . . of the basest and most profligate of men'. The defence counsel to the Pentrich rebels of 1817, the politically obsequious John Cross of Manchester, argued in mitigation that they had been agitated by Cobbett's 'malignant and diabolical' *Address to the Journeymen and Labourers* in the first issue of his *Twopenny Trash*: 'poor, miserable hawkers, wanting bread, were going up and down the country selling 44,000 of the most mischievous publications that were ever put into the hand of man'.[18]

In March 1817 the Home Secretary issued a circular to all the county lord lieutenants urging magistrates to use the Hawkers and Pedlars Act to arrest anyone suspected of selling 'blasphemous and seditious pamphlets and writings' without a licence, prompting a wave of local prosecutions. Magistrates' powers were vigorously contested but even an unsuccessful prosecution could ruin a small business. As Philip Harling explains, 'It was simply easier to harass vendors than to harass authors. The government was mainly interested in breaking the supply chain by putting stress upon its weakest links, and it was less interested in imprisoning vendors than in scaring them out of business.'[19]

In real terms the price of a newspaper was as high as it had ever been. The fourpenny stamp duty pushed the standard price for a newspaper to 7*d*. – half a day's wages for a low-paid worker. This was, as a modern *Guardian* editorial put it, 'the severest of paywalls'; many middle-class households with servants could not run to a daily paper.[20] There was a tax on raw paper, a further tax of 3*s*. 6*d*. on every advertisement, and restrictions (albeit largely ignored) on the hiring out of newspapers. Many newspapers relied on either government or opposition support to survive; the *Manchester Observer* had neither. Notwithstanding the economies of scale that came with steam printing and rising population, the circulation of newspapers per head was static for twenty years after 1815; with rising population, however, this still translated into sizeable rises in the pool of newspaper readers.[21] These were multiplied by listeners: the Oldham militia captain William Chippendale reported in December 1816 on the local reformers:

> They have taken four or five empty Rooms for the Purpose of reading Cobbett in. The lower classes are invited to attend and Admission is gratuitous. One or more of the Leaders attend and perform the office of reading which is generally accompanied by a short commentary.[22]

Manchester was a particularly hostile environment for reformers, governed by a high Tory oligarchy through an overlapping cluster of institutions with little scope for effective dissent, backed up by intrusive police surveillance and a hawkish magistracy; 'Manchester law' was notorious. Manchester had its Exchange Newsroom where well-heeled subscribers could read the press, but it rejected opposition papers; after Peterloo even *The Times* was cancelled.[23] Three of the five weeklies were Tory,

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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led by *Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle*, with a circulation around 3,000, 'a very old established & respectable paper that has always been remarkable for its good sense & loyalty' according to the magistrate James Norris.[24] The other Tory papers were Joseph Harrop's *Manchester Mercury*, founded in 1752, and Joseph Aston's struggling *Exchange Herald*, founded in 1809. Aston had started as a reformer, but turned loyalist and was regarded by his former allies as a 'servile and cringing sycophant'.[25] In August 1819 the *Observer* claimed that the *Exchange Herald* had a circulation of only 130 copies so that 'the very existence of his paper is unknown three streets from the office at which it is published'.[26]

A reforming paper had been started in Manchester in 1792: the *Manchester Herald*, supported by the middle-class Manchester Constitutional Association. It lasted barely twelve months, enduring several days of church-and-king rioting directed against its offices, disturbances that were encouraged by the authorities. In the end its two editors, faced with no fewer than five state prosecutions, fled the country.[27] The enduring opposition paper was *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*, a canny survivor of wartime repression whose editors William Cowdroy, father and son, were mysteriously unafraid of the authorities. Archibald Prentice wrote for it after his arrival in Manchester in 1815, alongside the future *Manchester Guardian* founder John Edward Taylor. 'We somewhat restrained the expression of our thoughts in order that he might not be prosecuted by the government', recalled Prentice. 'I sometimes said to him [the editor, William Cowdroy junior], "Are you not afraid of being indicted for seditious libels?" "Not I," was his usual reply: "write away."'[28] The *Gazette* maintained a consistent alternative stance throughout the wars and beyond, at a time when other papers lacked any kind of critical edge, although it remained fearful of crowds and withheld support for the radical mass movement. Its bluntest statements were put in the mouths of working-class characters in comic dialogues, speaking in Lancashire dialect.[29]

There was another attempt to publish a reforming paper, *The Courier, or Manchester Advertiser*. Its first issue on 4 January 1817 claimed (predictably) to be above party, to have an 'ardent attachment to the principles of the British Constitution', and to support both state and subject, governors and governed. But it also made a point of declaring against 'any attempt to wrest the laws to sanction oppression, or to give impunity to abuses' and its founders were Citizen Howarth Cowdroy (the radically named brother of the editor of the *Gazette*) and William Rathbone, together with Thomas Rogerson, in Market Place.[30] 'Persons at a distance can form no adequate idea from the Manchester Newspapers, of the transactions in this town', complained a correspondent at the height of the bitter cotton strikes of 1818. 'The Editors seldom give themselves the trouble to collect the particulars of anything remarkable in the town, but will either give a long speculative opinion of their own upon the subject, or perhaps say nothing about it.'[31] The radical *Manchester Spectator* was more succinct: 'here . . . the Press has been converted into an engine of slavery'.[32]

From the beginning the *Manchester Observer* was different. It systematically promoted the core radical campaign for universal suffrage, annual Parliaments and vote by ballot. Its stamped status made it unusual among radical papers. A number of London-based weekly journals, circulating in the provinces, promoted the radical

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agenda: Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, Sherwin's *Republican/Political Register* (taken over in 1819 by Richard Carlile), and Wade's *Gorgon*. They would be joined after Peterloo by a crop of short-lived titles such as the *Democratic Recorder, White Hat, London Alfred, Medusa* and *Cap of Liberty*. None of these were stamped newspapers; what they offered was essentially political commentary, with elements of news smuggled into editorials, letters, satires and copies of resolutions passed at meetings (which may explain why resolutions were so wordy). The exception was William Cobbett's long-established *Weekly Political Register* (1802–36), an expensive London-based newspaper, migrating from Tory to radical, its price restricting its circulation to the propertied classes. Cobbett's innovation to reach the masses in early November 1816 was to put his own editorial commentary into the central pages and sell this separately, unstamped, for 2*d*. His *Twopenny Trash*, as he proudly called it, ran for three years and sold an unprecedented 40–50,000 copies of its famous first issue, before settling down in 1817 to around 8,000.[33]

Cobbett's publications were fed through an expanded network of agents and pedlars which provided a national distribution system for radical publications of all kinds. Thomas Wooler's *Black Dwarf* ran for seven years (1817–24) with a circulation of up to twelve thousand. In its early years it was aligned with the London Spenceans, a group of Soho-based radical activists outside the mainstream, but it was also supported by the constitutionalist Cartwright whose plans the Spenceans sought to turn in an insurgent direction. It was essentially a journal of satirical commentary, appearing in quarto format, but it did influence the radical agenda by well-timed campaigns against petitioning the House of Commons and in favour of remonstrances to the throne, backed up by mass direct action.[34] A more direct comparison with the *Manchester Observer* is provided by Wooler's stamped Sunday newspaper, *Wooler's British Gazette*, which ran for four years from 1819 to 1822 and sold for 8½*d*., well above the working-class pocket. Its weekly sales were 2,000 in 1819 falling to 1,200 in 1821, when it amalgamated with the *Manchester Observer* in a novel metropolitan-provincial partnership.[35] The *Manchester Observer* seems to have been unique as a stamped regional radical newspaper, with a full range of local, regional, national and even international coverage alongside court reports, sporting and commercial news, poetry, reviews and advertisements.

Two of the repressive Six Acts which followed Peterloo at the end of 1819 were directed at the press: the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act and the Newspaper Stamp Duties Act, directed against what Lord Ellenborough called 'a pauper press . . . administering to the prejudices and passions of a mob'. It plugged the *Twopenny Trash* loophole by defining a newspaper as any publication containing news *or comment* on matters of church or state, of one or two sheets, sold for 6*d*. or less (plus duty), and appearing at greater than monthly frequency. All newspaper printers and publishers had to find a bond of up to £200 (£300 in London) in order to continue; this was twenty times the cost of an iron press. As the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, explained, 'It was not directed against the respectable body of booksellers and printers, but against those persons who had intruded themselves into that class, and who [had] neither property, respectability, nor responsibility.' The effect

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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on the radical press was devastating. The price of Cobbett's relaunched *Twopenny Trash* rose to 6*d*., causing a sharp decline in sales and effectively restricting them to booksellers, while the stamped *Political Register* was reintroduced at a price of a shilling. In January 1820 the *Black Dwarf* raised its price from 4*d*. to 6*d*., shrank in size to a single-column pamphlet, and reduced its political coverage still further. Most other radical papers simply folded, but somehow the *Manchester Observer* kept going at its old price of 7*d*.[36]

The most prosperous working people might purchase the *Manchester Observer* but most would have relied on borrowed copies, passed around or read aloud, often in those few pubs whose landlords were able to fend off the consequent threat to their licences. Free loyalist literature, complained the *Observer* in January 1818, was 'forced into all the alehouses in this town without charge to the landlords'.[37] Weavers bringing their finished cloth to Manchester on Saturdays, and manufacturers from the district visiting their warehouses and clients on Mondays, were among the regular readers. The radical brushmaker Joseph Johnson, who invested in the *Observer*, let people read copies at his shop in Shude Hill, which functioned as a simple newsroom; he called it 'The Temple of Reason'. A Hollinwood hat manufacturer told the York Peterloo trial how he dropped by about a dozen times in a year 'for the purpose of hearing news', often looking at the paper which he also saw at other places.[38] Another witness said that the radical Middleton weaver Samuel Bamford 'was noticed for reading newspapers, and so on. Had heard him read *The Manchester Observer* in his own house.'[39]

When the shortage of silver coin early in 1819 caused more people than usual to be paid their wages in pubs to get change, the magistrates reported: 'Whilst the workpeople are thus forced together, they are equally the dupes of itinerant & alehouse politicians of which there is an ample supply in this town & the neighbourhood. The Manchester Observer, the Black Dwarf &c. &c are sought for & read with avidity.' Henry Hobhouse, the senior official at the Home Office, arranged for £10,000 worth of silver coin to be supplied by the Royal Mint to relieve the shortage in Manchester. Security trumped sound money.[40] Each copy of a provincial paper was reckoned to be read on average by seven or eight people, which for the *Observer* at its reported peak sale of 4–6,000 suggests a readership of 30–40,000. Other estimates range up to twenty readers per copy, which is credible for some copies though probably not as an average. In these ways the radical *Manchester Observer* survived and even flourished in ultra-loyalist Manchester (**Figure 1**).

2. Mark Wardle 1818–19

'The *Manchester Observer* will be an independent journal . . . conducted on constitutional principles, and in a firm and temperate manner . . . neither imposed upon by names, nor influenced by factions.' Thus ran the flier announcing the new paper at the start of January 1818.[41] The proprietor was Thomas Rogerson of 11 Market Place, who advertised himself as 'bookseller, printer, stationer, binder, patent medicine vender, &c'. Rogerson was born in Preston, and worked as a printer and

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Manchester Observer;
Or LITERARY, COMMERCIAL, AND POLITICAL REGISTER.
Price 7d. Ready Money. 8s. per Quarter in Credit. If paid in Advance—29s. 6d. per Year.
No. 19. SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1818. Vol. I.

Figure 1 Masthead, *Manchester Observer*, 9 May 1818 (John Rylands Library, Manchester, R227748, ©University of Manchester).

bookseller in Blackburn before coming to Manchester; later he was involved in the *Liverpool Mercury*.[42] The printer and editor was Mark Wardle, a local publisher of trade directories and the *Manchester Magazine* (1815–16).[43] The notice to the public in the first issue on 3 January 1818 promised to satisfy 'the demand, so generally made, for an *Independent Paper* . . . free from all party attachment', opposing both 'the encroachments of power' and 'the turbulence of anarchy'. 'Our cause is that of the People – our interest that of the Nation', declared Wardle. More widely, the paper embraced 'the progress of all useful knowledge' and 'the march of the human mind'. It also promised plenty of local information (and there was a good range of adverts for local shops and businesses), along with literature, art and science, all 'highly acceptable to the statesman and the philosopher' and to 'manufacturing and commercial interests' (**Figure 2**). This all reads like the later prospectus of the *Manchester Guardian*, although the *Observer* would be very different. Wardle and Rogerson had dabbled in radical publishing before. In January 1815 Wardle and Pratt printed for another publisher a mock *Political Catechism*, addressed to the Prime Minister Lord Liverpool and the Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh by 'An Englishman'.[44] In January 1817 Wardle and Rogerson began *The Manchester Political Register, or Reformers' Repository*, which ran for less than three months between January and March 1817, launched unfortunately at the same time as the weekly *Courier, or Manchester General Advertiser* in which Rogerson was also a partner. It covered the climax of the national radical movement for parliamentary reform, disappearing as soon as emergency legislation was enacted. The *Manchester Political Register* proclaimed itself as an independent voice for 'all good and enlightened citizens'. 'The *Tories* have four papers, the *Whigs* have two; but the People have none!' declared an editorial; the *Register* was for 'the Cause of the People, and a Free Press'.[45] The paper's office was in 'Gillett's entry, near the Exchange, Market-street'. It was not properly a newspaper but a pamphlet-sized weekly compendium of commentary and political information, sold unstamped for 4*d*. every Saturday – like *Sherwin's Political Register*. It was used to communicate the resolutions and minutes of local reform meetings, which risked encroaching into stamped news territory. It could not report local news as such, but a comment on 1 February made clear its position:

> Manchester is now the laughing stock of England: it is confessedly disgraced by Police meetings and swearing-in meetings which have no other tendency than to

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Figure 2 Advertisement for a Manchester drapery store, *Manchester Observer*, 14 March 1818, p. 87 (John Rylands Library, R229748, © University of Manchester).

> promote disunion among the people, and to disturb the tranquillity of the town . . . If the Prince Regent's ministers were as arbitrary and despotic as the municipal officers of Manchester, Turkey would be a land of liberty, compared with England.

A copy of the next issue was the first of many forwarded by a dismayed Boroughreeve of Manchester to the Home Office, whether for information or for prosecution is unclear.[46]

The arrival of the *Manchester Observer* in January 1818 coincided with a revival of the radical cause. In 1816–17 a national petitioning campaign for parliamentary reform had failed to get a serious hearing from the House of Commons despite mustering close to a million signatures on over seven hundred petitions. Several abortive risings had followed, the first two in Manchester in March 1817: the attempted march of the 'blanketeers' to London and the mysterious 'Ardwick rising' three weeks later. The London-based *Black Dwarf* had urged the rebels on, seeking to recruit in the north the organised manpower which had been lacking in the capital. Penetrated by spies, decapitated by arrests, and mired in conspiracy, the Manchester radical movement collapsed.[47] As its activists were released in early 1818 they regrouped

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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around the new *Manchester Observer*. The paper helped to create a genuine mass movement, regional in its base, English in its rhetoric, and constitutionalist in its ideals. While acting as a strategic link with the London movement the *Observer* consistently denounced spies and warned against conspiracy. Wardle was able to report on the release of the prisoners of 1817, including Thomas Evans of London, a future proprietor of the *Observer*. Wardle marked the triumphant acquittal in London of William Hone from his three trials for libel by reprinting some of his blasphemous verses. This was too much for the proprietor Thomas Rogerson, who inserted his own notice to the public:

> When I undertook to publish the Manchester Observer, it was with a view of rendering it locally and generally acceptable as a vehicle of comment and literary information; but as the Editor has diverted from my design, and conducted it in a manner so opposite to my intention and expectations, I must cease to be the Publisher.[48]

Wardle defended himself the following week, saying he had never 'deviated from his engagements'. He later gave his side of what had happened.

> In January 1818, when the 'Manchester Observer' made its first appearance, I had made arrangements with Mr Thomas Rogerson, for its regular and steady production, I left an old-established office, to join him at his shop, in the Market Place. Mr Rogerson, for reasons not necessary to be state here, gave up the concern, the whole management of which devolved upon myself,[49]

The new publisher was Robert Robertson, stationer, 76 Market Street, with Wardle as the printer, but this arrangement did not last. From 21 March Wardle was also listed as the publisher, from 'Pool St, near Swan Inn, Market St', convenient for the coming and going of the mail coaches.[50]

When Wardle took over the *Manchester Observer* it was still making a loss, and from the beginning the paper had to struggle against attempts by the authorities to close it down. In the spring of 1817 Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth had issued a circular to the authorities in each county encouraging them to arrest and prosecute the writers, publishers and sellers of 'blasphemous and seditious pamphlets and writings'. With politically sympathetic London juries having acquitted some high-profile publishers such as William Hone and Thomas Wooler, the government was looking to provincial authorities to act against the radical press, and loyalist Lancashire was particularly trustworthy.[51] Publicans in Manchester, Stockport and Bolton who took in the *Observer* for their customers were warned by magistrates and faced losing their licences. 'The publican is booked, and the first trivial circumstance on which he can be turned round upon commonly leads to his dismissal from business,' claimed the paper. 'How pitiful are these attempts to stop the progress of truth'.[52] The *Observer* fell seriously foul of the authorities during the cotton strikes of 1818 in Stockport and Manchester. In July John Lloyd, the energetic clerk to the senior Stockport magistrate Charles Prescot, wrote to the Home Office: 'The Manchester Observer contains a most infamous libel relative to the proceeds at Stockport – Mr Harrison the Justice

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is called an "Infamous Liar!"'[53] The military commander of the Northern District, Sir John Byng, was also outraged and sent a copy of the 25 July edition to the Home Office, urging prosecution for a letter about the strike signed 'J. B'.[54] The Manchester stipendiary magistrate James Norris interviewed Wardle and reported:

> The libel was traced to Bagguley. I have seen the envelope in the hands of Wardle the Proprietor of the Observer Paper in the handwriting & under the signature of Bagguley & the Editor offers to give evidence of this & allowed me to take a copy . . . Mr Harrison agrees to prosecute.

John Bagguley, an 18-year-old turner and tiler, had emerged in 1817 as a popular radical orator, and his role in urging on the march of the Blanketeers earned him nine months' imprisonment without trial. He was now trying to rally the striking Stockport spinners and weavers behind the cause of parliamentary reform. Wardle thought he had lost Bagguley's letter but Lloyd or Norris somehow obtained it, for it lies among the Home Office papers along with a covering letter from Bagguley inviting Wardle to 'select the Wheat and burn the Chaff'.[55] A copy was made and the offending parts marked up by Lloyd for the attention of the crown lawyers.

The Home Office took a close interest in the case. Henry Hobhouse, Sidmouth's permanent under-secretary, wrote to Lloyd:

> If the article in the Manchester Observer is very mischievous, let an Indictment be presented against the Editor and Publisher at the ensuing Assizes, as a private Prosecution of Mr Harrison and the other Magistrates, and they shall afterwards be borne harmless in the Expense. Take care to let the Indictment be correctly drawn.

Two days later Hobhouse referred Lloyd to the Attorney General for confidential advice: 'You ought not to stir, unless you can pretty well depend on a Lancashire Jury', wrote Hobhouse. 'I think we should be pretty certain of conviction for the Lancaster juries are most respectable', Lloyd assured him. Hobhouse continued to fret. 'If you don't take great care, Wardle will allow Bagguley to slip through your fingers, by playing some Trick respecting his Evidence', he added. 'Take care that the Libel is correctly set out in the Indictment', for any slip-up 'would afford a triumph to the Seditious'.[56] But when Lloyd sought to get Wardle to swear his evidence, he was frustrated. '[Wardle] is a Sot or Drunkard, & I had to send round to have him found. He was met with at a Tavern drunk. I therefore thought it best not to have anything to do with him in that state.' Lloyd eventually extracted Wardle's evidence, only to find that he had printed an objectionable address from Bagguley signed 'A Weaver', and inserted another of Bagguley's letters in the latest *Observer*.[57] Then came another setback: the Attorney General advised that the prosecution was unlikely to succeed. Lloyd was 'at a loss', but decided to make the best of it.

> I shall have Wardle with me this morning & to him I shall say that Counsel advise proceedings against him but as I had brought him as a Witness I wou'd not turn round upon him and prosecute him for the particular articles complained of by Mr Harrison. He continues to lay himself open & the last weeks paper contains

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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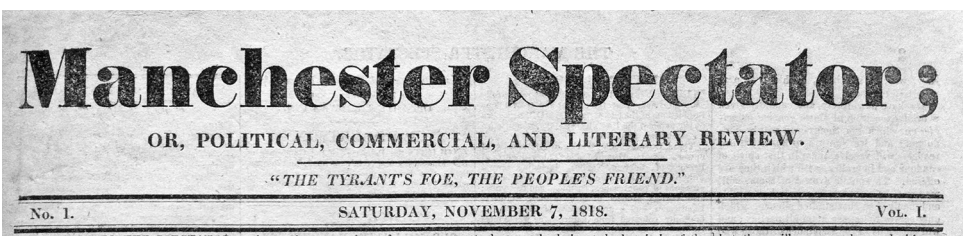
> another libellous letter of Bagguley . . . I must have some promise from or change in him as the condition of withholding the prosecution.

It worked. 'He appeared sensible of the favour and there was a promise made to Mr Dawson (one of our printers present) to become circumspect.'[58] Wardle delivered on his promise. "I have written a paragraph for Wardle to put into his Observer Paper and I have now got such an ascendancy over him that he will follow my dictates (for a time at least)', wrote Lloyd the next day. The following Saturday's edition provided proof. 'Wardle appears to have profited by my admonition, as this day's paper will convince you & I send it . . . Wardle disclaims any acquaintance with either Bagguley or Drummond, and promised to hold no conversation with them on the subject should they enquire or suspect any thing.' A week later Lloyd remained satisfied that Wardle was 'pretty well behaved'.[59] The *Observer*'s coverage of the cotton strikes from this period was indeed uncharacteristically thin, leaving other papers to cover their turbulent final stages and the prosecution of the leaders.

Wardle's compromised *Observer* soon faced competition from the left. On 18 November Norris wrote to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth:

> We have no fewer than three papers published on a Saturday in this town all of the most inflammatory and dangerous tendency & published for the sole purpose of poisoning the minds of the lower classes. They are called 'Cowdroys Manchester Gazette', 'The Manchester Observer' which has been published about 12 months and the 'Manchester Spectator' the second number of which appeared on Saturday last. This paper it is understood is edited by two men of the name of Whitworth of broken fortunes & Knight the reformer . . . Great pains are taken by them to disseminate their poison. Wroe the bookseller in this town & after whom Mr Clive [under-secretary at the Home Office] made some inquiries is the most active in this part of the business.[60]


Manchester Spectator;

OR, POLITICAL, COMMERCIAL, AND LITERARY REVIEW.

"THE TYRANT'S FOE, THE PEOPLE'S FRIEND."

No. 1. SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1818. Vol. I.

Figure 3 Masthead, *Manchester Spectator*, 7 November 1818 (Chetham's Library, Manchester, AB.2 (13), Courtesy of Chetham's Library).

A copy of the first number of the *Manchester Spectator; or, Political, Commercial, and Literary Review*, subtitled 'The Tyrant's Foe, the People's Friend', survives in Chetham's Library (**Figure 3**). It appeared on 7 November 1818, printed and published by Thomas Wilkinson for unnamed 'proprietors'. The two editors mentioned by Norris were John Knight, the veteran Manchester reformer, and Nicholas

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Whitworth, a corn dealer active on the Police Commission who signed the letter inviting Henry Hunt to Manchester for the first time in January 1819.[61] The *Spectator*'s opening prospectus addressed 'The Friends of a Free Press and of rational Liberty', and enthused about the 'march of intellect':

> This general improvement in political knowledge, is particularly observable in this populous district. All around us the people are in motion; the public mind is in full march; and it requires only the aid of a free and enlightened press to produce the most important results. To furnish this highly necessary support, will be our unceasing study; on this we have formed the most deliberate resolution; and by this determination we shall be governed, whatever may be the consequences. Too long have the banners of corruption waved over the walls of this degraded and insulted Town: it is time that they should be surmounted by the flag of liberty. It is here that the Press has been converted into an engine of slavery.[62]

This suggests that the writer was aware that Wardle was under the thumb of Lloyd. An eight-point statement asserted the principles of equal rights, the people as the source of power, the right of the people 'to change and modify their Constitution, agreeably to the will of the majority', and representative government. In this campaign the press was central: 'The Press is the great palladium of our rights, and therefore ought to be free. An independent paper should expose all the local as well as public abuses, which may affect the character or the interests of the community.' The paper expected prosecution, which it vowed to face with 'a firm confidence in the verdict of an English jury'. This confidence was to be severely tested. The *Spectator* itself does not seem to have survived past the second number, but it prompted the *Observer* to adopt a more radical line and within a few months Wroe had taken it over.

At the beginning of 1819, as the reform movement revived with an open-air meeting in Oldham, Chippendale's agent 'No. 2' was cultivating a connection with James Wroe.[63] Fletcher's agent 'B' reported that Wroe's future chief reporter J. T. Saxton 'caught the attention of the people' at Oldham and added: 'There is a subscription on foot to purchess a printing press and it is to be called the peoples press and to be under management of the same Saxton it is he who prints so many political songs'.[64] By early January Wardle stiffened his editorial stance in response. The Boroughreeve and constables of Manchester sent Sidmouth the issues of the *Observer* for 5 and 19 December, now claiming the second highest circulation in Manchester – a figure assisted by the sixty copies of one issue which they purchased in order to gain evidence that Wardle was evading the stamp duty. 'Scarcely a week goes by without its containing some violent attack on His Majesty's Government and the most valued Institutions of the country, in addition to the foulest calumnies and scandalous insinuations against the public authorities of this place.' One piece headed 'Manchester' on 19 December, they complained, libelled the constitution. This must have been the first of William Ogden's 'Letters to the Treason-Hunting Municipality of Manchester', whose real offence was attacking the magistrates rather than the constitution.[65] Sidmouth readily agreed that the paper should be prosecuted, and

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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promised to take measures against the sale of unstamped copies.[66] At the same time his office was requesting copies to keep itself informed of radical activity.[67] 'As you are in the habit of seeing the Observer (Manchr)', Chippendale wrote to Col. Fletcher on 9 February 1819, 'you are consequently aware of the Meeting which took place at Royton yesterday'.[68]

In January 1819 the *Observer*'s influence was boosted by the first visit of the radical orator Henry Hunt to Manchester, seven months before his more famous visit to the great reform meeting in August. On 18 January Hunt processed from Stockport into Manchester, and addressed a meeting of some ten thousand people on St Peter's Field, followed by a celebratory dinner. 'Mr Wardle, the intrepid proprietor of the Manchester Observer' was toasted, and in reply pledged his paper would continue to combat corruption 'as long as you continue to assist me'. Wroe was among those on the hustings, along with Joseph Johnson, a financial backer of the *Observer*.[69] A few days later Hunt and three associates hired a box at the Theatre Royal and became involved in a brawl with Hussars over their refusal to show sufficient respect to the national anthem. This in turn spilled over into a poster war and a legal action. Interestingly, all three of Hunt's companions on that night – Thomas Chapman, Nicholas Whitworth and Joseph Johnson – were connected with the radical press. The Oldham militia captain William Chippendale acknowledged the *Observer*'s accurate reporting of Hunt's Manchester speech: 'The Report given in the Manchester Observer agrees so nearly with the accounts received from my informants upon the occasion that it is quite unnecessary to transmit them', he wrote. But he noted that the paper left out William Fitton's statement that 'we want the Heads of His Majesty's Ministers and particularly of King Sidmouth in atonement for the murdered men at Derby'.[70] Norris thought the issue of 30 January gave 'a tolerably fair account' of the court proceedings over the theatre riot.[71] The magistrate Thomas Jackson, however, thought 'the vile paper' guilty of 'the most gross falsehoods' in claiming that the Earl of Uxbridge, a spectator throughout, had assaulted Hunt. His comment to the Postmaster General is revealing of the way government was understood to manage the press.

> I have just read the paper giving an account of last Monday's proceedings & its enough to make one shudder at the speeches. You will excuse the liberty of my again requesting you to see that the Editor of the Sun Paper will bestow a part of it to confute the *Observer*.[72]

A copy of the paper was sent to the Home Office. The government's law officers recommended that it be prosecuted for comments 'libellous upon His Majesty's Ministers and upon the house of Commons', and for Hunt's speech denouncing those responsible for the execution of the Derbyshire rebels as 'bloody unfeeling Murderers'. But they didn't sound quite sure: 'We think a jury ought to convict the publisher' because 'the jury ought to decide according to law.'[73] On 3 February the Manchester authorities were informed of the decision to prosecute.[74] Wardle promptly ran off thousands of copies of Hunt's speech and posted them over the town, 'as an incitement to the population of this district to follow the example

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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of revolutionary France' complained Norris.[75] The *Observer* office that day was crowded with customers and they ran out of stamped sheets. 'A few of this week's impression is printed on unstamped paper. The duty will be paid to the Stamp Office', explained Wardle.[76] The authorities judged that nearly all were unstamped and again sent out agents to buy further copies to pass to the town's Stamp Office.[77] Wardle was obliged to regulate his production by the supply of stamps. A small notice posted on the office on 6 February 1819 read:

> Observer Office, Saturday night, 8 o'clock.
> 200 stamps have just come to hand, and are in the press, which will be ready for delivery early on Monday morning.

Not long afterwards the paper was secreting political leaflets in its pages, another supposed 'fraud upon the Post Office'.[78]

Wardle's problem seems to have been not so much excess demand as lack of ready cash, exacerbated by pressure from the Stamp Office to pay off arrears. He had also fallen into arrears with advertisement duty, and after being served with a notice to pay was in danger of having his presses seized. He applied to a local businessman, Thomas Chapman, for a loan, and agreed in return to mortgage the newspaper to him.[79] The bond, dated 26 January, was between Mark Wardle of Swan St, Manchester, letterpress printer, and Thomas Chapman of Manchester, fruiterer. Wardle in effect sold both the *Manchester Observer* and his printing business to Chapman for £118. He also undertook not to set up any newspaper, periodical or printing works within ten miles of Manchester, and agreed to be bound in the sum of £100 to honour the contract. Wardle was kept on 'to conduct the paper' as editor at a salary of £2 per week.[80] Chapman's name was entered at the Stamp Office as proprietor. Thus, while Wardle continued to determine the content, Chapman took the risk of running a paper which the government was already in the process of prosecuting.

3. Thomas Chapman, 1819

Who was Thomas Chapman, and why was he willing to take on the risk of running the *Manchester Observer*? The sale deed of the *Observer* described him as a fruiterer (his shop was in Fennel St); a spy dismissed him as 'Mr Chapman the orange dealer'. He was later caricatured as 'fruiter, dealer & Chapman' (a chapman being a common pedlar), cheerleading for Hunt in an 1822 loyalist satirical paper, the *Manchester Comet*. In 1814–15 he served as a town beadle under Joseph Nadin. When late in 1819 he stood bail of £150 for the publisher James Wroe he stated that he owned twenty-six houses.[81] His property qualified him to act as a member of the Manchester Police Commission, and he was also a regular attender at the quarterly meetings of the parish vestry calling for scrutiny of the constables' accounts. He was a thorn in the side of the Manchester's high Tory governing network. At one especially heated vestry meeting in the Collegiate church in the spring of 1818 Chapman successfully got the constables' accounts voted down, whereupon (reported the *Observer*) the

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Reverend Charles Ethelston 'abused Mr Chapman in the grossest language' and a 'disgraceful vituperation' ensued.[82]

In late 1818, when Chapman was believed to be the author of a letter in the *Manchester Observer* alleging that market officials were profiting from the disposal of butter seized for being of short weight, he received a visit from a market looker who used 'very abusive language'. Three market lookers afterwards descended on his fruiterer's shop to inspect his weights and measures, finding tiny faults and extending their inspection to two defunct sets used as display props. Chapman suspected that their own balances were weighted with concealed smears of fat.[83] The loyalist *Manchester Chronicle* consistently denounced Chapman as an incendiary and a revolutionist, and Chapman gave back as good as he got.[84] He was physically brave, accompanying Henry Hunt to the theatre on his controversial first visit to Manchester in January 1819 and fighting with the Hussars who tried to turn them out. He himself was insulted by a special constable named Torr, who said, 'Damn your eyes, Chapman, you have been the cause of much disturbance in this town before; I should like to give you a good milling.'[85] Hunt later described Chapman as 'one of the very best men and most honest advocates of Liberty in the kingdom . . . sincere and bold in public, and kind, generous, and open-hearted in private.'[86]

The next public reform meeting after Hunt's visit, at Royton, resolved to thank Chapman 'for his boldness' in coming forth to conduct the Observer Newspaper, after the desperate attempts that have been made to ruin Mr Wardle, the late Proprietor'.[87] At the meeting, 'Mr F.[itton] commented with great warmth upon the paltry means the tools of Government had used to suppress this valuable publication. He paid the highest compliments to the undoubted Patriotism of Mr. Wardle.'[88] Wardle's paper certainly had a campaigning side. It advertised high-quality engraved prints of Henry Hunt (albeit up-market ones, for 7–9*s*. each), and it acted as a collection point for donations to the newly opened radical Union Sunday School.[89] Bagguley, Drummond and Johnston, three radicals imprisoned in Chester Castle, received the paper every week.[90] Chapman's *Observer*, doubtless assisted by its new owner's business sense, expanded its network of country agents rapidly as the radical movement itself began to surge. By April there were agents in Bury, Blackburn, Chorley, Wigan, Preston and Liverpool, and by May in Rochdale, Huddersfield, Burnley, Stockport and Warrington, as well as two London agents in Warwick Square and Fleet Street.[91] Despite its increased distribution, the paper became less like a campaigning bulletin and more like a middle-class journal. There was less news of the radical movement locally, and it tended to come in the form of public notices and lists of resolutions rather than detailed reports. There was, however, increased coverage of local government, following Chapman's own campaign, and the space was made up by articles on literature (eighteenth-century rather than romantic) and on historical topics with contemporary parallels.

The paper also consistently published new poetry, typically two or three poems a week for the best part of four years. The cheaper local newspapers of the 1850s and after would become the leading publishers of Victorian poetry, but the *Manchester Observer* was already fulfilling that role for the radical movement.[92] Much of it was in

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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some way political, and much of it came from the readers. The first poem published in the *Observer* was a youthful squib by the Conservative politician George Canning entitled 'The Massacre of the Ducks', mocking political repression. There were also two anonymous items by Charles Lamb, 'On the Inconveniences of Being Hanged' and 'Song for the Coronation' of Queen Caroline.[93] Much of the verse published in the *Observer* was bombastic stuff, 'death or liberty' being a favourite theme. The greatest beneficiary of the *Observer*'s poetry column was Samuel Bamford, who owed his writing career to it. Although his first published poem, 'The Lancashire Hymn', had appeared in the *Black Dwarf*, it was the *Manchester Observer* that launched his poetical career, printing no fewer than twenty of his poems between 1818 and 1822, and generously reviewing his first published collection *The Weaver Boy* in 1819 (which was also printed at the *Observer* office) and then the longer *Miscellaneous Poetry* in 1821.[94] The paper also revived Cowdroy's practice of wrapping up blunt discussions of politics in broad Lancashire dialect, starting a series of sketches of 'Lancashire Politics' in March 1819. One published by Wardle as the mass platform movement was launched in Oldham and Ashton neatly summed up the core issue: 'whethur "the property o'th' Cuntry is the Cuntry," us owd Burke sed it wur, ur whether the *people* o'th Cuntry is the Cuntry'.[95]

The harassment of the paper continued. An excoriating editorial on 13 February complained that 'Every stratagem has been resorted to that *art, envy* and tyranny could devise to *suppress these columns* you, reader, now have before you.' Several publicans had been threatened with the loss of their licences for taking in the *Observer* and, the paper hinted broadly, post office clerks in the surrounding towns were stealing copies under orders from their employers. The following Saturday evening one of the 7th Hussars came to the office, bought two copies of the paper and asked if there were anything in it about the 7th Hussars. Receiving a non-committal answer, he replied: 'that scoundrel Cobbett ought to have had his b—dy neck stretched long ago!'[96] In Stockport in May a pub known for taking the *Observer* was entered by the town constable, William Birch, apparently drunk and accompanied by two special constables. He demanded to see the newspaper; the landlord said it was in use but offered him one of the two sheets. Birch then strode over to the man reading it, upset a jug of beer over the man's wife, brandished a poker at the landlord and threatened him with the loss of his licence. His companions dragged him away.[97]

In late February the magistrates resolved to prosecute the *Manchester Observer* for a libel in the issue of 6 February. In March they decided on a second prosecution for a libellous commentary on the sentences handed down to the leaders of the 1818 spinners' strike, who had been tried the previous month.[98] In March, however, explosive clashes at the Police Commission provided stronger grounds for prosecuting Chapman. The *Observer* had printed guidance for members of the commission on the correct procedure for challenging its management, and followed it up with a series of allegations. Taken together, they detailed instances of excessive charging for paving and gas pipes, claimed that the master of paving was moonlighting in broad daylight as a private contractor for the work he was paid to supervise, and claimed that contractors who sat on the commission were awarding themselves lucrative

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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contracts with the connivance of the treasurer, Thomas Fleming. The letters talked of bribery, peculation and 'robbing the town'.[99]

At the March 1819 meeting of the Police Commission there was a coordinated attack on Chapman, who was taken to be the editor. Thomas Withington, a former town constable, produced a copy of the *Observer* for 27 February which, he said, contained a libel against Fleming, and had it read out. He then proposed an inquiry into Fleming's conduct, which was carried unanimously. Chapman, realising this was a manoeuvre to make him reveal his sources, prevaricated, to cries of 'Shame! Scandalous! Infamous!' One Railton jumped onto the table and tried to seize from Chapman's pocket book a document, supposed to contain the information on which the report was based. A general brawl was averted only when the Boroughreeve took Chapman into custody, releasing him once things had died down. (After another incident in December, Chapman revealed that he had been carrying a pistol at the time, a habit ever since he had been threatened some time before. Railton was 'thrown into a most profound agitation' at the news that the man he had assaulted had been armed).[100] In the following week's edition Chapman promised to publish his evidence of corruption, making a defiant declaration.

> We know the *offence* we have committed, and we know well the nature of the Herculean task we have undertaken. We know the foulness of the *stable*; but we will cleanse it, or perish in the attempt. If the facts we have stated be true, then we repeat, that Manchester is the most infamously abused town in the kingdom . . . The whole interested host is against us. We have *spoken out*, the *truth* has alarmed them. The *dignity* of office, and the trappings of aristocracy, no longer screen their conduct from the public eye.[101]

Chapman then had writs for assault served not only on Railton but on the Boroughreeve Edward Clayton, the constable John Moore, and the son of the deputy constable, to appear at the August Assizes in Lancaster. Instead, it was Chapman who would find himself before the courts.

The same week Wardle was arrested at the *Observer* office and bound over to appear in King's Bench at start of Easter term for (he was told) 'a libel on government'. 'By the Lord!' exclaimed Wardle. ''Tis a libel to call it a government.' But 'for myself I care not – banishment, imprisonment – all the chains, bolts, and bars the puny despots have at their command, are to me "trifles light as air"'.[102] Wardle, now styled 'late Proprietor and Editor of the *Manchester Observer*', appeared in court on 29 April 1819, charged with a libel on the King and Parliament in the 19 December issue. The indictment failed to identify the libel as false, leaving the way open for Wardle to defend himself on the grounds that it was true.[103] The trial was postponed and hung over him throughout the summer.

On 21 May 1819 Thomas Chapman himself received a summons to the court of King's Bench in London to answer a charge of libel for a letter in the *Observer* of 6 February which denounced the severity of the two-year sentences imposed on the three weavers' leaders at Salford Quarter Sessions the previous September. 'Juries and Magistrates were instituted to prevent unreasonable retaliation and to

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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deal impartially with all offenders', said the writer, who went on to ask how they would be able to sleep at night 'when the cries of the prisoners . . . shall be eternally sounding . . . for vengeance'. The case was brought by ex officio information from the Crown, a procedure that placed the prosecution in the King's Bench under the control of the Attorney General and the verdict in the hands of a special jury of propertied citizens, similar to a grand jury. The defendant could be summoned without notice, required to raise very high sums for bail and kept waiting for long periods as the case was moved from the county assizes to Westminster and back again. If eventually acquitted, he was unable to recover the costs.

The government had abandoned the use of ex officio proceedings for libel for a time after being publicly humiliated in its attempt to prosecute William Hone in London in 1817; Lancashire, with its hawkish authorities and pliant juries, seems to have been selected to revive this procedure.[104] In his affidavit Chapman explained that the offending article had been inserted by Wardle as editor, without his knowledge, shortly after he had bought the paper. 'When the agent for the prosecution called on him, he expressed his readiness to give up the author, provided an assurance was given that he would not be prosecuted.' Having been set up by the Attorney General as a King's Bench case it was then sent back to Lancashire to be heard by a reliable Lancashire special jury. The QC was James Scarlett, who would later act as prosecuting counsel at the York Peterloo trial. Three more libel actions were later added at short notice arising from attacks in the 27 February edition on corruption in the Police Commission; the treasurer, Thomas Fleming, a commissioner and gas contractor named Williams, and Williams's business partner Peel, sued Chapman for £1,000 damages each.[105] Chapman had to wait until September for a hearing, in a case that would ultimately drag on for eighteen months.

At the same time, Chapman's *Observer* faced a challenge from a rival group of activists, consisting of the bookseller James Wroe, the veteran reformer and cotton manufacturer John Knight, the brushmaker Joseph Johnson of Shudehill, who provided financial support, and the reporter John Thacker Saxton. Saxton described the group as 'a set of men who are confessedly the enlightened advocates of universal toleration, but who cannot conscientiously restrict themselves to the prescribed diet of a set of *Modern Philosophers* in the enlightened age of 1819'. This was clearly a dig at the intellectual content of Chapman's *Observer*. Posters were put up advertising the 'Resolutions of a Meeting, composed . . . of a number of friends to liberty, for the purpose of establishing a People's Press'. The *Observer* (most likely in the words of its editor, Wardle) claimed the meeting was 'composed of five or six *Robin Hood Topers*, with a red nosed printer at their head, who is the framer, and prime mover, of this Utopian Scheme'.[106] This seems to have been a revival of the January scheme for a 'people's press', which had been put on hold after Chapman's purchase of the paper. Now Chapman, under pressure on all sides, sold the paper to Wroe's group.

The sale of the business was briefly announced in the 5 June edition, which stated that the new owner would honour all debts and receive all payments due at his office at 18 Market Street. But while Thomas Chapman had handed over the *Observer* with

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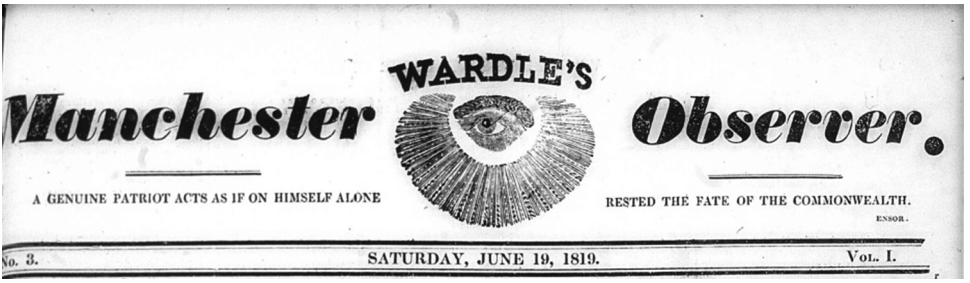

Figure 4 Masthead, *Wardle's Manchester Observer*, 19 June 1819 (Chetham's Library, AB.2 (20), Courtesy of Chetham's Library).

dignity, his erratic predecessor and editor Mark Wardle proved more difficult to dislodge. On 5 June he launched his own *Wardle's Manchester Observer* (**Figure 4**) from an address in 'Dog & Partridge entry, bottom of Market St' where it was printed by Richard Tomlinson. The publisher's address was given as 101 Market Street, and it was sold by J. Reddish, Market Place, and (it was claimed) agents in eleven other towns. The first issue carried a bitter editorial, detailing Wardle's difficulties since taking over the paper soon after its launch nearly eighteen months before.

> The receipts at this time were not equal to the disbursements. The little money advanced me by my friends was soon expended; and I was in arrears at the Stamp Office for my advertisement duty. In this dilemma, Mr Thomas Chapman kindly and disinterestedly stepped forward, discharged the debt, and took possession of the office. In this transaction, *it was expressly specified*, that Mr Chapman should hold the business for me, until my friends came forward, or until the proceeds enabled me to return the money which he had advanced.
>
> In this state the business proceeded for some time. Unfortunately, Mr Chapman's family and connections, were opposed to the politics of the paper, and became much alarmed at the proceedings commenced against him. Under these circumstances, he determined to quit the concern, more precipitately than he otherwise would have done, and I could not conveniently procure the money which he had advanced in the time he wished.
>
> At this period, Messrs Johnson and Wroe, came forward and purchased the concern. From that moment I was aware that my interest was sacrificed, and that my services would be dispensed with . . . I proposed to Mr Wroe to conduct the business as usual, and to take *half the profits*, whatever they might be, for my labour. This was refused me, and I was told that I had no right, title, or interest whatever, in the concern. On this I left the premises.
>
> I was not prepared for such a blow as this. Storms and tempest from without I could sit and smile at – but when treachery *enters the camp*, and in the shape of friends, attempts to rob me of my fair fame and fortune, I confess my heart sickens, and I sigh for the forlorn state of my unhappy country.

On top of this Wardle was arrested, taken to the New Bailey, and indicted for a libel on the government. He threatened that in the next issue 'an account shall be given

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of *Wroe, Johnson* and *Whitworth*, in the whole of this transaction', calling them 'pygmies'.[107] Wroe issued an angry handbill the same day.

> To the Public.
>
> A newspaper having made its way to the public this day, under the title of 'Wardle's Manchester Observer,' and distributed to many of our subscribers, by some of the newsmen who had left us in considerable arrears, we deem it necessary to acquaint our fellow citizens, that future arrangements will be made to guard against similar impositions.

Subscribers were asked to leave their names and addresses at the new office, 'the regular list having been taken from the premises'. (Norris sent a copy of this too to the Home Office, underlining the seditious phrase 'fellow citizens'.)[108] In the next issue Wroe set out his view of things. Chapman had given Wardle the opportunity to repurchase the paper, but Wardle had been unable to find the money; the offer remained open for another two months should Wardle be able to take it up. (This must have been why Wardle was so upset: Wroe had in effect pre-empted this option.) Wroe printed the text of the bond between Chapman and Wardle, in which Wardle pledged not to set up any rival publication within ten miles of Manchester.[109] Wardle backed off. In the next issue he agreed to postpone publishing his account of the Wroe group's manoeuvres, but denied removing the subscriber list from the paper's office, since it was never there in the first place; Wroe, he declared, would never have it.[110]

Wardle's paper was consistently short of local news and adverts, filling its columns with borrowed material and long, allusive letters from pseudonymous correspondents. On 19 June, however, he printed a very full account of the Ashton meeting of 14 June which had issued its 'Appeal to the People of England', carrying more detail than that of Wroe and Saxton, and adding the text of letters to the meeting sent by Knight and Johnson; Wroe's *Observer* printed the Knight letter the following week, pleading pressure of space. The issue of 3 July carried a similarly full report of the Stockport meeting of 28 June. Wardle's need to fill his columns with news has left us with two pairs of exceptionally detailed accounts of key radical meetings just before Peterloo; a careful examination would yield useful insights into reporting practices.

It seems likely that the radical Reverend Joseph Harrison was Wardle's Stockport correspondent and main purveyor of news, for there was also a well-informed report of the Stockport weavers' dispute. Harrison's involvement would explain the inclusion of Knight's letter, soaked in the New Testament language of fairness and brotherhood. Wroe's group had been critical of the amount of resources Harrison was devoting to the support of the imprisoned radicals of 1818, Bagguley, Drummond and Johnston, and the three prisoners continued to prefer Wardle's version of the *Observer*. Bagguley, who had absorbed Harrison's brand of radical Christianity, wrote in from Chester Castle on 24 June to declare: 'I am enlisted in the cause of liberty, and have sworn allegiance to the God of *Freedom*'. He signed it 'your dungeon-proof friend, John Bagguley', unaware that he had become considerably less dungeon-proof as a result of Wardle's disclosures to Lloyd the previous year.[111]

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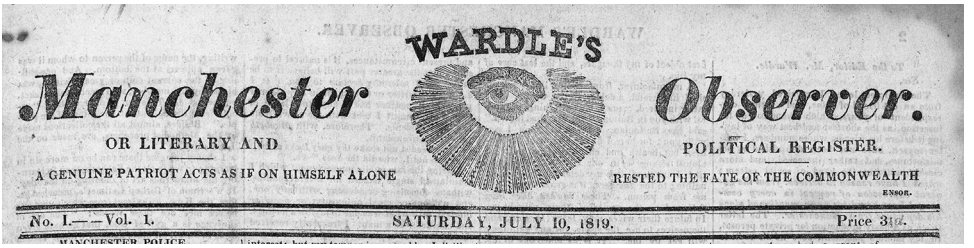
WARDLE'S
Manchester Observer.
OR LITERARY AND POLITICAL REGISTER.
A GENUINE PATRIOT ACTS AS IF ON HIMSELF ALONE RESTED THE FATE OF THE COMMONWEALTH
No. I.—Vol. 1. SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1819. Price 3½d.

Figure 5 Masthead, *Wardle's Manchester Observer*, 10 July 1819 (John Rylands Library, R851314, © University of Manchester).

The 26 June issue of *Wardle's Manchester Observer* did not appear. Harrison had to report: 'I am afraid Wardle will not be able to carry on; he but printed 50 last week, owing to the stamps not being arrived, which will give him such a check, and he will not easily recover.'[112] An editorial note in the next issue blamed a failure to supply stamps, though added that some had arrived on the Saturday morning. No trace of this fourth issue survives, however, and the pagination continued with issue 5 of 3 July. Wardle was charged around this time with stamp duty offences and convicted.[113] He produced two final unstamped issues on 10 and 17 July (**Figure 5**), the paper, now subtitled the *Literary and Political Register*, shrinking to four pages and the price from 7*d*. to 3½*d*. As well as harrying him for stamp duty the magistrates also pursued Wardle for libel, though this proved more difficult. The issue of 19 June was sent to the law officers who found the reports of meetings at Ashton and Leeds 'grossly libellous' but thought prosecution inadvisable. The magistrates meanwhile arrested and prosecuted him for libel at the New Bailey, initially refusing bail. They then sent to Preston for a writ of *certiorari* to transfer the case to Lancaster, allowing them to apply for a second writ 'which will carry the case to the civil side, and thus a special jury be obtained'.

T. J. Wooler of the *Black Dwarf* had struck an effective blow at the special jury system at his trial in London in 1817, but the system clearly remained robust in Lancashire.[114] Wardle responded by publishing the names of the panel of 48 grand jurors who would decide his case; it was a list of landowners and office-holders, including the magistrates Fletcher and Hulton, as well as a former boroughreeve and constable of Manchester. The prosecution, however, went awry, for on 17 August Sidmouth was 'extremely sorry to learn that the Witnesses White and Fleming have been mistaken as to Wardle's person, because it will throw a slur upon their whole testimony, and the acquittal of the Defendants especially upon these grounds will be a matter of Triumph to the disaffected'.[115] Wroe's *Observer* disdained to report on Wardle's case but it seems that he was eventually convicted of libel.[116] Wardle's brief but combative editorial on 17 July identified his battle to continue publishing unstamped with the battle for the representation of Manchester.

> In answer to many inquiries relative to the future conduct of this work, we have only to say, that IT IS NOT A NEWSPAPER, and does not, consequently, come within the

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> meaning of the Stamp Act. We are determined to try the issue . . . For OURSELVES, though trials, fines, penalties, and imprisonment surround us, the last act of liberty, the last act of our life, shall be an endeavour to depose Despotism, and hurl Tyranny from its usurped throne.

This was, however, Wardle's final issue, and it was Wroe's stamped paper which continued to serve the radical movement.

Perhaps the most interesting things about *Wardle's Manchester Observer* are the reports and satires about the Manchester's police and Yeomanry, and the identity of their anonymous author. This is an incomplete detective story which lies outside the scope of this article, but one which, even unsolved, reveals something about the paper. As previously noticed, in early 1818, immediately after Wardle assumed full control, the paper carried several letters about the use by Nadin's police force of blackmail and entrapment, linking it to the exposure of the political spies Michael Hall and James Rose. They were clearly based on inside information, mentioning for example an Irish officer of particularly suspicious habits, one 'Johnny Macdonald, alias Johnny Shan'. They were signed 'Uncle Toby' and 'Corporal Trim', two characters in Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy*: Uncle Toby was a former soldier with an obsessive interest in re-enacting battles and Corporal Trim his manservant.

In December 1819 and January 1819, just before Wardle was forced to sell the *Observer*, there appeared, in a different style, four 'Letters to the Treason-Hunting Municipality of Manchester' by the radical printer William Ogden, addressed in turn to the former Boroughreeve Joseph Green, the late Constable Richard Withington, the Deputy Constable Joseph Nadin, and the magistrate William Hay.[117] *Wardle's Manchester Observer* revived the genre. The issue of 10 July carried both an unsigned piece on the Manchester police, listing the names, nicknames and alleged specialities of a number of officers, and a long letter about Manchester affairs in satirical vein from 'Corporal Trim', with a covering letter from 'Uncle Toby'. Trim's letter was dated 26 June from Lancaster Castle, and appears to have been written by someone recently committed to the debtors' prison – as Wardle might have been if he had owed stamp duty, and just at the time when his paper failed to appear. It referred to 'the late public impeachment which I maintained single handed for several months, without consulting or advising with any one . . . exposing local abuses, and civilizing certain subordinate officers set in authority over the inhabitants'. 'Trim' also denied that he was the author of a letter mentioned thus in Wardle's notes to correspondents: 'We recognize in John o' Gaunt, an old friend with a new face . . . his attack on *Joe the Giant* is very severe; we must pause before we give it publicity'. Lancaster Castle had well-known associations with John o'Gaunt; 'Joe the Giant' could have been Nadin. Wardle's informant inside the police, then, seems to have been either Wardle himself or a close associate. This would explain why local material in this style was conspicuously absent from Wroe's *Observer*, which was mainly concerned with radicalism on a national scale.

As he took over the *Observer*, Wroe paid tribute not to Wardle the editor but to Chapman the owner: 'when every other bookseller in the town was terrified into

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submission . . . he braved the storm'.[118] Manchester's stipendiary magistrate, James Norris, informed Sidmouth:

> Mr Chapman having some prudence left has given up the Observer & that paper is now edited by Wroe: the worst of the set; and I fear the paper will become infinitely more licentious & dangerous to the public peace in his hands.[119]

4. James Wroe 1819–20

Under James Wroe the *Manchester Observer* peaked as an activist paper. The loyalist Francis Philips called it 'The Official Journal of the Radicals', while the magistrate James Norris described it as 'the organ of the lower orders in this part of the country'.[120] Wroe had been born in Manchester in the year of the French revolution, 1789, and began business as a market trader in 1810 selling scrap iron and books. He was one of the first agents for Wardle's *Observer*, and one of its first advertisers. In March 1818 he chaired a meeting held in Manchester to launch a subscription for the recently released political internees of 1817, arrested around the time of the march of the 'blanketeers'. 'Mr Wroe is an obscure vendor of political Pamphlets as Black Dwarf &c.', noted someone from the magistrates' office before forwarding it to the Home Office.[121] His bookshop in Ancoats Lane stocked publications from London, 'political pamphlets of every description, wholesale and retail', as well as music and musical instruments.[122] His fellow bookseller James Weatherley recalled that 'his stock of old Books was of low Priced articles'. The magistrate James Norris thought it 'the most detestable trash of all sorts political and otherwise' and suspected that Wroe was the Manchester contact for the London Spencean radicals. He was correct: in the autumn of 1818 Wroe received a large parcel of pamphlets and leaflets via one of the returning Manchester spinners' delegates to London. A London informant wrote: 'this Rowe states himself to be the most extensive Dealer of these sort of Publications in Lancashire'.[123] Several radical works published in London carried Wroe's name as a distributor, such as the secularist tract 'Jesus a Freethinker'.[124]

As Manchester's radical bookseller, Wroe was filling the role left vacant by two other men, William Ogden and James Molineux, both of whom had been interned without trial in 1817–18. William Ogden (1753–1822) was the son of 'poet Ogden', the fustian dealer Samuel Ogden of Manchester, author of 'the British Lion Roused'. William set up as a printer next door to his father's premises in Wood St, and was involved with several local newspapers, including a spell as editor of the *Chester Chronicle*. He was a bold spirit who printed a great deal of radical propaganda, including the blanketeers' petition which Molineux had refused, and protested vigorously and publicly over his subsequent imprisonment.[125] At the time of Peterloo he was still a printer and, at 76 years of age, he was on the hustings. He suffered a 'sabre cut on the head, and a thrust from a sabre in the eye; was much bruised by constables' truncheons'. According to his obituary, 'from this period his life became nearly a blank, and . . . he quietly expired' in March 1822.[126]

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James Molineux, the Manchester agent in 1816–17 for *Cobbett's Political Register*, may have provided Wroe's first contact with London. He lived in Deansgate, near his premises at Riding's Court, St Mary's Gate, printing pamphlets and handbills and distributing subscription books as well as coordinating fund-raising, and chairing and speaking at radical meetings. He was among the Manchester activists arrested and sent to London for questioning by the Privy Council when habeas corpus was suspended in March 1817. There he may have encountered Evans, who was also held in this period. A James Molineux and a William Molineux are both listed as compositors and typesetters in London in 1809, so if they were related this gave James a continuing London connection after he moved north. William Molineux remained in the capital as a radical publisher, publishing the trades paper *The Gorgon* for which Wroe became the Manchester agent.[127] *The Gorgon* reached Manchester during the cotton strikes of 1818: 'I have read today a very dangerous publication called the Gorgon which discusses the case of the cotton spinners', Norris wrote to the Home Office in August 1818.[128] James Molineux seems to have virtually stopped publishing around the time the *Observer* started up, in circumstances which appear in a letter from Charlotte Johnston to her imprisoned radical husband in late 1817: 'Mr James Molneuex as got Wedded to a very young lady with a large fortune she is only seventeen he desires to be remembered to you.' He was, however, still around to stand bail for Wroe at the New Bailey at the end of 1819, and in 1820 he published Henry Hunt's 'Address to the Radical Reformers'.[129]

Wroe was active in the short-lived *Manchester Spectator* in late 1818 when it offered a radical challenge to Wardle's paper, and when Hunt spoke at Manchester in January 1819 he read the declaration from the platform.[130] He subsequently promoted subscriptions for a high-quality print of Henry Hunt, and published his own cheap satirical print depicting a skeletal 'British Constitution' shot through with the arrows of despotism, taxation and corruption.[131] Henry Clive, Under-Secretary at the Home Office, began making inquiries about him in 1818.[132] Andrew Clegg, William Chippendale's agent 'No. 2', gained his confidence for a time in early 1819, and was assured by him that there would be no rising in Manchester without an order from London.[133] Wroe's relationship with the London Spenceans was, however, heavily qualified by his hostility to their former Lancashire ally, the hapless Joseph Mitchell, whose unwitting relationship with Oliver the spy in 1817 had destroyed his credibility. Wroe threatened him at a public meeting in Failsworth that 'if he appeared on the stage at Manchester he would be put off'.[134]

When Wroe took over the *Observer* in June 1819 he kept on his Ancoats Lane bookshop, where he lived with his family. John Tyas of *The Times*, in Manchester to cover the Peterloo meeting, described the Market Street office, a few doors up from the Exchange.

> The shop of Wroe, the printer of the *Manchester Observer*, in that part of Market-street which has been called 'Sedition-corner', is perpetually beset with poor misled creatures, whose appetite for seditious ribaldry, created at first by distress, is whetted

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> by every species of stimulating novelty. *Medusas, Gorgons, Black Dwarfs*, and all the monstrous progeny begotten by disaffection upon ignorance, are heaped on the table or in the windows, with hideous profusion.[135]

The office did not have a painted sign over the door, but it hardly needed one.[136] By July 1819 the *Observer* had fourteen provincial agents, in Liverpool, Warrington, Leeds, Rochdale, Burnley, Stockport, Blackburn, Chorley, Wigan, Preston, Haslingden, Huddersfield, and Uttoxeter, as well as two agents in London, and one in Dublin.[137] Both *The Times* and the *Liverpool Mercury* copied its reports of radical meetings.[138]

Wroe placed both the *Observer* and its office at the heart of the mass platform campaign of the summer of 1819, appointing his fellow radical John Thacker Saxton as chief reporter. Saxton had been born in Chesterfield in 1777, the son of a local innkeeper and tradesman. He claimed in January 1819 that 'more than 20 years ago the infamous Pitt caused him to be chained and conveyed to Lancaster Castle, for speaking openly his sentiments'. In his twenties he set up as a bookseller in Chesterfield but was declared bankrupt in 1804. In January 1817, as provincial reformers came to London in connection with a national campaign to petition parliament for reform, an agent of the London ultras made contact with Saxton in Sheffield; Saxton wanted an account of parliamentary debates on reform, and Thomas Preston talked about a visit north to make contact.[139] Saxton surfaces for the first time in Manchester in a report on an open-air reform meeting at Failsworth on 4 January 1819, where he is described as 'from Sheffield'. In a 'Stentorian' voice he urged the crowd: 'Stand to your arms my friends & be ready at your posts. You'll find us ready to lead you on. We fear no danger . . . We are certain to be found at our guns.'[140] He had, if we can credit Bamford's poem 'The Fray at Stockport', taken a vigorous part in fighting off the police at the Stockport reform meeting of February 1819.

> For Saxton blun'd his thievin' e'e,
> An' gan' his jaw a welter,
> Which made him "right about" to flee
> As fast as he could skelter.[141]

Bamford's friend 'Doctor' Healey read out the poem to a crowd of between 12–15,000 people at Ashton-under-Lyne on 14 June 1819. Saxton too addressed the crowd (**Figure 6**).

> He would beg leave to propose that a communication should extend from one extremity of the kingdom to another; and as Mr. S. now held a confidential situation in the office of the most independent Newspaper in the kingdom, viz. The ORIGINAL MANCHESTER OBSERVER, published by Mr. WROE, he was authorised to say that the columns of the journal would ever be thrown open to the insertion of such important intelligence, as the best friends to liberty in this popular district could devise, and that arrangements for that purpose were in hand, which would be published periodically under the head of "*Important communication to the People of England.*"[142]

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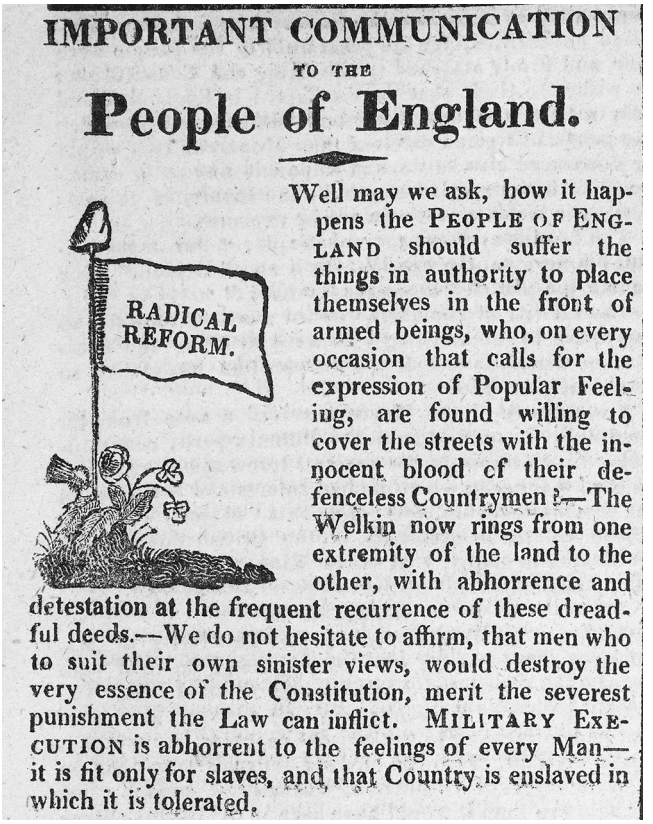
IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION
TO THE
People of England.

Well may we ask, how it happens the PEOPLE OF ENGLAND should suffer the things in authority to place themselves in the front of armed beings, who, on every occasion that calls for the expression of Popular Feeling, are found willing to cover the streets with the innocent blood of their defenceless Countrymen?—The Welkin now rings from one extremity of the land to the other, with abhorrence and detestation at the frequent recurrence of these dreadful deeds.—We do not hesitate to affirm, that men who to suit their own sinister views, would destroy the very essence of the Constitution, merit the severest punishment the Law can inflict. MILITARY EXECUTION is abhorrent to the feelings of every Man—it is fit only for slaves, and that Country is enslaved in which it is tolerated.

Figure 6 'Important Communication to the People of England', *Manchester Observer*, 1 September 1821, p. 12 (John Rylands Library, R229748, © The University of Manchester). J. T. Saxton launched a series of addresses 'To the People of England' in the *Manchester Observer* as part of the mass platform campaign of summer 1819. This opening address revived the series.

The emphatically presented rallying calls under that heading were written by Saxton, while John Knight usually wrote the leaders.[143] From Oldham on 7 June until Manchester on 16 August there were eighteen mass open-air reform meetings held across the country, ten of them in Lancashire and Cheshire. The *Manchester Observer* now positioned itself as the central organ of the national radical movement, articulating and amplifying the voice of the people. It was also the means by which the voice of the people reached the Home Office, which learnt of the postponement of the Manchester meeting from 9 to 16 August from the *Observer*. The magistrates too continued to find its reports useful, citing them in a report to the Home Office in April 1820 as evidence in support of their claims of a seditious conspiracy.[144] They purchased the paper to provide Major-General Byng, the military commander for the northern district, with 'advice on which he could act as to the arrangement of his forces'.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Byng himself was a regular purchaser, although he was careful to explain that 'I have always burnt the Manchester Observer, that no person in my house may read it'.[145]

From the moment Wroe took over the paper from Chapman and Wardle, the Home Office was determined to close it down. 'This publisher appears resolved to carry to the uttermost length' the excesses of the press, Hobhouse advised the Stamp Office.[146] When the Bolton magistrate Colonel Fletcher arrested men for military drilling, he reported to Sidmouth:

> One of the prisoners confessed, that he had imbibed his reforming notions from the Manchester Observer, which it seems he was in the habit of reading for the Information of his neighbours. From this corrupt source has flowed in this country a considerable portion of the disaffection that prevails.[147]

The *Observer*'s report on the Ashton meeting was referred to government lawyers, along with another on a meeting at Leeds. They advised that while the reports did contain 'grossly libellous matter' liable to cause disaffection, and the truth of the libel was no defence, there was enough doubt about the outcome to make prosecution inadvisable. Libel – even seditious libel – was becoming less reliable as a charge at this time, forcing the government to forge new tactics of prosecuting the organisers of mass meetings.[148]

The 17 July issue of the *Observer* provided ample grounds for prosecution. An address to the people of Stockport from the imprisoned John Bagguley urged them to 'come forth, brave tyranny to her teeth; brand her decrees with infamy; trample upon her altars; destroy her temples; reduce to ashes the whole fabric, and implore the Gods to reduce them to nothing'. A letter signed 'Alfred' exulted:

> The destiny of England is near at hand. The moment is drawing near, when a constitutional stand against the corruptions of the day, is to be made. The reign of oppression is near its close, its dying embers are fast receding from our sight; and the spirit of freedom is rearing her head in lofty triumph over the departing tyrant that has so long usurped her place.

There was a combative letter 'To the Female Reformers of Blackburn', following up the previous week's report on the Blackburn meeting where a group of female reformers had presented a cap of liberty on the platform. The *Observer* gained an early coup in July with an accurate report from an inside source that the Yeomanry had sent their sabres for sharpening, three days before they received the official instruction to hold themselves in readiness for a public meeting in Manchester.[149] But the boldest of all was Saxton's '*Important Communication* TO THE **People of England**' the following week.

> The stupid boobies of Yeomanry Cavalry in the neighbourhood . . . have, during the past week, been foaming and broiling themselves to death, in getting their swords new ground, their pistols examined with the minutest scrutiny, and their bridle reins made impenetrable to the steel of the *mere phantom* of an improved Pike.
>
> As to Soldiers, they resemble them not quite so much as automata do men, and their ridiculous assumption of being able to put down the PEOPLE, will one day be as dangerous as it is now contemptible . . . The idea of *such things being able*

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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> *to put down A PEOPLE*, rising in the ARMS of REASON against their domestic Despoilers, is completely farcical. If they had courage to attempt such a deed, they would be *Traitors* to their Country, and would doubtless meet with the fall they meant to prepare for their fellow Countrymen.[150]

On 19 July Norris sent a copy of the paper to the Home Office, which encouraged him to prosecute both the Blackburn speakers and the editors of the *Manchester Observer*. Even before the reply had arrived Wroe was indicted on two counts.[151] The next issue of the *Observer* reported its own editor's arrest by Manchester's notorious deputy constable, Joseph Nadin.

> On Wednesday afternoon, about two o'clock, Nadin came to the Observer office, and without any ceremony marched into the counting-house, where the Proprietor of the Observer sat writing – and without any apology or hesitation said, 'I have got a warrant against you, Mr. Wroe.' 'Very well,' replied the Proprietor of the Observer, 'its what I have been expecting for some time.' . . . He was rudely seized by two Ruffians, in the garb of Police-runners, who expressed their infernal satisfaction at having got possession of their prey, and dragged him like a felon through the street.

The arrest had been carefully planned, and the plan had leaked: Wroe was warned that Nadin was coming twenty minutes before Nadin actually received his order. Bail was set at the immense sum of £500 for Wroe himself and two further sureties of £250 each which, to the astonishment of the magistrates, Wroe was able to produce, one of them from his predecessor Chapman. Wardle's bail for similar offences had been £100 for himself and two sureties of £50, so it seems that excessive bail was being used to drive the paper out of business.[152] Other charges followed making a total of five, on a total bail of £5,000. The editor of the London-based *Black Dwarf* was astonished. Did not the Bill of Rights state that 'excessive bail should not be demanded'? Why not try the question in the courts?[153] A mass meeting of (it was claimed) 15,000 people in Rochdale on 26 July voted thanks to the 'bold and intrepid' Wroe (prompting, claimed the paper, cries of '*shame!*' '*shame!*' '*The Manchester Observer for ever!*'). Saxton responded:

> The Manchester Observer may now truly be called the 'National Intelligencer;' its circulation is without precedent, and it is the only faithful beacon in this part of the kingdom to direct to the *true* principles of Liberty.

'To great applause' he pledged the paper to respect 'THE MAJESTY OF THE PEOPLE'.[154] Norris wrote to Sidmouth that Saxton's speech could be prosecuted. Better still, the previous edition of the *Observer* had carried an ill-judged article advocating the assassination of spies, concluding with the sign of a dagger, and published the same day as the shooting of the hated Stockport constable William Birch. Norris was content: 'Wroe . . . I conceive is finished.'[155]

The Home Office set out its strategy against the press in a private letter to Hay on 23 July.

> It is determined to make trial of the London Juries again in some of the most gross cases of Libel, which have recently appeared; and to institute Indictments against

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> the Vendors of the same publications in the Country. The Country Libels will be prosecuted probably with better effect by the Local Authorities.

The Manchester magistrates were urged to act against local sellers of *Sherwin's Political Register* while the government prosecuted the paper itself.[156] The next day Hay, as chairman of the magistrates, delivered a charge to the grand jury at Salford Quarter Sessions dominated by concerns about itinerant reformers and their allies in the press: 'Whilst these Demagogues have been haranguing their auditors towards Rebellion, writers of the worst description have been aiding in their design, by circulating their nefarious publications weekly.'[157] The Manchester authorities redoubled their efforts in this direction. On 4 August the town officers sent to the Home Office copies of some handbills printed by Wroe to Sidmouth, and complained: 'The printer of the Observer newspaper in Manchester continually disseminates in paper the most libellous and seditious doctrines and the magistrates have lately demanded of him the copies with the names and address of the authors of various passages.' Wroe had refused: could he be prosecuted for his refusal under the 1799 Unlawful Societies Act? This required printers to hold and disclose the details of those who paid to have seditious material printed. The response of the Crown's law officers was disappointing: the law only applied to works published 'for hire reward gain or profit', not to handbills, and in any case newspapers were exempt.[158] Hobhouse meanwhile was reading the paper carefully, noting how the news on the outer sheet was kept separate from the other material on the inner; he suggested to the Stamp Office that it was 'to all intents two newspapers' and should be prosecuted for evasion of duty.[159]

The *Manchester Observer* was closely involved in planning the Manchester reform meeting of August 1819. The invitation to the orator Henry Hunt to address the meeting was issued by Joseph Johnson on behalf of the 'Manchester Patriotic Union', probably Johnson's name for the Union Society which met weekly at the Union Rooms in George Leigh Street, of which Wroe was now treasurer. All the practical organisation seems to have come from the group running the *Observer*. When the magistrates challenged the legality of the meeting advertised for 9 August, Saxton went to Liverpool for legal advice and returned with a recommendation to cancel the meeting and advertise a fresh one, dropping all mention of the idea of electing a 'legislatorial attorney' to represent the people of Manchester in the Commons.[160] The requisition for a meeting on 16 August was opened for signature at the *Observer* office, gaining 700 signatures in a few hours. A placard outside announced Hunt's entry into the town at noon on Monday 9 August, in lieu of the proposed meeting. Hunt, Johnson and the radical Staffordshire landowner Sir Charles Wolseley paraded into Manchester in a carriage. As they arrived at the top of Market Street, *The Times* reported:

> The multitude had so much accumulated, that it literally covered the whole space as far as the eye can see, and appeared like a ragged inundation hemmed in by opposing banks. When the orator arrived at the *Observer* office, he took off his hat,

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> and gave three cheers. The salute was answered by a deafening and tremendous yell.[161]

For the next edition on 14 August Hunt supplied a letter to the reformers of Manchester, which the paper took upon itself to alter to 'the people of Manchester'. Hunt complained, and (according to Johnson) 'Saxton said he supposed some of the men in the office had done it to give the paper a better head'.[162]

The mass meeting at St Peter's Field, Manchester, on 16 August 1819 was not only the climax of the summer's wave of mass radical meetings, but also the first provincial political meeting to be a national media event. 'Peterloo is the debut of the reporter in English public life' wrote the author of the centenary history of the *Manchester Guardian*.[163] Saxton was on the platform with Hunt ('addressing the mob', according to Hay),[164] alongside a line-up of journalists unprecedented for any provincial meeting: Edward Baines Jr of the Whig *Leeds Mercury*, John Smith of the Whig *Liverpool Mercury*, Richard Carlile of the radical *Sherwin's Political Register* (about to become *The Republican*), Charles Wright of the Tory London *Courier* and John Tyas of *The Times*. Also present was Henry Horton of the ultra-loyalist *New Times*, who found himself jammed between the ranks of reformers guarding the hustings and 'thought it advisable to put up my pencil and paper'.[165] Matthew Cowper, secretary to the Committee in Aid of the Civil Power, acted as a correspondent for both the *Courier* and the equally ministerialist *Morning Post*, passing his notes to the magistrates.[166]

Jeremiah Garnett observed from the crowd for the conservative *Manchester Chronicle*, along with Archibald Prentice of *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*. Prentice's sometime colleague on the *Gazette*, the cotton merchant John Edward Taylor, seems to have arrived later after working the morning in his office. The future proprietor of the *Ashton Reporter* Edward Hobson, brother of the Yorkshire reformer Joshua Hobson, was also at the meeting.[167] It was an unwitting gathering of war correspondents. An assembly of 40–50,000 people was attacked by the Manchester Yeomanry, in part revenging themselves for weeks of abuse in the columns of the *Observer*; 'I'll let you know I am a soldier, to-day', one was heard to say. According to a witness at the John Lees inquest: 'One of the Cavalry cut at Saxton, but his horse seemed restive, and he missed his blow. He then called out to another, "There's Saxton, damn him run him through."' Another witness, James Walker, identified the two Yeomanry Cavalry as Samuel Harrison and Thomas Shelmerdine.[168] John Tyas of *The Times* provided corroboration.

> The Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry lost all command of temper. A person of the name of Saxton, who is, we believe, the editor of the *Manchester Observer* was standing in the cart. Two privates rode up to him. 'There,' said one of them, 'is that villain, Saxton; do you run him through the body'. 'No,' replied the other, 'I had rather not – I leave it to you'. The man immediately made a lunge at Saxton, and it was only by slipping aside that the blow missed his life. As it was, it cut his coat and waistcoat, but fortunately did him no other injury.[169]

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Garnett (who later found it necessary to threaten a yeoman with pistols) witnessed an attack on Charles Wright of the *Courier*.

> Having myself accompanied Mr. Wright to the hustings, I was witness of a part of the treatment he met with. When the Yeomanry and Constables cleared the hustings, Mr. W. was unfortunately taken for a reformer, and received several severe blows to the head with a constable's staff, and a deep sabre-wound in his left arm. It is most probable that the Constables and Soldiers had observed Mr. W. making notes, and supposed that they were for a seditious newspaper published here. This may account for [the] severity with which he was treated.[170]

The injured Wright was brought before the magistrates but when the mistake was discovered he was sent to his inn in a coach where Garnett helped him write up his report for the *Courier*. Tyas and Saxton were both arrested and spent the night in the New Bailey, and Saxton was committed for trial at Lancaster Assizes along with Hunt and the other leaders. Prentice got together with Taylor that afternoon to write reports for the *Times* and another London paper to make sure that the magistrates' version was not the first to be published. In the event Tyas was released and travelled with his report to London just in time to stop the presses of the 19 August issue of *The Times*.[171]

By the time Saxton's own report of the meeting appeared in the 21 August edition of the *Observer*, the *Times* report had already reached Manchester. The *Observer* report was eagerly awaited, not least by the aggressive Major Dyneley of the artillery.

> I intend to send you that scoundrel Wroe's paper if I can get it, but the shop has been surrounded since day light this morning, and they are sold as fast as they can be printed; now that is a wretch that does want skinning alive – his paper has done as much mischief as Hunt or any one of his ruffians.

Dyneley's servant waited all Saturday morning for a copy but, complained the major, 'as they print them off they only sell them to people of their own kidney – hundreds are waiting to take them to the country'.[172] The following week, 28 August, 'hundreds of people were obliged to wait for hours before they could be supplied'; Hough, the printer, was pressed to take a supply home to sell to his neighbours so they could avoid queuing.[173]

The authorities were closing in on Wroe. He faced another indictment for publishing the 'Address of the Female Reformers of Blackburn', a development which the paper celebrated by reprinting extensive extracts of the offending article in its report of the hearing.[174] After his arrest on 16 August, Joseph Johnson had shown signs of wishing to give evidence against Hunt. He wrote to Sidmouth to ask for bail for the sake of his 'amiable Wife and two lovely Children' and promising 'to give up all connexion with politics and retire entirely . . . to the bosom of my beloved family'. Norris informed Sidmouth on 19 August:

> Johnson . . . seems very penitent and admits that matters have been pushed too far . . . [he] had previously said to some of his near relations (which I know to be true)

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

> that when that day was over he would entirely abandon the radical reformers. He is the monied support of the *Observer* though not the actual proprietor and he has pledged himself . . . to withdraw his support entirely and this I trust will have the effect of extinguishing the paper. Wardle has also volunteered a similar proposition & to lay open the machinations of the whole party.[175]

Byng visited him in the New Bailey: 'Johnson promised me if let out on bail, he would stop the publishing of the *Manchester Observer*, such an act would render the most effectual help, for that publication has done more harm than everything else'. Chapman, who went up to Lancaster to bail Hunt out of the castle prison, was able to warn Hunt of Johnson's treacherous turn in the coach on the way back to Manchester; possibly Chapman's relationship with Wardle had yielded this information. Chapman's own hearing at Lancaster Assizes in early September was on the same day as the indictment of Hunt and the Peterloo defendants; he was given six months to prepare his evidence. Johnson was indicted along with Hunt and the rest, having in the end given only general information that told the Home Office nothing new, and within a month he had placed a letter in the *Observer* comparing the magistrates to 'the tyrant Macbeth'.[176] Thomas Chapman accompanied Hunt and company on their tumultuously applauded coach journey from Lancaster Assizes through Bolton to Manchester, and later that month chaired an open-air meeting to protest against Peterloo at Leeds.[177] An anonymous Manchester correspondent claimed in November that Johnson had withdrawn support from the *Observer*, cutting its circulation by 200. As late as February 1820 Chippendale and the government solicitor Heslop were still trying to cultivate Johnson, but he went to trial with the rest, and was eventually sentenced to a year's imprisonment.[178]

The following Saturday Wroe advertised a new regular unstamped pamphlet 'Peterloo Massacre', dedicated to providing a full account of the events of 16 August.

> In the course of the Work will be given, all the public Placards which were issued previous to and after the bloody Tragedy; with every authentic Document that can be procured, tending to exhibit in their true colours the Authors, Abettors, and Actors in the *Drama of Death*. – In order to render this Work as complete a Record of Facts as can be obtained, the Friends of the *murdered* and *wounded* people, are requested to furnish the Editor at the Observer Office with accurate statements of the nature of the wounds that occasioned death; and also of those which were sustained by the living.[179]

The Home Office recommended arresting the sellers as well as the publisher.[180] In the end, fourteen numbers appeared in the autumn of 1819, followed by editions in book form, the pages dominated by the intermittent drama of the Oldham inquest into the death of John Lees at Peterloo. It made the *Observer* office into a newsboard, as noticed by the county's Whig MP, Lord Stanley, in a speech in the House of Commons:

> It had been lately the practice to post up in the windows of the *Manchester Observer* the names of the persons wounded, and also the names of those soldiers by whom

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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> wounds were said to have been inflicted. Among others, the name of captain Birley was frequently mentioned.[181]

The paper also branched out into visual representations of Peterloo. The issue for 23 October included a full-page plan of St Peter's Field on 16 August (**Figure 7**). More than a map, it was a detailed visual account of Peterloo complete with a 21-point key, based on evidence collected by the solicitors Charles Pearson, James Harmer and Thomas Denison who were investigating the episode on behalf of the Metropolitan and Liverpool Committees of inquiry. It showed not only the layout of the area but the sequence of events, including the route of the processions, the arrival of the various troops on the field and the troops attacking fleeing protestors, with tiny vignettes of 'Manchester Yeomanry cutting at Men and Women, heaped on each other before the houses' and 'Foot Soldiers and Dragoons, striking and intercepting Fugitives'.

The same month Wroe published a print of the massacre. When the subscription was launched in the *Observer* in September it was described as 'From a drawing taken on the spot by T. Whaite, to be engraved by J. Sudlow'. Its view of the field, as seen from the north-west corner at the Peter Street exit, appears to be based on the same detailed information as the map printed in the paper, and shows in three dimensions many of the same features. The advancing troops are seen at different stages: moving into the crowd, then surrounding the hustings and Hunt's carriage with female reformers inside it, and finally chasing and slashing at the dispersing crowd, with the artillery arriving in the background. A mass of people is shown fleeing into a crush at the opposite side of the field, and numerous instances of violence and tragedy are depicted in naive style. The print was advertised at 5*s*. or 3*s*. 6*d*., a price which (the paper optimistically claimed) would 'make it attainable by almost every rank of society'.[182] More realistically, the *Observer* advertised small prints of Hunt, 'neatly engraved on wood' and 'convenient to bind with the Weekly Political Tracts' at 2*d*. each. It is not clear which of the various portraits of Hunt this was. One small souvenir image of Hunt does survive, however: a medallion-style portrait with the slogan 'Henry Hunt Heroic Champion of Liberty' (**Figure 8**), printed on a small piece of silk or fine cotton.[183] The *Observer*'s Peterloo print was the basis for the better-known copper-engraving or 'Cabinet Picture' by the Manchester engraver J. Slack, which features a more finely detailed and artistically composed version of the moment when the Yeomanry attacked the hustings. This was enlarged and given an elaborate frame and title for a print on a fine cotton handkerchief. The smaller original of this, slightly different in detail, appears to have been afterwards bought by Wroe who replaced Slack's name with his own.[184]

Saxton later recalled this period of the *Observer*'s life as:

> the days of its meridian splendour – when its arrival in London was looked for with as much impatience, as the bulletins of a distant army – and when fear of what the Lancashire Reformers were about to do, blanched the cheeks of every ministerial editor and minions as he unfolded this contents. London has been called the strong

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

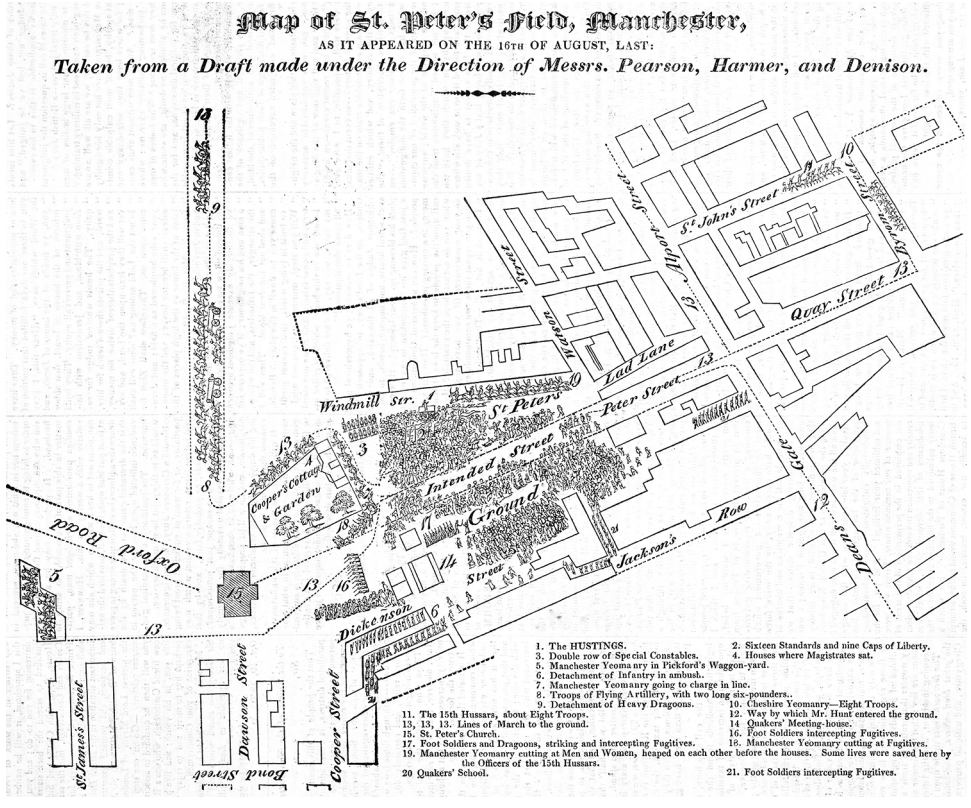

Figure 7 'Map of St. Peter's Field, Manchester, as it appeared on the 16th August, last', *Manchester Observer*, 23 October 1819, p. 786 (John Rylands Library, R224798, © The University of Manchester). This is not so much a map as a visual narrative, providing the framework for engraved views of the event.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

> hold of the liberty of the press; but Manchester is assuredly the centre and strong hold of the Parliamentary Reformers.[185]

The *Observer*'s editorial on 28 August proclaimed:

> We can now boast of a more extensive and numerous circulation of the *Manchester Observer* (being more than 4000 in number,) than any Provincial Paper in the kingdom; and whilst we have breath, we will never shrink from discharging our duty faithfully to the Public, although ex-officios were sent down in bales, by Pickford's Caravan.

Pickford's carriers yard had been used to station the Yeomanry on the morning of 16 August. The Home Office suggested an even higher circulation figure, in the form of a note on a copy of the *Observer* for 16 October:

> It is said there are 6000 papers published weekly. That on the day of publication it is not uncommon for the shop to be shut, whilst new editions are printed. There is

Figure 8 'Henry Hunt, the Heroic Champion of Liberty', souvenir print on silk or fine cotton similar to those produced by the *Manchester Observer*, *c.*1819 (Manchester Central Library, 942.730731 P88(6), © Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives).

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

> always a crowd round the door, either to receive the papers, to read the seditious publications, or look at the political caricatures in the window.[186]

The paper reached its peak in the autumn of 1819. An editorial on 6 November claimed, with some exaggeration:

> They have persecuted the proprietor of the *Observer*, until the *Observer* itself has more than tripled its circulation; we have arrived at the zenith of our ambition, *there are more of our paper sold than of any provincial paper in the Kingdom*; and we believe it to be read by not less than 100,000 people weekly!

James Epstein has described the satirical *Black Dwarf* as 'The nation's most widely read radical journal', but the *Manchester Observer* was the most widely read radical newspaper. Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* sold 3–4,000 copies a week in London in 1818–20, and Cobbett's stamped *Political Register* (continuing in a lower key during his American exile) was said to have sold up to 6,000, but the *Manchester Observer*'s circulation of 4,000 or more almost certainly had a higher multiple readership and certainly a far more popular one.[187] One night in October a military officer and five beadles entered a barber's shop looking for pikes but found only the *Manchester Observer*: 'G—d d—d' newspapers', they exclaimed. In November a newsroom was opened in Swan Court, perhaps in Wardle and Chapman's former premises, aiming no doubt at the custom of those dissatisfied with Exchange newsroom, which had banned *The Times* for its report of Peterloo. For an annual subscription of 16*s*. readers could choose from the *Manchester Observer, Gazette, Chronicle*, and even the Tory *Mercury*, as well as the banned London papers *The Times* and *The Star*. It became known as the 'New Exchange'.[188]

Peterloo brought London and Lancashire radicals closer together. Wroe, in hiding at the time of the meeting, received a visit the same evening from a fugitive Richard Carlile, who had, somewhat ill-advisedly, come straight to Wroe's secret address from the loyalist headquarters of the Star Inn, where he had naively put up; Wroe persuaded him to leave for London as soon as possible and publish his report.[189] Wroe made his own journey to the capital later the same week, to negotiate closer political and publishing cooperation with the London ultra-radicals. The *Manchester Observer* was regularly taken in at the weekly Spencean meetings at the White Lion in Soho.[190] The next *Manchester Observer* advertised a new weekly, *The London Alfred*, published by Thomas Davison to protest against Peterloo. It also carried an account of the protest meeting at the Crown and Anchor on 21 August, organised by a temporarily united front of London radicals to protest against Peterloo, which resolved 'That the resolutions of this meeting be inserted in the Manchester Observer.'[191] The Home Office received copies of dozens of allegedly seditious newspapers and handbills protesting about Peterloo, which it referred to the law officers for their opinions on prosecution.[192] The *Observer* also helped to inspire one of the most famous of metropolitan satires. The second issue after Peterloo carried a spirited parody on the nursery rhyme 'The House that Jack Built'.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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> This is the field of Peter-Loo.
>
> These are the poor reformers who met, on the state of affairs to debate; on the field of Peter-Loo.

It built up to a libellous climax.

> These are the just-asses, gentle and mild, who to keep the peace, broke it, by lucre beguil'd, and sent Hurly-Burly, a blustering knave, and foe to the poor, whom he'd gladly enslave, who led on the butchers, blood-thirsty and bold, who cut, slash'd and maim'd young, defenceless and old, who met, on the state of affairs to debate; in the field of Peter-Loo.

With the *Observer* circulating in London radical bookshops in the sensational aftermath of 16 August, Hone and Cruikshank could hardly have missed this; it may well have provided the inspiration for their phenomenally successful pamphlet *The Political House that Jack Built*, with its enduring images of Peterloo. There was nothing new in basing satires on nursery rhymes, and Cruikshank had used the same rhyme for political parody ten years before, so it seems that the *Observer*'s timely effort reminded him of a good idea.[193]

After Peterloo the authorities mounted a determined campaign to close down the *Observer.* The paper itself received an unwelcome visit on 25 August.

> On the afternoon of Wednesday, the Office of the Observer was visited by a party of five or six fellows dressed in red jackets, who vigorously attacked the placards hung at the door, which soon fell to the ground overpowered by mortal wounds from the bayonets of the assailants. If these men are to be employed in illegal depredations, we would rather that our property should suffer, than that our fellow—citizens should be butchered.[194]

Anonymous notices were posted around the town, addressed in the style of the *Observer* 'To the People of England' and signed 'a real Radical Reformer', claiming that the *Observer* (on its own circulation figures) was making £2,600 a year profit.[195] At ten o'clock on the night of 31 August, Wroe's home, at his shop in Great Ancoats St, was roughly searched by police with a blunderbuss – including his children's beds. They found nothing. Wroe himself seems to have been in London. He was summoned to Lancaster Assizes and, on the same day as the Peterloo defendants, was indicted in his absence for seditious libel and a warrant was issued for his arrest. The Home Office set in motion further prosecutions for the issues of 28 August and 11 September.[196] Wroe was taken on 27 September and imprisoned overnight in a small cell in the New Bailey; having recently broken his arm, this caused him considerable pain. He was released the following day after finding £200 bail from 'several respectable gentlemen', fending off attempts to make him pay court fees as he left. His solicitor was the London barrister James Harmer, who was in town representing the reformers' side at the Oldham inquest into the death at Peterloo of John Lees.[197]

The Oldham inquest brought the Manchester authorities more trouble with the press, and there were running battles between the coroner and reporters, including

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

Ross of *The Times* and the radical Peter Finnerty of the *Morning Chronicle*, over their right to take notes at the inquest and their papers' right to print them.[198] Ross sent his reports via the Liverpool mail coach, rightly suspecting that the Manchester mail was monitored. At one point Thomas Barnes, editor of *The Times*, turned up in person to defend his reporter's right to make notes and send off his reports. The inquest was widely covered in the national press, and the *Observer*'s detailed coverage in its *Peterloo Massacre* periodical was one account among several.[199] When the Oldham inquest collapsed in October the *Observer* ran a furious editorial which encouraged armed resistance, openly contemplated the assassination of Hay and Canning, and defied the threat of libel.

> We despise the taunts and threats of our oppressors. The OBSERVER yet lives; *it has a circulation superior to any provincial journal in the kingdom*, and exceeds that of all the other Manchester Newspapers combined. This it is which galls our authorities at the New Bailey; we hope they will notice us again, it will only increase our sale. We tell them to do their worst, for we have bail for 100 libels at command.[200]

This was starting to sound like hubris.[201]

Hay meanwhile was getting his own material out incognito in the loyalist press. 'Authentic regular information from hence is much wanted', he explained just before Peterloo, 'and complaints are made every day of the injudicious and overstrained accounts inserted in the *Courier* from these districts.' The *Courier* was the closest paper to the Tory governments of this period. Stoddart, the editor of the ultra-loyalist *New Times*, had just written to both Hay and Nadin ask for regular information from Manchester, presumably seeking an answer to Tyas's reports in *The Times*. 'Nadin seemed at a loss on the subject, and I have recommended him to take no notice of the letter – in truth, he is not quite equal to the thing.' Hay agreed to send material but thought there was no substitute for a paid correspondent. He warmed to the task, however, and in late September was able to report to Hobhouse that he had ordered many reprints of an article from the *New Times* of 13 September, and to request help in 'getting these into general circulation throughout the United Kingdom'. He added that he had also recently got articles published in the *Yorkshire Gazette* and reprinted in 'several well-affected papers' in Manchester. Hobhouse was delighted by Hay's work and asked him to send two or three copies of each tract so that the Home Office could reprint them for circulation throughout the country, adding: 'he entirely concurs with you in your opinion of the necessity of correcting the poison of the press'.[202]

Wroe was again indicted for libel at the October 1819 Quarter Sessions. This time the trap had been better prepared; even though an associate ran at top speed to Wroe's office to warn him the moment the warrant was issued, he found that Wroe had already been arrested. He spent the night in custody and was charged the next day with selling a seditious issue of Wooler's *Black Dwarf* which carried 'A letter to the soldiers of England' hinting at mutiny. This time bail was set at £600 for each of several charges. 'Manchester law' was now being exerted against the London

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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press. Wroe however produced four people to stand bail, including his beleaguered predecessor Thomas Chapman and the former Manchester radical publisher James Molineux. The magistrates were incredulous and bombarded the four with sceptical questions about their means. 'The scene was almost novel even in a Manchester court', reported the *Observer*. 'Gentlemen of very great respectability in property, and very certainly in character, as any person on the bench, were cross-questioned as though they had been paupers seeking relief from the parish.' James Ogden, manufacturer and draper, asserted that he was worth £1,500 in stock in trade alone, on top of an estate in Collyhurst, while Wroe's predecessor Chapman stated that as well as the twenty-six houses he owned he had credit enough to cover all his debts, notwithstanding the actions for libel against him. The bench then tried to impose a bail condition that both Wroe and Chapman should keep the peace. Chapman refused: 'People may be employed to cause us to break the peace. These are very peculiar times.' The magistrates backed down and Wroe left, threatening action against the magistrates for attempting to impose illegal bail conditions and again refusing again to pay court fees.[203]

Wroe walked free, but the following day several members of his family and shop staff were indicted for selling seditious publications. The grand jury was chaired by the Bury manufacturer Sir Robert Peel (father of the future prime minister) and its members included the former Boroughreeve Joseph Green and the Police Commission treasurer Thomas Fleming. Wroe's 10-year-old son David was charged that he, 'being a wicked and evil disposed person . . . and being moved and instigated by the devil, did, with force and arms attempt to excite and stir up sedition, disaffection, and rebellion within this realm'. Birley, the Yeomanry captain, complained to Sidmouth of the difficulty of suppressing the *Manchester Observer*. By clever pleading and manoeuvring Wroe had succeeded in getting bail and may have delayed his trial by as much as twelve months; for the time being he continued to publish his 'infamous' paper.[204]

The unity of radicals behind the *Observer* showed some cracks in the autumn as disputes opened about the movement's post-Peterloo strategy. The London ultra-radicals promoted a plan for simultaneous mass meetings across the country on 1 November, intended (like similar plans in 1817) as the occasion of a general rising. Hunt opposed the plan as too close to conspiracy and liable to squander the constitutional ascendancy gained after Peterloo. Encouraged by a visit to Manchester from the London ultra-radical Arthur Thistlewood, the local radicals Joseph Bradbury and a suspicious newcomer, 'the sailor' W. C. Walker, dubbed by Norris 'the Thistlewood of these parts', supported the London plan. Wroe, Johnson and Knight backed Hunt, and claimed that these ultras received their funds from Whitehall.[205] Placards (written by Bradbury) countered that Wroe himself had recently supported Thistlewood financially; Wroe insisted that 'the truth was that Mr Thistlewood had never called on him until he wanted Money to pay his Coachman to London'. Wroe called Thistlewood a spy and publicly stated that Bradbury and Walker 'were two of so bad character that the Union would never prosper whilst they had anything to do with it'.[206] His judgment was sound. Walker had appeared from nowhere making

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

inflammatory speeches, generating suspicion all around, while Bradbury was an erratic figure who had turned informer while imprisoned in 1817. The main effect of the dispute was to divide the radicals at a time of near-unanimity in their protests, which was probably its objective.[207] The 1 November meetings were cancelled, and there were further arguments about rearranging them for December.

At this point Wroe went to ground once more, remaining in hiding locally from early November until early January. Around the same time the *Observer* office seems to have begun leaking information, wittingly or unwittingly, through a shop assistant: John Chorlton, one of the shop staff under threat of prosecution, confided in a man who corresponded with the magistrate James Norris under the codename 'M'.[208] According to the magistrates' informants, Saxton, Wroe and Johnson, stung by criticism of their timidity, went along with a plan for a meeting at St George's Fields, near New Cross, on 13 December. As the date approached and delegates from other towns began arriving in Manchester, however, Johnson (who had been the strongest supporter) 'sent a handbill to the Observer office to be printed warning people to be aware of the meetings called by the delegates as he believes there is something dark and dangerous in their design'. Wroe and Saxton at first disagreed but at the last minute the meeting was cancelled. 'STAY AT HOME AND SPARE THE EFFUSION OF BLOOD!!!' warned the *Observer.* Manchester remained quiet. The suspicion must be that the unreliable Johnson had been duped by agents, and the others smeared.[209]

On Christmas day 1819 an editorial marked two years of the paper, claiming again 'a more extended circulation than any country Newspaper ever before experienced', and asserting: 'The *Manchester Observer*, which is now become deadly poison to the venal slave, will yet be found an impregnable fortress to guard the mighty fabric of our constitution'. Behind the scenes, however, Wroe was preparing for the worst. The radical Samuel Bamford, who was himself embarking on journalism through reporting on the Oldham inquest and related cases, was reported to have told delegates in Middleton:

> Wroe had already taken the value of his stock and was going to assign all over to another quite fresh Proprietor so that whatever Fine might be levied upon him he would never pay a penny and that his Concern he did not value – because the Concern would be turned over in such a way as his Wife and Children could derive some benefit from it and further said that he was not a hundred yards from his own office all that nine weeks they were in search of him and every vigilance had been used to find him.[210]

Although Wroe had managed to get his main trial put off to Lancaster spring assizes, his family and employees were separately tried at Salford Quarter Sessions in January 1820. Wroe's son, now 11, changed his plea to guilty in return for a nominal fine of 6*d*., a concession made 'on account of his tender years'. The *Observer*'s young shopman John Chorlton was sentenced to four months imprisonment for selling the issue of 28 August, whose advertisement for the 'Peter-loo Massacre' publication allegedly libelled the troops as murderers. For the same offence Louisa Hough, the wife of the printer, was sentenced to six months hard labour in the New Bailey, and

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

their 17-year-old daughter Sarah was fined £5. This had come about, explained the paper, after the printer had taken extra copies home to sell to satisfy local demand: 'Mr Hough's daughter had returned home the week before and chanced to be in the house when the *informer* went to purchase one. Her mother being busy desired her to reach him one from the plate rack. This was the whole of her offence.'[211] Norris reported with satisfaction to the Home Office: 'The Jury in their verdicts seem to have been governed by one common feeling on these cases inasmuch as they in about 5 minutes in all the cases found the parties guilty.'[212]

The harassment of the *Observer* and its agents continued. The paper proudly if rashly passed on a story from Worksop in Nottinghamshire: a bookseller who boasted of being 'agent for every newspaper in the country' was asked for the *Manchester Observer*, and replied that he dared not stock it even for five guineas.[213] In April it reported on the case of a Macclesfield man who had lost his job for selling the paper. News agents were being leaned on to substitute other papers for subscribers to the *Observer*.[214] When Wroe was offered a well-attested story about apparent collusion between Nadin and his Liverpool counterpart over the sale in Manchester of obscene books which had been confiscated by the Liverpool authorities, he dared not print it. 'We went to the Office of the Manchester Observer a Radical Paper to have the case exposed', recalled James Weatherley, 'but they said they dare not Insert it as the Authorities were watching every opportunity to Crush them down so the Matter dropped.'[215] At the procession in Manchester to proclaim the accession of George IV in February, several of the Yeomanry 'in passing the Observer Office brandished their swords, and one of these *valiant* heroes, actually struck at the window of the shop, where a large print of the inhuman massacre at St Peter's was exhibited'.[216]

The former editor Thomas Chapman, also awaiting trial, ran into further trouble. He attended a regular meeting of the Police Commission on 10 December 1819 only to find a separate meeting convened upstairs afterwards. He was challenged by Richard Withington, a Pendleton merchant and one of the Yeomanry at Peterloo, who insisted that the meeting was private. Chapman replied that he would stay there 'till some better authority than that of one who had attacked his fellow Townsmen when they were unarmed, in a manner the most *inhuman* and *cowardly*, should inform me I was not wanted there'. According to Chapman, Withington paced round the room, and 'after opening the door, saying aloud "let us put him out of the room and break his neck down stairs," I cautioned him, or any one else, against offering any personal violence, informing him at the same time that I was armed, and would spill blood in the room in defence of my person'. Chapman was carrying his usual pistols. The Boroughreeve arrived to confirm that it was a private meeting and Chapman and his ally Whitworth agreed to withdraw. It had, complained Birley the following week, been a 'very improper intrusion'.[217] The local libel action against Chapman came to Preston Sheriff's court in February 1820; he was ordered to pay Fleming £250 and Peel and Williams £200 each, only a fraction of the thousand pounds each they had claimed, but it was still a serious blow. The *Observer* reported that this was due to 'the extraordinary negligence of the defendant's attorney who omitted to take some legal steps in the defence of his client'. One wonders what official manoeuvres

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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may have lain behind this apparent accident. The evidence for Chapman's claims of corruption was not tested in court.[218]

By late February, despite the cases already disposed of at the New Bailey, the number of charges against Wroe's *Observer* had mounted to eleven: eight against Wroe himself, mainly for hostile writings against the troops after Peterloo, and three against others. The other three were against his wife, his brother Peter, who happened to be in the shop when an informer purchased one of the offending papers, and his other brother William. With a wife and five children to support Wroe was in real trouble, and on 19 February 1820 he addressed his readers. He had, he admitted, been ruined by the costs of his defence and by 'the fear and even terror with which my friends have been seized from the supposed operation of the late Act of Parliament'. This was the Newspaper Act, one of the six repressive acts passed at the new year, which had imposed burdensome restrictions on the press and severe penalties on those associated with illegal publications. Wroe declared:

> At the close of my political career . . . while in the full vigour of my mind, neither subdued nor paralyzed by the persevering efforts of a malevolence which has been strained to destroy me . . . I have bearded my enemies to the very teeth: – I have refused to bend to the rising storm; but I could not resist the violence of the tornado which has at length overwhelmed me.[219]

Wroe announced that he was handing over proprietorship of his paper to Thomas John Evans, one of the London Spencean radicals. Evans promptly launched a subscription towards Wroe's defence.

The *Manchester Observer* featured in the trial of Hunt and others at York in March 1820 for their role in organising the Peterloo meeting. It was repeatedly cited by the prosecution as the means by which the meeting was called and the public agitated to attend; as the prosecuting counsel, James Scarlett explained, 'one part of the charge was for conspiring to bring about the meeting by means of such publications'.[220] Attempts were made to discredit respectable defence witnesses by getting them to concede that they regularly read the paper. The loyalist attorney Roger Entwistle claimed that he recognised many of the Oldham and Royton marchers as 'he had frequently seen them buying the works he had mentioned at the office of *The Manchester Observer*, and recommending them to their friends'.[221] One issue of the paper was particularly important, for it had contained both the resolutions of the Smithfield meeting of 21 July and the notice of the Manchester meeting of 16 August. Hunt had chaired the Smithfield meeting and put to it a resolution which renounced allegiance to the Crown if there were no reform of Parliament underway by 1 January 1820. As Hunt had chaired both meetings, and the Manchester resolutions had conveniently disappeared, the prosecution argued that the Manchester meeting had shared the same illegal purpose with the Smithfield one. The judge, however, ruled against the prosecution; the *Observer* could not be taken as evidence for such a link.[222] Five of the ten defendants were found guilty; Hunt was sentenced to two and a half years in gaol, and Bamford, Healey, Johnson, and Knight – the last two connected to the *Manchester Observer* – to one year. Bamford's conviction

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

was a surprise, for Scarlett in his final speech had spoken favourably of Bamford's talents and regretted merely 'that he was not found in better company'. Scarlett had earlier read Bamford's 'Lancashire Hymn' in the *Observer* during the trial, and both he and the government solicitor Maule ordered copies of his published collection *The Weaver Boy*.[223]

The York judges, Bayley and Best, then moved to Lancaster Assizes in early April to preside over the trials of Chapman and Wroe. Chapman faced two separate libel actions. At York he had procured a hearing in chambers from Justice Bayley and had the verdict by default against him in the cases of Peel and Williams set aside on a technicality. The same charges were now heard by a fresh jury and he was convicted a second time and again ordered to pay damages of £200 each, though he managed to get a stay of judgment. The more serious case was the alleged libel against the Manchester magistrates in the case of the weavers' leaders. The Manchester Tory barrister John Cross, prosecuting, described it as 'a libel that would not be endured' against the guardians of justice. His defence counsel pointed out that he was neither the editor of the paper nor the author of the letter, but the judge sided with the prosecution, insisting that magistrates and juries needed to work free of intimidation: 'A more wicked and malicious libel he had never heard read in his life.' After this 'the Jury, without the least hesitation, pronounced the defendant guilty'. He now had to await a summons to the King's Bench in Westminster for sentencing.[224]

To go through all eleven outstanding charges against Wroe and his family would have occupied the rest of the week, but on the advice of his lawyer Wroe pleaded guilty to two charges of selling issues of *Sherwin's Political Register*, one containing an 'Address to the Army' after Peterloo, the other commenting on the King's speech opening Parliament. A man from Bolton had already been sentenced at Manchester Quarter Sessions to twelve months in Lancaster Castle for selling one of the same issues of *Sherwin*. On the advice of his lawyer, Wroe submitted to the other charges, as did his wife and his two brothers. He was fined £100 and sentenced to twelve months imprisonment in Lancaster Castle, with sureties of £300 to be found for his good behaviour in the following two years. His wife and his brothers, Peter and William, were also convicted, and required to find sureties of £100 each to appear at the next assizes if required, the sentences left to hang over them.

Hobhouse at the Home Office was pleased at the news but also slightly disappointed: 'Many excellent persons are much offended that he did not receive sentence on more than two indictments.'[225] Finally, in September 1820, a relatively subdued Wroe was led through the tunnel under the courtroom in Lancaster Castle to appear in the dock and receive sentence on the remaining charges on which he had previously pleaded guilty. There was no further punishment, 'it being understood that he should not interfere any more in political matters'.[226] The *Manchester Observer*'s most militant activist editor had, in his own words, been 'driven from the field of politics'.[227]

5. Thomas Evans 1820–21

With Thomas John Evans the *Manchester Observer* acquired its first editor from London. His father, also Thomas Evans, a print colourer, had been secretary to the

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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radical London Corresponding Society in the 1790s, and was afterwards a leader of the London Spencean ultra-radicals and organiser of their network of pub meetings and debates, alongside his equally radical wife Janet. Evans Junior was for a time the Spenceans' secretary, and could be heard leading the singing of William Hone's blasphemous *Political Litany*.

During the peace of 1814 the Spencean radical Arthur Thistlewood took young Evans to France for a month to meet with exiled members of the revolutionary United Englishmen, carrying introductions from Alexander Galloway, brother to Janet Evans. Galloway had been president of the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s and a United Englishmen; he was now a respected engineer and London liveryman. From the Spa Fields meetings of 1816 the Spencean group worked consistently for insurrection, and was monitored by a dozen separate informers. In the winter of 1816–17 the organisation received visitors from Manchester, including William Benbow, Joseph Mitchell and Samuel Bamford. At this time a spy reported an indiscreet conversation.

> Evans Junr in a conversation with—coming home from the Cock, Grafton St, Soho, observed that the people were riper than they had been for many years; that there would be a great commotion & a deal of bloodshed, unless the army was so very rotten to the government as to join the people. But what he feared was the foreign soldiers, who would fight for those that paid them.

He now condemned as 'premature' the attempt to rise at Spa Fields in December, in which he had been involved alongside the young Watson; a series of meetings, he now realised, could easily be put down by troops, but a wave of simultaneous meetings would be impossible to stop.[228] Both father and son were imprisoned without trial under the emergency regulations of 1817, although by then Evans Senior had lost his primacy to more committed insurgents and subsequently split with the other Spenceans. When the time came for their release, the younger Evans stood his ground in an indignant encounter with Sir Nathaniel Conant, refusing to make any pledge of good behaviour for 'I have resolved never to wear the badge of ignominy.' Sidmouth, it was claimed, hurried past up the back stairs to avoid the Evanses' wrath, and they were subsequently released without making any commitment. Imprisonment moderated both men, however, and Evans's parents opened a coffee house and radical newsroom and distanced themselves from the Spencean ultras.[229]

Thomas John Evans's takeover of the *Observer* arose from long-standing contacts between London and Manchester radicals and publishers. The *Observer* at its peak was distributed through the shops of three radical London printers: Richard Carlile in Fleet Street, Thomas Davison in Smithfield and Thomas Dolby in Soho.[230] Both the Evanses and Galloway sat on the Metropolitan Relief Committee which raised funds for the Lancashire reformers after Peterloo. Galloway, together with the London reformer Francis Place, may have brokered the arrangement and provided the finance to buy out Wroe's *Observer*.[231] Evans arrived in Manchester to take control of the paper in February 1820; he was followed by his father who used his time to write *A Brief Sketch of the Life of Thomas Spence* which was published in Manchester in 1821.[232] In his prospectus and opening editorial Evans praised Wroe's 'fearless

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

advocacy' of reform and promised that his *Observer* would continue its Manchester coverage, recording 'every instance of magisterial oppression' as well as reporting on a struggle which had come down to 'Slavery or Revolution'. His paper would also print the London news a day before the London papers arrived. More than this, it would act as 'a prompt and regular channel of communication' between the radicals of London and north: 'hitherto a lamentable ignorance has divided them, and palsied their mutual efforts'.

> I am conscious that I am entering upon a task, which to be well performed, cannot fail to place him who attempts it in a situation of some danger. I am aware, that beside the power of direct and open persecution, a thousand indirect means of annoyance are possessed by those who fatten on the present system of misrule, and that, especially in this county, these persons are remarkable for a shameless disregard of law and justice, surpassing the indecency even of the ministers who employ them . . . I embark with a perfect knowledge of the warfare in which I am going to engage.

He consoled himself that 'these prosecutions are the surest titles to public esteem and gratitude'. There would, Evans decided, be no more adverts for the cure of venereal diseases – a policy that distanced the *Observer* from elements of London's radical subculture. The *Manchester Observer*, he declared, would become 'the first provincial journal in the Empire'.[233]

Evans's first issue appeared late, thanks to the requirement in the recent Publications Act to deposit £200 with the magistrates as a surety against blasphemous and seditious libel. Knowing the reputation of Manchester magistrates he arranged to post his sureties in London, only to be advised by the Stamp Office at the last minute that he must do so in Lancashire. After taking legal advice he travelled to Liverpool to post sureties with the reforming Colonel Williams, getting back at 9 p.m. on the day of publication.[234] Thereafter he worked hard at the basics of the newspaper trade, all the more essential with the repression and decline of the radical movement and its unstamped journals. He printed bills for Hunt's campaign to become MP for Preston at the general election. In early March, however, Byng was told that: 'The number of the Observer Papers sold weekly has again decreased from 2000 to 700 since Evans became Publisher.' In the summer of 1820 the paper began a 'Commercial Register' on the state of the cotton trade, and started to publish racing results from around the country, giving it a greater air of permanence. It printed two editions, one for local circulation and another for distribution by post to London and other parts of the country, with occasionally a local second edition on Monday.[235] It was not long before the Manchester authorities referred Evans's *Observer* to the Home Office for prosecution, for a leaflet which it had printed and widely distributed in the region proposing maximum prices for milk. Milk-sellers in Middleton and elsewhere had been harassed, and (claimed the Boroughreeve), 'it is avowed, that if the plan proves successful with regard to Milk, it is to be extended to all other articles of Food'. It is interesting to see a radical paper apparently involved in promoting food riots.[236]

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

Trial reporting dominated the early weeks of Evans's editorship. Before the York Peterloo trial and that of Wroe at Lancaster, the first major story Evans had to cover was the arrest, trial and execution of the several of his former Spencean associates for the Cato Street conspiracy. They had been lured by government agents into an attempt to assassinate the cabinet, and when the trap was sprung Thistlewood had murdered a constable. In an editorial Evans deplored assassination but tried to blame the episode on loss of faith in petitioning – not something that could be applied to Thistlewood himself, who had never had any faith to lose. Evans had less to say about the role of spies and agents provocateurs, a previous target, either because he still did not realise its full extent or because he did not care to admit that the whole operation had been a sting. The *Observer* covered the trial and grisly executions in sympathetic detail; among the crowds watching at the scaffold on Tower Hill were the Peterloo defendants Joseph Healey and Joseph Johnson, in London for sentencing.[237]

The *Manchester Observer* played a significant role in supporting radical prisoners and in building solidarity with them through its flourishing poetry column.[238] The tone was set by a cheering poem called 'The Captive' printed on 3 June 1820.

> Mark how serene – how noble he appears,
> How his soul brightens in this vale of tears!
> Unfetter'd there, he soars aloft from shame,
> Proclaims his wrongs, and vindicates his name . . .
> Thy prison, then, O Captive! is a treat,
> And thou can'st frolic, laugh, drink, sing, or eat,
> Sleep on thy straw, and laugh the knave to scorn
> Whom guilt enslaves in shackles more forlorn!

Bamford had contributed 'Lines Written During Confinement in Lancaster Castle' on 19 September 1819, and now he used the *Observer* to convey 'Lines to Jemima, Written in the King's Bench Prison, May 16, 1820', affirming his love both for his wife and for 'the high cause of Liberty'. This in turn earned another tribute, 'To Mr. S. Bamford, prisoner in Lincoln goal, *Suggested by his "Lines to Jemima*"', celebrating his refusal to be cowed by the dungeon.

> We'll not forget, thee, noble Man!
> Tho' a dungeon's darkness hide thee,
> Disgrace thee never tyrants can,
> We'll bless thee more, the more they chide thee.

Bamford sent another verse from the King's Bench prison the following day, and further tribute to him as 'sweet bard of liberty' appeared in August.[239] There were also some rousing stanzas addressed by one 'J. Ogden' to Jemima Bamford, wife of the imprisoned reformer Samuel. A second tribute followed a month later. The author, Bamford afterwards found, was James Butterworth, the Oldham writer and historian.[240] Another anonymous supporter addressed lines 'To Samuel Bamford' in Lincoln gaol the following month, and the same issue printed a lengthy reply by Bamford.[241] After his transfer to Lincoln Castle, Bamford published a Hymn,

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

'Harrison's Hope', to the imprisoned Stockport radical minister Joseph Harrison, who was in Chester Castle. Later the *Observer* printed his 'Lines, on the Liberation of Sir Charles Wolseley'.[242] These poetic exchanges allowed prisoners to communicate with their supporters and with each other, helping to keep up morale on all sides during long and isolating sentences. The most spectacular display of solidarity came at the first Peterloo anniversary in August 1820 when the imprisoned Bamford's new *Song of the Slaughter* was solemnly sung by the massed ranks of reformers at a series of open-air events. Bamford is likely to have read about this in prison.[243] As in 1818, the *Manchester Observer* sought to turned imprisonment to the service of the radical movement.

Under Evans's editorship the *Manchester Observer* ran a sustained campaign against the military, and it was this that caused the Home Office most concern and led to Evans's prosecution. Criticism of the troops found a ready readership in the aftermath of Peterloo, but behind it seems to have lain a strategy to cultivate popular indignation against the military, and to foster dissent among the troops themselves as preparation for a future confrontation – a policy pursued since the Spa Fields meeting of 1816 by Evans's former circle of London ultra-radicals. With the campaign against the radical press proceeding successfully in the aftermath of the Six Acts, by April 1820 Hobhouse was even considering prosecuting *The Times* for its continuing criticism of the Manchester Yeomanry and magistrates.

> I have long very much wished to see an action brought against the Editor of the Times, who is by far the greatest of our London Libellers, by some of the Gentlemen in Lancashire who have been so scandalously calumniated. The Venue might be laid in Lancashire, I think the Probability is that Damages would be such as to teach Caution to the Editor, who is callous to every consideration except that of money.[244]

In the event, however, Manchester provided the best opportunity for such a prosecution as Evans, used perhaps to the relative security provided by London juries, fell foul of 'Manchester Law' in his reporting of riots involving the regular troops in the area.

The *Manchester Observer* had been worrying away at the local military for some time. On 8 April it claimed: 'The Hussars now quartered in Manchester are in the habit of drinking three or four pints of ale a day. From what source do they draw this spending money? Their pay cannot allow of such excesses.' His deputy, General Sir James Lyon, accompanied by a Colonel of the 15th Hussars, visited Evans in his office to deny the report in person. Evans admitted that he was not certain of his story, but added that it came from a usually reliable source. Byng forwarded his own copy of the paper to the Home Office, commenting: 'the remarks in it on the late atrocious plot [Cato St] display such cold blooded villainy, as to excite my utmost indignation. I must drop the subject, for if I give way to my feelings, I should extend my letter to a length.'[245] Two weeks later the *Observer* carried a story about two drunken dragoons who were seen at New Cross 'wantonly firing their pistols in the open street, and spreading terror among the

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

people'; this was only one of numerous instances of bad behaviour by the troops, said Evans.[246]

The climax of this friction between troops and civilians began on the King's birthday on Monday 24 April, in Oldham. The *Manchester Observer* of 29 April reported that soldiers turned drinkers out of the White Horse Inn in Oldham Market Place to have it to themselves. Early the next evening some locals annoyed a group of soldiers quartered at the nearby Bull's Head by singing a provocative song about Peterloo, with a line about 'bloody butchers'. One of the offending singers had his hat taken and thrust into the fire by a soldier, provoking a prolonged pitched battle during which troops wrecked furniture, battered people with pokers and clubs, beat and stabbed at bystanders, threw people out of windows, and attacked women and constables who tried to intervene. After a quarter of an hour some officers arrived and ordered the troops back to barracks. Violent incidents in the street continued for a fortnight and the count of those stabbed and wounded rose to thirty-five. Thousands of people signed a petition to the House of Commons demanding that the troops be punished; a military court of inquiry brought no charges, but the regiment concerned was withdrawn from the town shortly afterwards. The *Observer* reported the event as if it were a second Peterloo.

> We never witnessed such agitation as was prompted by this shocking instance of the ferocity of a drunken and unlicensed soldiery . . . We could not have credited [it], had not the editor, in person, investigated the details on the spot . . . We state no fact of which we did not receive concurrent testimony from several respectable persons.

It was claimed that 'a quarter-master was observed urging his men on, and telling them in the language of his superiors to *"give the Radicals a sound beating"*,' while the commanding officer who arrived belatedly to order the troops back to barracks had been 'revelling at Manchester'. Another editorial laid the responsibility on Sir James Lyon himself, for having previously praised his troops for 'soundly beating the radicals'.[247] Captain Chippendale, who intervened to end the affray, advised Major-General Byng that the *Observer* report contained 'scarcely a word of truth'. The London *Star* claimed that there were five dead.[248] Reports gathered for the military inquiry blamed hostile locals for provoking the troops but confirmed the ferocity of the fighting.[249]

The authorities moved quickly to limit the damage and Evans found himself before the magistrates charged with libel. The *Observer* gleefully reprinted the warrant on its front page, including the entire text of the offending article. There were some telling exchanges at the New Bailey. Sir James Lyon appeared in court, 'covered with stars, and decorated with foreign orders' and accompanied by several soldiers, to rebut the report. 'Is it false?' asked Evans. 'It is *impossible* to be true,' insisted Lyon, 'for I must have heard if any such proceedings had taken place.' Evans said he had proof of an assault by soldiers on one of his own employees. The magistrate James Norris cut in. 'That particular instance is of little consequence; you allege that the acts of outrage

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

on the part of the military on the people are *"numberless"*.' Evans replied that he had fifty such instances. 'Fifty!' exclaimed Lyon, but Norris was unimpressed. 'It was the duty of that person to have made a complaint to Sir James Lyon, or to a magistrate, and not have published exaggerated statements in a newspaper.'

Evans invited Lyon to confirm that if a complaint were made to him on oath he would ensure that justice was done. Norris ordered him not to answer but Lyon agreed. Norris would have none of it, asserting: 'I have no hesitation in saying that this libel is as coarse, foul, and infamous as ever was written'. 'Every word I can justify', insisted Evans. He was committed to the Quarter Sessions on a hefty bail of £200.[250] The Attorney General, asked for his opinion, concluded that 'it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly what occurred' but recommended that five of the radicals be prosecuted and none of the soldiers. He recommended that Evans be prosecuted for libel, not for his report on the Oldham affair (he had been an eye witness, making the report too credible for a prosecution to be likely) but for a later report of an assault by two drunken soldiers on a young employee of the *Observer*.[251]

Evans was summoned to the Quarter Sessions on 27 July 1820 alongside the alleged rioters, making it clear that the *Observer* was regarded as an accessory to the unrest. He came out fighting, for the most recent edition of the *Observer* reported that soldiers of a Lancashire Militia Regiment had given radical toasts and sung radical songs at Bolton. 'The Manchester Observer . . . is if possible worse than ever' complained Byng. Forwarding another copy to the Home Office he commented, 'I send you my weekly plague the Manchester Observer. It is clear the writer aims at converting the soldiery.'[252] Evans's report on the trial at the New Bailey took the form of an open letter to the Reverend W. R. Hay on the front page, quoting his remark: 'This is the way in which WE administer justice.' The rioters, claimed Evans, 'were prosecuted in order that the Manchester Observer *might be reached through them*'.[253] The authorities now found another way to pursue Evans for the issue of 29 April: he was charged with libelling not the troops but 'certain justices of the Peace'. The judge read the offending passage from an editorial out in court:

> Justice will in this case be difficult to be obtained. A sympathy, we apprehend, will prevail between the abettors of massacre in one place, and the perpetrators of murder in another. Oldham is too near Manchester. The right of appeal is abolished, and our lives are now at the mercy of any infuriated *military* ruffian.

Evans's case was then passed up to the county assizes: he awaited trial on bail for another eight months.[254] In his coverage of the Oldham riots he had opened himself to charges that he had libelled the military commander General Sir James Lyon, the clerk to the Police Office John Shawcross, and the magistrate James Norris by implying that they were willing to commit perjury and procure false witnesses. In early September he was obliged to post further recognisances pending his trial at Lancaster Assizes, which tied up £400 of capital for six months.[255]

When two more of the Oldham rioters were committed to Salford Quarter Sessions in October 1820, Evans led the campaign to raise money for their defence. He

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

read out his original report of the riot at a public meeting and denounced 'this atrocious Conspiracy against the liberty of the press'.[256] After a nine-hour trial the two Oldham defendants were convicted on just one of the eight charges against them. Hay, from the bench, after declaring that the defence witnesses were 'equally guilty with the defendants', pronounced a sentence of two years imprisonment, producing 'an electric shock of surprise' in the court. Evans, 'greatly mortified', published another front-page letter to Hay, claiming: 'the witnesses on one side might have been ABSOLUTELY PERJURED'.[257]

In July 1820 the paper opened a new satirical front against the Manchester Yeomanry in the form of a series of letters from one 'Squib', a purported member of the Yeomanry, writing to a friend in London.[258] The style is similar to that of the sketches of the inside workings of the police by 'Corporal Trim' which had featured in Wardle's *Observer.* Some characters are still recognisable, such as the commander 'Major *Grim*, the most opulent spinner in Denmark' (Captain Birley) and 'Maggot' (Meagher, the trumpeter). Others, like 'Spanking Bob' and 'Captain Thickdick', would have been recognised at the time, and the account of their inept and drunken progress through eight days' duty in Preston was obviously based on inside information. An editorial note on 23 September further twisted the tail of the Yeomanry: 'The strange distemper, the Observerphobia, it seems, has broken out with uncommon virulence among the Yeomanry. We intend next week to administer a strong antidote to several *eminent members* of the Corps.'

If the *Observer* is to be believed the Yeomanry themselves were among the most avid readers, coming into the shop to buy copies, ostensibly to burn them – a practice the paper encouraged, baiting 'the knights of the rueful countenance' with hints of further revelations.[259] The pieces were soon published in book form. A final letter from 'Squib' in April 1821, invited in a note from the editor, described the Yeomanry as 'a set of greasy pig-butchers, *odoriferous* tallow-chandlers, and *delicately* scented cheese-mongers . . . smoky publicans; winking, uncouth horse-dealers; dirty, disfigured corn contractors . . . and sundry others not a whit more respectable'.[260] In this way the *Manchester Observer* continued the tradition of lampooning volunteer troops which had begun in the French wars, resumed with venom after Peterloo, and continued into the 1840s.[261]

Further opportunities for weakening the military came with the arrival in England of Caroline of Brunswick in May 1820. The long-estranged wife of George IV, who had come to claim the title of Queen in the face of determined attempts by the government to help the King to divorce her, was welcomed by an immense wave of popular support. Lancashire reformers were at first slow to join this London-centred movement, but press reports started to make an impact. On the first anniversary of the Peterloo massacre meetings were held at the Manchester Union Rooms to promote an address to the Queen, headed by the *Observer*'s J. T. Saxton. The address recalled that the King, when Prince Regent, had congratulated the troops after Peterloo. The Manchester female reformers, who had suffered badly in the attack, submitted an address to the Queen which proclaimed: 'In your Majesty's triumph, we foresee the downfall of that local domination under which we have suffered.'[262]

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

When the highly public hearing into the evidence for Caroline's infidelity ended with the government backing down on the proposed divorce, the *Manchester Observer* took several weeks to report all the public illuminations and bonfires across the region which celebrated the Queen's 'acquittal'.[263]

The authorities became concerned about the effect of the *Observer*'s reporting on the loyalty of troops. When it reported disaffection among troops in Worcester, the Boroughreeve wrote to Sidmouth to complain of 'that pernicious paper, the *Manchester Observer*'; the copy of the paper seen by government's law officers is heavily marked for alleged libel. Major-General Byng too sent a copy to the Home Office, marking up a section which compared the cheering of troops at Knightsbridge barracks for Queen Caroline to the cheering of troops on Hounslow Heath for the acquittal of the seven bishops, which precipitated the fall of James II in 1688; the law officers found it libellous but no action was taken. The issue of 4 September, containing an address to the Queen, was deemed 'mischievous' but not clearly libellous enough to risk prosecution.[264] The paper also carried a story about pro-Caroline sentiment among troops in Macclesfield. When two privates were sentenced to flogging for getting up an address to the Queen, which the *Observer* published, their fellows refused to carry out the punishment and there was a general mutiny. General Sir James Lyon had to come with dragoons and infantry from Manchester to carry out the punishment. The authorities played down the scale of the unrest but the pro-ministerial London *Courier* carried a report largely endorsing the story. Eventually the regiment concerned was marched off to Plymouth to embark for the Mediterranean, and was cheered along the way.[265] A spy was employed to report on troops in Bury, and a man was convicted in Manchester of attempting to draw troops from their duty.[266] Fletcher explained to the Home Office that while there was little practical prospect of radicals suborning troops directly,

> The Press is the great, and almost the only means made use of with Effect, for this Purpose. The seditious Newspapers in their Comments on the changes in Spain, Italy and Portugal, seldom fail to hold up the example of the defection of the Troops in those several countries to British Imitation, in language little short of Treason.[267]

The *Observer*, in common with other reforming newspapers, carried news of the revolts in southern Europe and South America throughout 1820. Shortly before the first anniversary of Peterloo, the *Manchester Observer* proclaimed that the recent liberation of Spain and Naples had started a movement which would soon spread to Britain.[268] Among several dinners in the region to mark Hunt's birthday in November 1820 the *Observer* reported on one in Royton where there were toasts to the recent revolutions in Naples, Portugal and Spain, and to Queen Caroline, with songs including Bamford's 'God save Queen Caroline', recently published in the *Manchester Observer*, and the 'Marseillaise'.[269]

In November 1820 Evans's predecessor but one, Thomas Chapman, finally appeared in court for sentencing on his conviction for libelling the Manchester magistrates at Lancaster Assizes the previous Easter. Since then he had been wrong-footed by a series of legal manoeuvres coordinated by the Manchester and London

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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authorities. Although he was not summoned to attend the next King's Bench at Westminster for sentencing, he prudently decided to travel there at considerable expense. His case was not called, and he was advised that when it was due he was certain to be informed. No summons arrived so Chapman, 'being engaged in fruitless attempts to compromise with the plaintiffs in the other actions', decided to stay in Manchester. He was unexpectedly called upon in his absence, and when he failed to appear a warrant was issued. The first he knew of it was when he was arrested by Nadin at his shop in Fennel Street. He was refused bail and committed until the next Lancaster Assizes; as this was not until November, he was imprisoned without notice in Lancaster Castle for more than three months.[270]

At the hearing of November 1820 the still-defiant Chapman cut a sorry figure. His counsel explained that his health had suffered greatly from the months of close confinement, and that his property had been 'entirely dissipated' in fines and legal costs. James Scarlett QC, possibly still smarting from his notable defeat in the John Edward Taylor libel trail in the same court two years earlier, insisted 'that the libel was of a most dangerous and aggravated description. It tended to bring the administration of justice into contempt', something which was especially irresponsible in a disturbed town like Manchester. Then Chapman himself spoke.

> [He] inveighed with so much vehemence against the Magistrates of Manchester, that the court was under the necessity of intimating to him that such language could not be permitted. He declared that he could not control his feelings, that he was totally ruined, and their Lordships might now sentence him – they might do what they pleased with him; but if he did not lose his life by imprisonment, he would yet, perhaps, be revenged on those who persecuted him.

Justice Bayley agreed that the libel was 'most unjustifiable', and ruled that Chapman was liable as printer and publisher even though he was not the author. He ordered, however, that Chapman need only serve another two months, which would be in Coldbath Fields prison, Middlesex, and produce affordable recognisances totalling £120 for the next three years. Chapman, having produced the required recognisances, 'left the Court accompanied by a tipstaff'. When he finally returned to Manchester at the end of January 1821, reported his former paper, 'The civil actions against Mr Chapman yet remain unsettled; we trust, however, that the period of his losses and sufferings is arrived. We cannot suppose that it is contemplated to distress him any further.'[271]

Evans himself was falling more deeply into legal trouble. It started in a small way. Among Evans's features was a regular series of 'Notes to correspondents' above the weekly editorial, similar to those in the pre-1820 *Black Dwarf*, and it was one of these that caused him to come to grief. In the repressive climate following the Six Acts, these cryptic messages provided a teasing, semi-anonymous dialogue between the paper, its readers and its critics.

> If our Manchester correspondent, whose letter reached us on Tuesday evening, be really a 'Friend,' why does he not put us in possession of the abundant evidence

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

to which he alludes, especially as to the fact of the payments to the family of the young woman 'to keep them quiet'. (23 September)

Very reluctantly we have been obliged to lay aside the communication from the Stockport Reform Fund, after it was set in type. (21 October)

We are obliged to defer, for want of room, the report of the proceedings of the police meeting till next week, when we shall take the liberty of making some comments, not altogether pleasing, perhaps, to some of our fellow commissioners. (4 November)

A Ley-payer, who addressed us last week, should furnish us with his name and residence. No notice can be taken of any fact, unless the person who sends the information, will put us in possession of his own name. (18 November)

The letter of Telemachus, from Bury, respecting the language and conduct of *Dr C—*, has reached us safely. We are obliged to our correspondent for his communication, though we decline to insert it. The disgusting brutality of the language which this wretch has applied to the Queen, is certainly well contrasted to his own 'adulterous intercourse' with his maid-servants. The utmost severity is richly deserved in this case, but really we cannot inflict it: meanwhile we do not promise that some notice shall not be taken of this smooth hypocrite, unless he mends his language: his morals we despair of. (2 December)

On looking again at Mr Pilkington's Letter, we are apprehensive it would be rather unsafe to publish at Manchester. (30 December)

The parody on The Woodman is almost too pointed. Some justice would bind us over to answer an indictment for libel upon the King, whose name, though not mentioned, or, perhaps, intended to be insinuated, might be nevertheless discoverable through a pair of New Bailey spectacles. (6 January 1821)

The 'Notes to correspondents' section sparked interest, propagated rumour, and allowed recognition to spread outwards from those in the know. What could not be printed could be hinted.

Unfortunately, for Evans even hinting was now dangerous, and a week after the salacious item of 2 December appeared he was bound over at the New Bailey 'for a libel upon Mr Cunliffe, Surgeon, of Bury'. Evans found himself up against an outraged Tory gentleman, backed by the authorities in his refusal to compromise. Cunliffe had already been a target of reformers, his house besieged two days after Peterloo by angry people who believed that 'his son who lives at Manchester was heard to call to the soldiers on Monday to cut & slash'. As his defence counsel later pleaded, 'Mr Evans had offered to Mr Cunliffe to render all the reparation in his power, which had been peremptorily rejected by Mr Cunliffe'.[272] His financial resources were eroded by declining circulation; the paper chased up non-paying subscribers with increasing urgency, wrapping their copies in blue paper conspicuously printed with the threat of cancellation. For a radical paper in a declining market, subscriber fall-off was a major headache.[273] On 17 March Evans issued an appeal to 'Friends of the Liberty of the Press'. He had always been willing to run personal risks to keep the *Manchester Observer* going, he explained, but bravery was not enough.

No provincial journalist can incur the displeasure of the authorities with impunity . . . Their object is to destroy the paper, because it has been eminently useful as a

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

> faithful and vigilant guardian of the public interests. *Will the public allow them to effect this object?* Shall there be no paper for the people?

Evans appealed for immediate assistance in meeting legal costs: '*Without it, I cannot publish the* Observer *another week*.' Norris informed the Home Office that the bailiffs had already been round, and suspected that debts had followed him from London.[274] Too late, Evans sought to compound for the indictments against him. There were rumours that he would flee to the USA.[275] The next week the *Observer* failed to appear, while Evans himself appeared in court.

Evans attended Lancaster Assizes on 30 March 1821 to answer the accumulated charges of libel. The Cunliffe case was taken first, to establish Evans in the wrong. In origin a private libel case, it had been procedurally transmuted into a King's Bench matter, heard by a propertied special jury. Like the York Peterloo trial it was prosecuted by James Scarlett and presided over by Justice Best. Worse still for Evans the litigant was not Cunliffe himself but his son, for the good doctor had died in the meantime. Scarlett laid it on thick: Evans had abused his powerful position as editor to publish 'a calumny against a man whose character was above every immoral or vicious imputation . . . whose death, there was great reason to fear, had been hastened by its publication'. His son 'considered it almost the last dying request of his father to continue the prosecution . . . They were now piously fulfilling his last solemn legacy.' Evans's counsel struggled to pick holes in the indictment, made lame attempts at mitigation and, in the end, was reduced to presenting Evans's ill-judged comment as one of those 'occasional acts of aberration and eccentricity' that were the price of a free press. When he claimed that Cunliffe was a high Tory hostile to the people, 'Mr Justice Best (who had sitten very uneasily during the foregoing sentence) . . . replied, that when the learned counsel asserted, that the higher classes were divided against the lower, he felt it his duty to stop him. There were certain rules which must be observed.' His summing-up was firmly against Evans and the jury lost no time in finding him guilty.[276]

Having damaged Evans's integrity the prosecution embarked on the more controversial Oldham riot libel case. The only legal requirement was to prove the publication of the libel, which was a formality, but libel was becoming an unreliable blunderbuss in political trials and the Crown was taking no chances. Scarlett read out the offending report with its description of the troops as 'ruffians in authority' motivated by a 'spirit of malignant fury', and argued that the cunning inclusion of a few genuine facts to create a false sense of authenticity only aggravated the offence. The report, he insisted, was an attempt 'to prolong the irritation then unhappily existing' after Peterloo. Evans's counsel offered a political defence, talking of the freedom of the press and of rule by military occupation. When he had finished, and to his surprise, Scarlett rose to say that 'this was a government prosecution, and therefore he could insist upon the right to reply'. Justice Best agreed, although his own jaundiced summing-up rendered the exercise superfluous. The worst feature of the case, said Best, was the *Observer*'s attempt to link the case to Peterloo and so 'appeal to the passions of the ignorant part of the community'. He quoted Evans's editorial which

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

predicted that a fair trial would be impossible when taking on 'ruffians in authority': 'Was this cool discussion or fair commentary? Was it endurable? Was it not notoriously false?' After this, 'the Jury *instantly* found the defendant GUILTY'.[277] Oswald Milne, clerk to the Salford magistrates, communicated the verdict with satisfaction to the Treasury Solicitor's office. All three of Evans's predecessors had been convicted of libel at the same court, he noted, and two were still in gaol.

> This paper always was and still continues to be the vehicle of blasphemy and sedition, and every paper contains the most audacious attacks on every public institution as well as upon the character of individuals, and its whole object seems to be the subversion of every civil and religious institution and the destruction of all private character.[278]

The law was not yet finished with Evans. Three weeks later he was back for another King's Bench trial in Lancaster, this time for his allegations against Lyon, Norris and the magistrates' clerks over the Oldham riot affair. The choice of prosecutor was again significant: Serjeant-at-law John Cross, Manchester's preferred loyalist barrister. Cross began with a contemptuous attack on the very profession of newspaper editor.

> It was one of the public delusions practised by editors of newspapers, to speak of themselves as 'we' . . . An obscure writer . . . sitting behind a counter or in a garret, held himself forth to the country as 'we,' as a public body of importance. This was a fashion of editorship, by which those persons sought to raise themselves into consequence.

He presented this case as a vindication of the integrity of public authority against the calumnies of the *Observer*, but the tactic backfired. The conservative but punctilious Justice Bayley was tired and out of sorts. He grumbled about deficiencies in the indictment and objected to Cross's reading out another alleged libel (an article headed 'Manchester Law') in an attempt to add weight to the one on trial. Evans took the opportunity to deliver a lengthy polemic against 'Manchester Law' – a phrase which he claimed Hay himself had used. 'I never saw an indictment so defective', complained Bayley, who used his summing-up to dismantle it clause by clause: the prosecution had failed to identify adequately any of the alleged subjects of the libel or to demonstrate that the libel was false. The only charge with any legal force was that the foreman of the grand jury at the indictment hearing had conferred in whispers with the magistrates. The Lancashire jury was unmoved, taking only fifteen minutes to convict Evans.[279]

Evans had to find another £200 bail to appear again for sentencing but he seems not to have found it, for he was brought up for the hearing at Westminster from the King's Bench prison. His counsel apologised again for the Cunliffe libel: 'Mr Evans had offered to Mr Cunliffe to render all the reparation in his power', but this had been rejected. He was able to offer no mitigation for the Oldham riots article. Instead, he reported, 'Mr Evans had instructed him to say that he should not express any hypocritical contrition or whining apologies, but that were he (Mr Evans) to be similarly placed again, it was probable that he would again offend in a similar

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

manner.' The Attorney General 'shortly, but vehemently, addressed the court in aggravation, and urged that Mr Evans, by refusing to express any contrition for his offence, had repeated his crime, and set the court at defiance'. Evans was sentenced to six months in Lancaster Castle for the Cunliffe libel and another twelve months for the Oldham one, after which he had to produce sureties for two years' good behaviour, himself in the sum of £400 and two others at £50 each – enough to keep him out of the newspaper business for the foreseeable future.[280]

Sentencing for the libels against the Manchester magistrates was delayed until September, suggesting that on this case at least the prosecution was in difficulties. Most of the allegations were tacitly dropped, and argument centred on the only element in the indictment which Justice Bayley had been willing to admit, the conferring between the foreman of the grand jury and the magistrates. On this point the defence entered an affidavit from the *Observer*'s reporter at the New Bailey, William Dugdale, another of the *Observer*'s useful London links. The young son of a Stockport radical tailor and Quaker, he had come to London to assist with Spencean publications and later worked in Benbow's bookshop. He described how at the indictment hearing 'the foreman came into Court with some Bills, and was heard to say to Mr Norris, who was the Magistrate next him, "In finding the Bill against Evans we have acted upon—".' Norris then whispered to Hay. Norris and Hay denied that the conversation had taken place. Bayley, back to his old form, set all this on one side and ruled that Evans had committed libel by writing 'surely this is not consistent with the purest mode of administering justice'. With this face-saving conclusion, the sentence was a token fourteen days' further imprisonment. At the last, the Londoner Evans had achieved a victory of sorts over 'Manchester law'.[281]

6. John Thacker Saxton and Thomas Wooler, 1821–22

There was no *Manchester Observer* on 24 March 1821, the week after Evans's despairing appeal for support. The paper's demise was celebrated at a dinner for members of the Manchester Yeomanry on 28 March at the Dog and Partridge in Market Street – just down from the paper's office and next door to the one briefly occupied by *Wardle's Manchester Observer* in the summer of 1819. According to an informant the chair was taken by Captain Birley, and the celebrations were dampened when it was reported that placards had been posted announcing that the *Observer* would resume publication the following week.[282] It reappeared on 31 March 1821 from the same address, 18 Market Street, but with a new publisher, G. W. Service. Service had been the Secretary of the Metropolitan Relief Committee for the victims of Peterloo, having come north in early November 1819 to assist with its work; he would have worked on the committee with Evans.

At the time Service took over the *Observer* he had been in Manchester less than a year.[283] His opening address promised that the *Observer* would remain 'a spirited journal which will fearlessly advocate the cause of Rational, and Radical Reform, and of civil and religious liberty'. He favoured adult male suffrage, annual parliaments and the secret ballot but would support 'any *real* approach towards Reform'. In

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

exposing 'all the tyrannical, unconstitutional, and unjust proceedings, of persons possessing power', he averred, 'I shall prefer *"hard arguments to hard words*," being satisfied that a single sentence of calm reasoning will gain more proselytes to the cause of Truth and Reform than whole volumes of personal invective'. The new *Observer* would be a reformed as well as a reforming paper, with 'nothing offensive to good morals . . . the heads of families may confidently allow it to be read by all young persons'. There would be no more obscene libels of the Cunliffe type. The flow of outraged letters about the *Manchester Observer* to the Home Office seems to have dried up. The reformer Robert Pilkington of Bury suspected that the reform agenda was being watered down but conceded that 'the Observer forms the only rallying point the Reformers have in Lancashire'.[284]

Not long after Service took over the *Observer* a manifesto was issued for a new Manchester paper, also pledged to 'zealously enforce the principles of civil and religious Liberty' and 'warmly advocate the cause of Reform'. Richard Potter's 'small but firm band' of propertied men were setting up the liberal *Manchester Guardian*.[285] The first issue appeared on 5 May 1821, just as Service was trying to take the *Observer* back up-market. A fortnight later, with the *Guardian* attracting growing advertising revenue, Service's *Observer* issued an appeal:

> To Advertisers. The attention of Advertisers, is respectfully solicited to the Manchester Observer, as a most eligible medium of communication to the public, from its extensive circulation, nearly double that of any other journal published in this town or neighbourhood, and its being read by all classes of the community in this exceedingly populous and wealthy district.[286]

This still sounded healthy but significantly it was about circulation rather than sale, a difficult claim to verify. At the same time it announced that its office was moving 'to the late News Room, Swan Court, Market Street' – presumably Chapman's old premises. John Johnston, the radical firebrand of 1817–18, out of prison at last, advertised his own newsroom venture in Chapel St Salford. There would, alas, be no *Manchester Observer* to sustain it; this was its last issue. Saxton later explained: 'After an imbecile struggle of thirteen short weeks, the nominal interest possessed by the proprietor, was *turned over* to the *Guardian* newspaper, which had been commenced a few weeks before.'[287] With the *Observer*'s presses now printing the *Guardian*, Manchester had seen its last radical newspaper printed for some while.

The *Observer*, however, had one last throw, as its former chief reporter J. T. Saxton joined with Thomas Wooler of the London *Black Dwarf* to re-establish the paper as the political organ of Henry Hunt's Great Northern Union for reform. In an early issue Saxton set out his own version of the paper's history since Wroe's day.

> From the time of our ceasing to have concern in the management of the old Observer, that paper began to decline; and notwithstanding the high literary pretensions of the gentleman who succeeded to the important charge, it failed of keeping up its character as the advocate of the people's rights, and the terror of their enemies. The polished period of our successor made but little amends for

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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> the absence of that real and unfeigned attachment to the cause of Radical Reform which had distinguished the columns of the Observer whilst Mr Wroe was the proprietor: and it no longer excited the intense interest which had previously existed among the friends of Reform, widely diffused over the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Twelve months had scarcely elapsed when it was consigned to an ignoble grave.[288]

The *Manchester Observer* was once more to be an activist paper, its aim 'the union of the reformers of the north'. Saxton prepared the ground at the beginning of June 1821 by moving into the bookselling business, establishing 'a sort of depot for the circulation of seditious pamphlets'.[289] He offered a long list of radical papers and publications for sale from premises at 9 Nightingale St, off Port St, with agents in Ashton, Oldham, Rochdale and Stockport.[290] 'This arduous undertaking has been resolved upon, after mature deliberation on the difficulties to which it is exposed', he explained.

Saxton could have had no illusions on that point, for he had taken over his small bookshop from a fustian cutter of Bank Top named David Ridgeway. Ridgeway had sold up because he was being prosecuted for selling a libellous pamphlet by Richard Carlile which declared 'Britain has no constitution'. The prosecution was brought by the London-based Constitutional Association, known as 'the Bridge Street gang', a loyalist outfit set up to harass reformers; it seems to have been following the government's plan of extending operations against London publishers to their distributors in the provinces. Ridgeway strongly challenged the credibility of the sole witness against him, a young man employed by the police in collusion with the Bridge St Association, but without effect; he was gaoled for twelve months, leaving his wife and four children dependent on charity. With support from the *Manchester Guardian* group he appealed to the King's Bench. His evidence showed that the Association's solicitor had been allowed to select the special jury, and to circulate evidence to the jurors in advance. The appeal judge acknowledged that such a thing would indeed have been illegal had it occurred, but ruled that it had not affected the outcome.[291] The affair continued in 1822 when the Association brought Ridgway to Lancaster Assizes to face a new charge of perjury for daring to challenge the evidence against him. His many witnesses were kept waiting for days by procedural ploys, only to see the case removed to the King's Bench at the last minute; it eventually collapsed when it turned out that the main prosecution witness was himself in gaol.[292] The episode underlined the dangers faced by any radical publisher opposed by 'Manchester law' with powers in London at its back.

Evans's paper had remained in business just long enough to report on a dinner in June 1821 to celebrate the release of Samuel Bamford and his fellow Peterloo defendants (Hunt excepted) after their twelve months' imprisonment.[293] Saxton's revived *Manchester Observer* appeared just in time to report on a dinner to mark the second anniversary of Peterloo in August. He announced the paper's resurrection at the dinner itself, to great excitement. It would be published and edited in Manchester by himself, supplied with material by the imprisoned Hunt, and printed in London

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Figure 9 George Cruikshank, *Thomas Jonathan Wooler* (British Museum, London, 1873,1011.396, © The Trustees of the British Museum). Wooler was the editor of the *Black Dwarf* and London printer and publisher of Saxton's *Manchester Observer*.

by Thomas Wooler. A flier for the first issue credited the whole venture to Wooler (**Figure 9**), although Saxton later said he would have preferred to print it in Manchester had there been a press available.[294] 'In securing the active superintendence of the intrepid and able Mr. T. J. Wooler', Saxton assured his readers, 'we have given to the world a pledge of stability to the second series.'[295]

Wooler, like Evans, was a metropolitan radical blooded in confrontations with the authorities. In a case almost as celebrated as that of William Hone, he had survived a high-profile libel trial in 1817 for an article ridiculing the practice of peaceful petitioning of Parliament. In doing so, he exposed the much-abused special jury system, damaging it almost beyond repair in the metropolis although it continued to be used in Lancashire.[296] His unstamped satirical weekly *Black Dwarf* (1817–24) had sold 6–12,000 copies a week at its peak. It promoted an insurgent constitutionalism which aimed to stage a people's version of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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WOOLER'S BRITISH GAZETTE.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1821.

Manchester Observer.

New Series, No. 2.] Who comes next? This is the time for Heroes! [Price 7d.

Figure 10 Masthead, *Wooler's British Gazette*, 1 September 1821 (John Rylands Library, R229748 © University of Manchester).

Wooler was backed by the veteran London reformer John Cartwright, who found in him 'a giant in talent' and 'a man of excellent moral character', possessing 'a courage not to be appalled by any danger'.[297] Depicted in satirical prints as a black, dwarf-like figure, a sort of Jacobin homunculus, Wooler was in fact a cultivated man. The radical preacher Joseph Harrison of Stockport commented: 'his writings are calculated above all to enlighten the more learned part of society. He writes in a higher style than Mr Cobbett, and [is] therefore not so easily comprehended. He possesses a very extensive mind, and is the best satirist that ever handled a pen.'[298]

Wooler also had northern connections. He had been born in Yorkshire, and went north in the spring of 1817 to meet other radicals in Leeds. Before he left, Oliver visited him in the King's Bench prison, spinning tales of imminent rebellion and trying to persuade Wooler to go north with him 'to print some papers for distribution, as a signal'. Wooler refused, but rumours that he would be visiting Manchester, in February 1818, swelled the crowds at a reform meeting.[299] Wooler had a tactical advantage of sorts in future legal battles, in that he was already in gaol. Tried alongside Cartwright and others in August 1820 for taking part in the election of an unofficial MP at Birmingham in 1819, he was sentenced to be imprisoned in Warwick Castle for fifteen months; there were so many appeals and delays that he was still there in March 1822.[300]

Wooler continued to publish from prison, editing not only the *Black Dwarf* but also a stamped Sunday newspaper, the *British Gazette*. Its first number, in January 1819, had been advertised in the *Manchester Observer*, and now it became the vehicle for the *Observer* to restart.[301] On Sunday 29 July 1821 the name *Manchester Observer* was added as a subtitle to *Wooler's British Gazette* (**Figure 10**), and items of Manchester news were added inside. On 25 August the paper began a new series, moving its publication day forward to Saturday, making *Manchester Observer* the main title, and adding the motto: 'Who Comes Next? This is a time for heroes!' It was difficult to tell whether the *Manchester Observer* had moved south or the *British Gazette* had moved north.

The flier for the first issue promised full coverage of the local events to mark the second anniversary of Peterloo.[302] As a result, 'a large impression was sold before

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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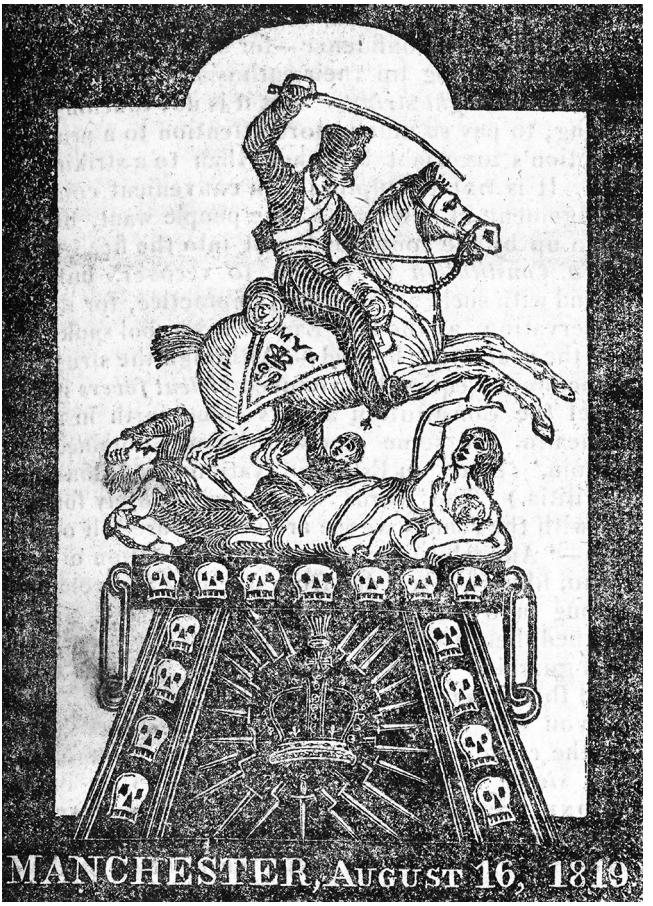

Figure 11 George Cruikshank, Design for a memorial to those who fell at Peterloo, *Manchester Observer*, 20 April 1822, p. 241 (John Rylands Library, R229748, © The University of Manchester). Nearly three years after Peterloo, Saxton's *Manchester Observer* continued to trade on its notoriety.

eleven o'clock in the morning, and five hundred additional copies might have been disposed of'. The coverage was so extensive that Saxton's opening editorial had to be postponed until the following week. For the first few weeks the paper continued to sell out on the morning of publication, thanks to its continuing coverage of the wave of public meetings and dinners that marked the second anniversary of Peterloo. 'We shall never cease . . . to hold up to public abhorrence the authors and agents in the foul transactions of the 16 August' Saxton declared.[303] His *Observer* traded on the belief that 'any thing which has even the remote connection with the events of the fatal 16 of August, must ever more powerfully excite the feelings of the people'. The following week it reprinted George Cruikshank's savage design for a Peterloo memorial (**Figure 11**).[304] The force of memory was also the force of circumstance, for the other conditions which had supported the radical movement had all but

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

disappeared with a strong recovery in the cotton trade, a sustained fall in prices, and a significant rise in living standards.

Hunt's Great Northern Union was launched at the same time as Saxton's *Manchester Observer*.[305] Hunt's aim was to create a network of local branches, each subscribing weekly to a national fund, which by cellular division would soon amount to a million supporters and a fund big enough to purchase dozens of rotten boroughs to provide parliamentary seats for radicals. There were, however, arguments over the ethics of collecting money to buy out boroughmongers when radical prisoners stood in need of support. In Manchester, where Wooler had hoped for 10,000 members contributing £10,000 a year, 1,000 members contributed £110 in the first year.[306] Saxton rode both horses, padding the *Observer*'s columns with wordy addresses to Hunt and Hunt's equally wordy replies, while including bulletins from other imprisoned radical reformers like Knight and Harrison, and a stream of bombastic poems about Peterloo. Wooler himself wrote from Warwick gaol to thank the reformers of Bury for a traditional seasonal gift: a simnel cake 5 feet in circumference.[307]

At the same time, the radical movement split. Hunt fell out personally with Johnson, and politically with Richard Carlile, exchanging venomous public letters with each. Carlile insisted that the only genuine kind of reform was republican and secular, while Hunt remained firmly constitutionalist, and wrote of 'that Great Reformer, Christ'. The Manchester Carlile supporters started meeting separately from the Huntites and Mary Fildes, who had been praised by both for her defence of the flag at Peterloo, came out publicly for Hunt and accused Carlile of having shown 'fear and cowardice' on the day. Carlile claimed that Fildes's letter had in fact been written by Saxton; while there is some evidence of male hands at work in earlier female reform manifestos, there is no reason to suppose that this letter was not Fildes's own.[308]

The last major episode of unfinished Peterloo business also divided reformers. The civil action of the Peterloo victim Thomas Redford against the Manchester Yeomanry struck Hunt and his supporters as an unseemly bid for compensation fuelled by greedy lawyers; Peterloo, he complained, could never be avenged by 'a base calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence, instead of demanding blood for blood'.[309] The *Observer* covered the trial in detail, with its further tranche of damning evidence, but at the same time denounced 'the farce of the MOCK TRIAL . . . got up *nobody knows how*, under the management of *nobody knows who* . . . a charge which ought to have been for WILFUL MURDER, but which, to serve an *inexplicable end*, has been frittered down to an indictment for *common assault*'. Saxton was angry that he had not being consulted about the action; having gone to Liverpool for the legal advice which had caused the meeting to be re-advertised he felt he was in possession of important information.[310]

The endless re-listings of the victims of Peterloo in the columns of the *Manchester Observer* papered over both the cracks in the movement and the shortage of real news. Saxton openly bemoaned 'the absence of all foreign intelligence, possessing anything like a claim to the attention of free-born Englishmen'. Advertisers were very few, and the paper actually suspended publication for a month in mid-winter without

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explanation. Possibly it had encountered further threats, for on its resumption Saxton wrote:

> In conducting *The Manchester Observer* at the present moment, with the dreadful Six Acts over our heads, and a prospect of banishment before our eyes, we are well aware, that we expose ourselves to all the malignity and persecution, which despotism can array against us.[311]

He still claimed for the paper 'a more general circulation than most other provincial journals' but the postmaster of Manchester reported only small packets of the paper going out. 'Its role is very limited . . . it soon must come to an end', commented Major Eckersley in February.[312] Saxton seemed to agree, informing his readers on 6 April that while foreign affairs were dull, 'equally barren are the subjects that have lately been occupying the *wisdom* of Parliament'. Even Lancaster Assizes was no longer a reliable source of outrage: 'there is a necessary and unavoidable sameness in these charges, which being frequently detailed, loses their interest with the reader'. The letters of 'Squib' about the Manchester Yeomanry were revived for a third outing, though he evidently laboured for material.[313] The paper was able to report on the activities of its former editor James Wroe, who after his release from prison promoted a series of non-denominational Sunday evening guest lectures at Manchester's Union Sunday School, opening with one of his own on the importance of education.[314]

In May 1822 Saxton could still claim that the *Manchester Observer* 'has become the general medium of communication with the Reformers throughout the kingdom'. 'My weekly returns in business, amount to from eighty to one hundred pounds', he stated not long afterwards, though this may have included his bookshop. The *Observer*, though, was in trouble. 'It is, in fact, *proscribed* by those who administer *Manchester Law* in this town, as well as in the widely extended district of Lancashire, and in some parts of the neighbouring counties. Any *publican* who should be hardy and independent enough to supply his customers with the Observer . . . would be unable to procure a renewal of his licence.' Saxton appealed for subscribers to pay off their arrears and tried to insist on payment quarterly in advance.[315] Still, longevity had its satisfactions. Sidmouth was given a warm send-off when he retired as Home Secretary in 1822: 'No man has been more instrumental in the production of the horrible condition of the country; and it would be unjust, if he should not reap some of the bitter fruits himself.'[316] The paper survived long enough to report on the suicide of Castlereagh. 'Castlereagh has slipped through our fingers!!! . . . He should have had a public trial and a public death', exclaimed Hunt. The death of Shelley, 'the friend of the Universe' (and Castlereagh's poetic executioner) was marked in the same issue.[317]

'I have long witnessed the declining state of the *Manchester Observer*' commented Hunt, as he began to issue his own bulletins toward the end of his long prison sentence.[318] The *Observer* kept going until the third anniversary of Peterloo, publishing its last issue on 14 September 1822 and expiring without further notice. Saxton turned up soon afterwards as a bookseller in Bolton, and not long after Hunt's release he was charged with a breach of the peace for wearing a hat decorated with

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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ribands and shouting 'Hunt and Liberty!' in the street.[319] Hunt's post-release procession was marked by a one-off loyalist satirical broadsheet, the *Manchester Comet*. Under the title 'See the Conquering Hero Comes' (**Figure 12**) it printed a crudely sketched picture of Hunt's coach entering Leeds accompanied by two former associates of the *Observer*, Thomas Chapman and Joseph Johnson. The *Comet* poked fun at 'the Manchester-London-Sexton-Wooler Observer' and suggested a motto: 'every man his own Sexton'.[320] It was left to the Tory *Manchester Herald* to write its rival's obituary: 'the *Manchester Observer* . . . is at last defunct . . . never did a viler production disgrace the freedom of the Press'.[321] After five years, seven proprietors, six editors, five imprisonments, four near-bankruptcies, the blackmail of its first editor, the attempted murder of its last and the loss of its presses, the *Manchester Observer* had succumbed to the most insidious threat of all: shortage of news.

7. Enter the *Guardian*

The birth of the *Manchester Guardian* can be traced to Peterloo, and the need for fair reporting in its aftermath. Since most sets of the *Manchester Observer* finish in 1821, the *Manchester Guardian* appears to succeed it. The accepted story is of a 'small but determined band' of liberal reformers deciding that the liberal cause would be better promoted by the 'calm and rational discussion' of a good newspaper than by volatile episodes of radical agitation.[322] They banded together to provide a loan of £1,050 to establish the *Manchester Guardian* in May 1821, which was paid back within three years as advertising revenue and circulation rapidly rose with the economic recovery. Through a combination of sound principles, commercial intelligence and political caution, the paper established itself as the forum for Manchester's enterprising middle class, and the core of the later 'Manchester school' of free trade politics. It moved from reforming economic liberalism in the 1820s–1840s to progressive liberalism in the late nineteenth century, and its move to London in the 1960s confirmed it as a national institution on the liberal left, making the radical *Manchester Observer* feel like its natural predecessor.

The chosen editor, the young John Edward Taylor, had the ideal combination: a background in the cotton trade, journalistic experience on the *Manchester Gazette*, and a record of robust opposition to Manchester's high Tory establishment. As for Taylor's own politics, Archibald Prentice wrote that 'his personal friends all knew that he went the full length of the radicalism avowed by Sir Francis Burdett' – that is, ratepayer or householder suffrage. He and Prentice had each sent a report of Peterloo to a London paper to fill the gap left by the arrest of *The Times* reporter John Tyas.[323] Afterwards, Taylor supported the Manchester Relief Committee and prepared a carefully documented demolition of official claims in his *Notes and Observations*. This can be seen as the beginning of the *Guardian*'s tradition of deep excavation of big stories; it also led to his wrongly being identified as the author of the *Observer*'s periodical *Peterloo Massacre*. He wrote that the Manchester Yeomanry contained 'individuals whose political rancour approaches to absolute insanity', though he also excepted the majority from this charge – a sign of a willingness to

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Figure 12 'See the Conquering Hero comes', *Manchester Comet*, 1822 (Chetham's Library, Hay Portfolio AB.11 (6), Courtesy of Chetham's Library). The loyalist *Manchester Comet* chose the occasion of Hunt's return from imprisonment in 1822 to depict him; Thomas Chapman, proprietor of the *Manchester Observer* in early 1821; and Joseph Johnson, the paper's main financial backer in 1819–20.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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make distinctions among Tories that characterised his future Liberal journalism.[324] In May 1821 the *Manchester Guardian* carried extensive coverage of the Commons debate on Burdett's motion for an inquiry into Peterloo. This was followed by articles attacking the Manchester Yeomanry, denouncing the spy system, and exposing a local *agent provocateur* – all radical territory. On 9 June Taylor made a direct pitch to readers of the *Observer*: 'I would respectfully suggest that the *Manchester Guardian*, combining principles of complete independence, and zealous attachment to the cause of reform, with active and spirited management, is a Journal in every way worthy of your confidence and support.'[325]

A somewhat different picture of the origins of the *Guardian* emerges from closer investigation of the *Manchester Observer* story. Both papers were the product of exceptionally sharp political division in late Georgian Manchester, but their solutions were very different. Despite an early foray into the *Observer*'s market the *Manchester Guardian* was an opposition paper but never a radical one. Much of its success was down not to copying the *Observer* but to avoiding its mistakes. Saxton's *Observer* noticed its rival just long enough to complain at 'the whining *whiggism* of a paper without any creed but that of enmity to the Tories'.[326] The paper's opening manifesto promised to 'warmly advocate the cause of reform', uphold 'the principles of civil and religious liberty' (or at least 'rational liberty'), and advocate 'all those ameliorations on our laws and political institutions, of which experience has proved the necessity'. It also promised a commitment to 'just principles of political economy' above party considerations. As Prentice observed, this gave Taylor 'ample verge and room for advocating the greatest or the smallest measure of reform'.[327]

However much Taylor deplored espionage and corruption – and there was plenty of both to deplore in Regency Manchester – he was an ally of the radical movement only in so far as he opposed its persecutors. He hoped and expected that radicalism would wither away in more benign political and economic conditions. In 1819 he criticised the support given to the imprisoned radicals Bagguley, Drummond and Johnston, who in turn rounded on 'that high morality man, John Edward Taylor'.[328] Shortly before the *Manchester Guardian* was launched Taylor was one of over seventy members of the new Market Street Improvement Commission, of whom (in Prentice's estimation) 'one fourth were Whigs and reformers, one fourth had taken little part in politics, and one half were Tories'. He was pleased when his fellow commissioners 'expressed their surprise to find him a reasonable gentleman, and not a rough radical bear'. While he supported repeal of the Combination Acts as a free trade measure, he remained as opposed to trade unionism as any mill owner; for the factory reformer Richard Oastler the *Manchester Guardian* was 'the cotton lords' Bible'.[329]

In the first month of the paper's existence Taylor was alone among his colleagues in supporting a severe cap on poor relief proposed in Parliament by the conservative Whig James Scarlett, prosecuting counsel at the York Peterloo trial; a year later he supported another of Scarlett's proposals on poor relief, which was so punitive that even Tory Manchester voted publicly to oppose it. The explanation, thought

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Prentice, was that Taylor was 'a Malthusian . . . regarding the multitude as intruders upon nature's feast, after the places at the table have been all taken'.[330] In the 1820s the *Guardian* smoothly incorporated two Tory papers, the *Manchester Mercury* and the *British Volunteer.* One of Taylor's agents in starting up was Thomas Sowler, a printer of St Ann's Square, a member of the militantly Tory Manchester Pitt Club alongside leading magistrates and Hugh Hornby Birley, mill owner and commander of the Manchester Yeomanry at Peterloo. Taylor moved confidently among the Tory-dominated circles of the Chamber of Commerce and the Exchange and formed common political cause with the economic liberals among them, including Birley himself, although the *Guardian* had declared, at the presentation of a ceremonial sword to Birley by his troops, that 'the sanction of all the special juries, and of all the judges in the kingdom, would be quite insufficient to wash out the "damned spot" of blood' from Peterloo. Taylor later claimed that the Manchester Tory party, over time, became 'much less intolerant and overbearing', adding: 'no small part of this change is owing to my own exertions'.[331]

Nor was Taylor's co-publisher Jeremiah Garnett a radical. Although he left the Tory *Manchester Chronicle* after his report on Peterloo was spiked, and allowed his own report to be passed to the *Manchester Observer* for its *Peterloo Massacre* periodical, he returned to write for the *Chronicle* again for a time.[332] Taylor's more reform-minded colleagues parted company with him once the *Guardian* was securely established. His former business partner John Shuttleworth supported persecuted reformers in 1812, corresponded with Cartwright in London, and after Peterloo corresponded with the Whig MP Henry Grey Bennett who was pressing for an inquiry into the events of 16 August 1819. After four years' writing for the *Guardian* he left.[333] Prentice in his memoirs summed up the paper's early progress:

> The *Guardian*, after a two years' experience of the difficulties of progression, took up its position half-way, rather disposed to wait for the coming up of those who were in the rear, than to march forward and join those who were in advance.

It became, in his view, an 'organ of whiggism'.[334]

It is to its defensive rather than its offensive capability that we need to look for the legacy of the *Manchester Observer* and the true strength of the *Manchester Guardian.* John Edward Taylor knew that few people crossed Manchester's Tory establishment in this period and got away with it. The redoubtable Thomas Fleming, the kingpin of the 1810s, was dramatically deserted over a financial scandal in which (reading between the lines) he was no longer in a position to cover up for his former cronies; even the *Manchester Observer* started to feel sorry for him, awed by the ruthlessness with which he was dumped.[335] Taylor had boldly defended a libel action against a leading Tory, John Greenwood, who had falsely accused him in public of having helped foment the 1812 Manchester Exchange riot. After failing to secure a retraction, Taylor sent Greenwood a private note calling him 'a liar, a slanderer, and a scoundrel'. Greenwood then sued for libel. Taylor chose to dispense with a lawyer in order to mount the high-risk defence that the libel was true. Perhaps he realised that Greenwood had confused him with his business partner John Shuttleworth,

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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who had written a flier in 1812 though not the one in question. Taylor cannily refused to reveal his hand, preferring instead to invite Greenwood to show his own evidence. He won his case on a knife-edge verdict forced by a single obstinate juror, one John Rylands of Warrington, a 'sedate, earnest, strong, thoughtful-looking man' who wore down the other jurors in the course of a long winter's night in Lancaster Castle. It was this episode which prompted a friend to suggest that Taylor set up a newspaper.[336] Another well-defended libel case in 1823, in which token damages were awarded against the *Guardian* in favour of a local banker who had been exposed as a fraud, cemented the paper's reputation as a defender of local commerce.[337] The *Guardian*'s manifesto pledged to 'sedulously avoid all tendency to private slander, and endeavour to prevent the best prerogatives and most important duties of the press from degenerating into calumny and abuse'.[338]

Behind Taylor's robust use of the law lay, surely, the salutary experience of the *Manchester Observer*: of Evans, brought down by a rash swipe at a local Tory; of Wardle and Wroe, forced out and nearly bankrupted by multiple prosecutions; and, above all, of the sinewy Chapman, challenging the Tory establishment with a pistol inside his jacket, condemned by a legal oversight to spend five months in Lancaster Castle and emerging a ruined man, ranting helplessly at his tormentors. Chapman was not part of Taylor's close-knit band, but his challenge to Fleming was covered in the *Manchester Gazette*, a paper for which Shuttleworth, Taylor and Prentice all wrote in this period. His fate must have been the talk of Manchester. Prentice wrote that the *Guardian*'s finances were set up in the expectation that its editor 'would encounter opposition from a very influential portion of the community'. Ten individuals each put up £100 and an eleventh £50, taking the entire risk off the editor's shoulders so that he 'should not have the fear of his own ruin before his eyes, in his attempt to lead public opinion', and thus 'to ensure a fearless cause in the attack of general and local misgovernment'. Prentice's complaint was that Taylor had used this formidable position not to lead the reform movement but to ingratiate himself with its opponents.[339] These defences, and the paper's cautious political line, were shaped by the need to survive the severe pressures on any opposition voices in Manchester in the hard years after Peterloo.

The *Manchester Guardian*, anchored in the cotton trade and sustained by advertising, was secure from the start. Its creed was to rely on free-market liberalism to bring about economic improvement and then political adjustment. That creed was severely tested by the banking collapse of 1825 and the civil war levied by Lancashire's handloom weavers in 1826 against the new steam-powered looms.[340] Despite its secure foundation the *Manchester Guardian* grew only slowly. It was launched during an economic recovery and was hawkish in its pursuit of advertising revenue, but sales were sluggish. In 1828, after seven years of commercially savvy operation, with its daily circulation at 3,000, the *Guardian* scrapped its old single-sheet Stanhope presses in favour of new steam-powered roller presses. Among those discarded was the one that had helped to print up to 4,000 copies a week of the *Manchester Observer.*

Subsequent attempts to publish reforming papers in Manchester showed just how difficult a venture it was, even in the much improved conditions of the 1820s.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Manchester's deep political divisions remained and newspaper publishing continued to be a rancorous, partisan business: 'the office of a Manchester newspaper in these years was no place for the timorous and non-committed', writes Turner. Prentice, despairing of Taylor's *Guardian*, set up a rival paper to promote the cause of reform. In 1824 he did what the founders of the *Guardian* had originally tried to do and purchased *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*, whose readership the *Guardian* barely managed to dent. Its circulation, however, stubbornly refused to take off, painfully increasing to 1,700 by 1828. Prentice relaunched it as the *Manchester Times* but finally went bankrupt and had to be bought out, its new proprietors retaining him as editor.[341] In 1830 the *Manchester Times* in turn acquired a rival on the left as the *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, launched in 1829 as a populist Tory weekly, turned radical after a year. Its circulation grew steadily, particularly after the stamp duty was reduced to a penny in 1836, and by 1837 it was up to 3,800 copies, still less than the *Observer* at its peak and in far better economic conditions.

Further afield was the radical *Tyne Mercury*, also a stamped weekly. Described by its historian as 'a moderate middle-class newspaper', it had long adopted a strong editorial stance on political issues but it opposed Hunt as 'a mad, meddling, malicious enthusiast'. In 1819, however, the new editor, W. A. Mitchell, took a vigorous line over Peterloo, providing such fulsome coverage of the Newcastle protest meeting in October of that year that the mayor sent a copy to Sidmouth. Sales figures for 1819 are lacking, but in a smaller town than Manchester, its regular print run in the post-war years was around 1,500, rising by half for major news stories. Like the *Observer* the *Tyne Mercury* was a strong supporter of the Queen Caroline agitation but took much less interest in reporting local labour disputes, which it failed to connect with radical politics. In the 1820s it moved towards the political centre, breaking with much of the reform movement in 1832 and opposing Chartism.[342] The Reform Bill agitation of 1832 demonstrated the power of the press when allied to mass agitation. On a wider scale and a broader political front, it vindicated the sort of confrontational tactics pursued in 1819 by the *Manchester Observer*.[343]

The Chartist press which came into existence in the late 1830s followed the success of the campaign against the 'taxes on knowledge', which saw the stamp duty reduced to a penny in 1836. The first Chartist newspaper, the Newcastle-based *Northern Liberator*, began in October 1837 as a competitor to the retreating *Tyne Mercury*. It was a stamped weekly priced at 4½*d*., giving it a halfpenny more margin over the stamp duty than the *Observer.* It ran for three years at an average sale of 4,000, the same as the *Observer* at its peak, also overtaking all its local competitors. Through the Chartist movement it built up a network of 112 agents across the country. It had one change of proprietor, and like the *Manchester Observer* was under constant threat of prosecution for supporting the popular right of resistance. It was eventually forced out of business by crippling fines after being prosecuted for an insurgent editorial.[344] Another regional Chartist paper was the *Western Vindicator*, which sold 3,200 unstamped copies a week for 2*d*. in the west of England and Wales in 1839.[345]

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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With the advent of the Chartist *Northern Star* in 1837, a national weekly based in Leeds, we are in different territory. It proclaimed itself to be 'a national organ; devoted to the interests of Democracy in the fullest and most definite sense'. Priced at 4*d*. stamped, within a year the Leeds-based weekly was selling 12,000 copies, overtaking the *Leeds Mercury* and *Manchester Guardian* to become the biggest-selling provincial weekly. The *Observer* had reached this relative position after about eighteen months, although it never had the *Star*'s national network. The *Northern Star*'s circulation peaked in 1839 at some 50,000 before settling at 18,000 in 1840, 12–13,000 in 1841–42 and 1848, and 6–9,000 for the rest of the decade.[346] One shop alone in Salford was selling 300 copies a week in 1839, and the paper's Oldham agent was the former *Observer* writer John Knight. 'It was part of a much larger Chartist cultural experience', writes Epstein. 'It was central to most local Chartist activity. Toasts were drunk to the *Northern Star* and the freedom of the press, votes of confidence and thanks were passed at meetings for its services.' Read out at meetings and celebrated at mass gatherings 'the *Star* represented a new departure in the history of the working class'.[347] The *Manchester Observer* performed a similar role in more hostile circumstances and on a regional scale. From 1819, particularly once Wroe took over, its London connections and circulation were significant. Anticipating the *Northern Star* by a generation and the *Manchester Guardian* by over a century, it maintained its printed circulation for a time by adopting dual bases in London and the north.

8. Conclusion: the *Manchester Observer* in Perspective

The story of the *Manchester Observer*, like that of the Chartist press, is inseparable from that of the radical movement which sustained it. Both press and movement need in turn to be understood in terms of the relationship between radical networks in Manchester and London, and in the context of a government move away from prosecuting the radical press in London and towards harrying it in the provinces.

In London the radical press flourished, connected to the mainstream press, the book trade, and to a democratic artisan culture whose political focus was provided by the regular elections in the City of London, Westminster and Middlesex. Behind it lay wealthy radical Whig patrons whose discreet support enabled the publishers of blasphemy and sedition to lead charmed lives. The trials of Hone and Wooler in 1817 collapsed in a blaze of press publicity, undermined by juries with a keen sense of civil liberties, and receptive to a courtroom rhetoric already familiar from the press. London, writes McCalman, had the advantage that 'a covert patronage system operated by middle-class intellectuals and entrepreneurs underpinned much of the writing and publishing of London ultra-radical pressmen in these years'.[348] Yet London's cultural strength coexisted with organisational weakness. The metropolitan radical movement was capable of mobilising impressive mass meetings, but it was organisationally fractured by a cadre of Spencean ultra-radicals obsessed by armed insurrection and carelessly hospitable to the spies who reported its every move to the Home Office.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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The Manchester region in 1819 was very different. Its cohesive handloom weaving communities, refreshed by waves of short-distance migration, were well-placed to sustain a mass popular movement which rivalled London's radical underworld.[349] At the same time, however, Manchester lacked London's democratic infrastructure and publishing networks; there were no open elections at any level, and reformers were up against Manchester's unaccountable high Tory authorities and against Lancashire juries fifty miles to the north. Manchester was fertile ground for popular protest but a dangerous place to run a radical newspaper.

This was where the *Manchester Observer* came in. It sought to connect the radical movements of London and Manchester without recourse to the conspiracies of 1817. In 1819 it set out to rally a national mass platform movement from Manchester, bringing Henry Hunt north twice and appealing on behalf of the region's reformers 'to the people of England'. The Peterloo meeting of August 1819, of which the *Manchester Observer* was in effect the main organiser, became a national event partly because of the unprecedented number of reporters present, John Tyas of *The Times* foremost among them. The future Manchester newspaper proprietors Prentice and Taylor ensured that the metropolitan press got early news of Peterloo to challenge loyalist claims from the outset. *The Times* was able to lead with the news that its own reporter had been arrested; when Tyas arrived in person with his despatch on Wednesday evening, Thomas Barnes stopped the presses to print his devastating account.[350] Reporters subsequently went north to cover the various Peterloo-related trials, with the editor of *The Times* turning up in person to challenge the coroner's reporting ban at the Oldham inquest. The *Manchester Observer*, supplemented in the autumn by its weekly *Peterloo Massacre* pamphlet, ensured that the evidence of Peterloo was put before the public and kept there month after month, and year after year. After sustaining a massive propaganda reverse, which continued through the Queen Caroline affair of 1820–21, the government succeeded in suppressing the radical movement. The Six Acts passed in the winter of 1819–20 restricted both the freedom of assembly and the liberty of the press, and changed the law to put both at a further disadvantage in the courts.

Unable to rely on London juries, the government sent prosecutions for libel and sedition out of London as far as possible, widening the practical application of the law to catch distributors and sellers as well as editors and publishers. The figures for both legal opinions and prosecutions show a spike in the aftermath of Peterloo. The impact of the repression showed not so much in the likelihood of conviction but in the sometimes ruinous effects of the costly legal run-around which editors and publishers were subject to, with those in the provinces prosecuted for the transgressions of those in the capital.[351] Wroe was convicted of selling seditious literature published in London, and Burdett was prosecuted at Leicester Assizes for a libel uttered in London, while Chapman and Evans faced long-drawn-out prosecutions and legal traps, coordinated between the government and the provincial authorities.

The *Manchester Observer* was sustained in part by a provincial version of London's 'radical underworld'. All its proprietors bar Chapman were involved in the book trade, which helped to sustain the paper through the most trying times, with its

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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owners, shop workers and distributors sharing the risks of prosecution. Beyond this, reform-minded men of business such as Johnson, Chapman, Whitworth and Shuttleworth were important in channelling some of Manchester's commercial wealth to the support of the radical press, supplying (to the dismay of magistrates) the crippling sums demanded in bail.

Manchester's coterie of radical publishers was also linked to London's radical underworld. In 1817 this was through the agency of Joseph Mitchell, James Molineux, William Ogden and William Benbow (a Mancunian of Cheshire origins who later set up as a bookseller in London), and in 1819–20 through Mark Wardle, James Wroe, J. T. Saxton and William Dugdale.[352] The *Observer* was able to bring in the seasoned metropolitan radicals Thomas Evans and Thomas Wooler to keep it going when hostile conditions in Manchester threatened to finish it off. Cartwright's support for Wooler at the London end in the *Observer*'s final phase in 1821–22 may have assisted the paper's survival. Its struggle for survival parallels the more famous defiance of Richard Carlile, whose family and supporters continued to run his publishing business for years while he, and they, were in gaol. But whereas Carlile was ideologically focused and happy to split the movement to conserve the integrity of his secular and republican ideals, the *Manchester Observer* plumped for Hunt, community, constitutionalism and radical populism.[353]

The case of a stamped newspaper like the *Manchester Observer* demonstrates the limits of studies that focus on the metropolitan press, especially the unstamped press, or on radical discourse alone. The study of radicalism as a stream of texts can throw up any number of examples to demonstrate that radical ideas were not confined by persecution, or to suggest the existence of a 'revolutionary' potential that could not be manifested physically. Peter Mandler, however, warns against over-selling the content of language without attention to its contemporary circulation, its influence, and its general 'throw-weight'.[354] David Worrall's work on London's theatrical culture has shown the importance of reading theatre texts in relation to the regulatory regime, the physical environment, and the full range of responses to the practical operation of power.[355] This was a culture in which radical rhetoric was highly valued, but in which radical change was not a political option. The result was what Gilmartin describes as 'reckless substitutions of language for power'.[356] To read this language in isolation, as a text alone – in postmodern terms, to 'privilege' it over other elements of the past – is to risk reproducing this rhetorical order, and becoming (in Joan Wallach Scott's phrase) 'an unwitting party to the politics of another age'.[357]

This is a misadventure into which it is less easy to be led in Manchester, where the *Manchester Observer* during its prime years was defined by its relationship to the radical movement of which it was a part, and to the authorities whose power it challenged. To learn in the correspondence between the magistrates and the Home Office of their desperation to bring down the *Manchester Observer*; to read the paper's description of its own once powerful editor Thomas Chapman led into court from his dungeon in Lancaster Castle; or to catch a glimpse of James Wroe at the New Bailey posting an enormous sum of bail and then skipping out refusing to

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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pay court fees, is to encounter the brute facts of power. The *Manchester Observer* mobilised not just words but people. It reported on the mass meetings of 1819, recounting the physical manoeuvres of the crowd to outwit the gathering forces of authority, amplifying the voices of defiance, and broadcasting them through its columns. These reports were then read – often aloud in groups – by the reformers themselves. In Saxton's editorial column 'To the People of England', printed with plenty of bold type, italics and exclamation marks to guide those reading aloud to others, the *Observer* merged its own voice with those of its followers, who began (in words once used from the platform by Edward Thompson) to feel their own strength. The editorial language varied between strong and melodramatic, but only in the paper's last phase, in 1821–22, does one get the sense of an editor repeating stale rhetoric to a core of converts. A study of the *Manchester Observer* takes us inside both Manchester's radical underworld and the underworld of loyalism which it confronted.

The future career of the paper's most successful editor, James Wroe, exemplifies this theme of text in context and words in action. Still only 30 or so when he was forced to give up the *Observer*, his business affairs took a long time to recover. In 1826–27 he returned to prison, this time as a debtor, but managed to set up again as a bookseller, and was an early cooperator; his shop, still in Great Ancoats Street, was described as 'a perpetual feast . . . a world at one view . . . without dullness or commonplace'. Having backed Hunt he also became a supporter of Richard Carlile, putting him up on his visits north; Carlile described Wroe as a gospel radical. He was prominent in the early Manchester Chartist movement, speaking at the Kersal Moor rally of 1838 before banners evoking the memory of Peterloo. He was elected as a delegate to the first Chartist convention in London in 1839, although he didn't take up his seat. He was most active in Manchester's local government, being elected a police commissioner four times in the 1830s, serving on the highways board, and being elected to the select vestry to influence the election of churchwardens. In the late 1830s he opposed the establishment of a Manchester Corporation, ironically lining up his Radical Electors' Association with the Tories against the *Manchester Guardian* group of municipal reformers. As a radical he could get into the parish vestry but a seat on the city council eluded him.[358] His colleague Saxton ended his life as editor of the reforming *Hertfordshire and Ware Patriot*, dying aged 57 in 1835, the same year as Cobbett and Hunt.[359] When Wroe died in August 1844, aged 55, the Chartist *Northern Star* carried a short obituary.

> Mr James Wroe, bookseller, Great Ancoats Street, Manchester . . . was one of the people; and although of late he has not taken any prominent part in public or local affairs, he retained his principles to the last. He was conspicuous in the time of Henry Hunt, and the paper (the *Observer*) which he conducted, was then, as the *Star* is now, a light to the people and a terror to evil-doers . . . He was equally an enemy to all abuse in the town's affairs, and has been the means of many of them being either much abated or totally removed.

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His two sons followed him into the print trade; in 1860 one, James, had a bookshop in Oxford Road and the other, chastened perhaps by a sixpenny fine forty years before, was running a sheet music shop in John Dalton Street.[360]

Slugging it out toe to toe with the most militantly Tory local authorities in England, twisting their tail from 'sedition corner', and rallying the reformers of Lancashire to appeal to 'the People of England', the *Manchester Observer* was England's leading radical newspaper and the chief organising force behind the mass platform movement which culminated at Peterloo. Through it Manchester became for a time the stronghold of both radical reform and the freedom of the press.

Acknowledgements

For assistance with this article and with bringing the *Manchester Observer* to free public access, the author would like to thank Hannah Barker, Nathan Bend, Malcolm Chase, Emma Davies, Robert Glen, Andrew Hobbs, Katrina Navickas, the late Donald Read (who lived to read a draft and to see the online files), John Hodgson and colleagues at the John Rylands Library Special Collections, Michael Powell, Fergus Wilde and colleagues at Chetham's Library, the Local Studies and Archives staff at Manchester Central Library going back many years, and the anonymous readers for this journal.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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Appendix. Announcement for the first issue of the *Manchester Observer*.[361]

PROSPECTUS

OF A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

(The first number of which will be published on Saturday, Jan, 3, 1818:)

ENTITLED, THE

Manchester Observer;

OR,

Literary, Political, and Commercial Register

'Encouraged by the reiterated and pressing solicitations of an extensive and respect circle of acquaintance, and guided by the judgment of a large number of intelligent friends . . .

We wish it to be clearly understood, that the MANCHESTER OBSERVER will be an *Independent Journal*; that it will be conducted on constitutional principles, and in a firm and temperate manner. It will be unremittingly devoted to the support of civil and religious liberty; and it will claim for all sects and denominations, the sacred rights of conscience. The Freedom of the Press, on which depends the freedom of Man, it will resolutely defend on all necessary occasions. But as this liberty ought not to degenerate into licentiousness, the OBSERVER can never become the vehicle of personal abuse. *Principia*, *non homines*, is an apothegm which we admire; and as we can neither be imposed upon by *names*, nor influenced by *factions*, we shall make it the rule of our conduct. Violence of every kind, we wish to condemn: it may serve a bad cause, but it can only injure a good one. It is unfriendly to the interests of truth, and a miserable substitute for reason and argument.

It will be our duty to watch over the interests of all whom it may be in our power to service; and as petty tyranny is sometimes no less oppressive than a more powerful despotism, we shall keep a constant eye on the conduct of the municipal authorities within our immediate district. For this vigilance we may incur the displeasure of a vicious magistracy, but we shall, on the other hand, be amply compensated by the approval of a virtuous one.

We shall consider it to be highly incumbent upon us to give the OBSERVER all the local interest within our power: for this purpose, we shall be particularly attentive to the proceedings at the New Bailey Quarter Sessions, and should any trial of superior interest occur, it will be correctly reported and published . . . It would be superfluous to add, that all domestic occurrences, worthy of the public attention, will be faithfully registered, accompanied with the necessary comments.

While the rights of the people are thus steadily and jealously guarded, their literary interests will claim and obtain much of our attention. Assisted by several men of

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letters, this department of our paper will unite the useful with the agreeable, amuse and instruct the reader, and, at the same time, furnish a novel feature in the character of a *Manchester newspaper.*

Whatever of science is valuable, whatever is interesting of agriculture and commerce, will here find a place; and as a strict regard to method will be observed, in the arrangement of every subject, each article will be found under its own proper head. This attention to order will further distinguish the Observer from almost all other Provincial Papers.

Original communications, in prose and verse, with useful extracts from new, scarce, and valuable books, will enrich the columns of our Journal; and, in short, every effort, consistent with our principles, will be made to render it worthy of the support which is now solicited.

From the number and respectability of the subscribers already obtained, we shall expect such an extensive circulation of the Observer, as will render it worthy of the attention of our advertising friends.

A . . . likeness of the late Princess Charlotte, and of her illustrious Consort, will be given to the Purchaser of the first number.

The price of the paper will be 7d –30s per year if paid in advance. It will be printed in 4to size, for the convenience of binding, and at the end of each year a Title Page and a copious Index will be printed to complete the volume.

Printed and published by T. Rogerson & Co., Market Place, Manchester . . . Orders for the Manchester Observer will be received by Newton and Co., Warwick Square, and White, 53 Fleet Street, London . . . by J. Thomson & Co., Edinburgh . . . Glasgow . . . Liverpool . . . Warrington . . . Preston . . . Blackburn . . . Bolton . . . Chorley . . . Bury . . . Chowbent . . . Ormskirk . . . Lancaster . . . Stockport . . . Macclesfield . . . Ashton . . . Nottingham . . . Birmingham . . . Derby . . . Leicester . . . Rochdale . . . Huddersfield . . . Chester . . . Carlisle . . . Colne . . . Leeds . . . Sheffield.'

Notes

1 Donald Read, *Peterloo: the 'Massacre' and its Background* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1958); Robert Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019).

2 http://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/allCollections. This is the only complete set of the paper in existence, and it is likely to have been the *Observer*'s own house set, acquired by the *Manchester Guardian* along with its press in 1821. The British Library has a set of volumes I–III of the *Manchester Observer* for 1818–20, missing volume IV for January–June 1821, and a full set of *Wooler's British Gazette/Manchester Observer* from 25 August 1821 to 14 September 1822. The British Library's collection also includes issues 1, 2, 3 and 5 of *Wardle's Manchester Observer* for 5, 12, 19 June and 3 July 1819, and then issues 1 and 2 of *Wardle's Manchester Observer, or Literary and Political Register*, new series, 10 and 17 July 1819. (Despite the apparent gaps, pagination suggests that this

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is a complete set). Manchester Central Library has bound copies of all four volumes for 1818–21 (N135, N141, N147 and N155), including *Wardle's Manchester Observer* for 19 June 1819. The set has several gaps, which can be partly filled by items from volumes N120 and N135A. This set has been microfilmed, with further omissions and some muddling of pages. There is also an unbound set of the 1821–22 *British Gazette/Observer* (BR fo. 72.733), including four pre-*Observer* issues of *Wooler's British Gazette* from 29 July to 19 August 1821, also absent from the *Manchester Observer* volumes in the John Rylands Library. This has not been microfilmed. Chetham's Library has several issues from February to April 1818, available as pdfs via the online catalogue, together with several issues from 1819 and *Wardle's Manchester Observer* for 5 June and 3 July 1819. Many individual copies of the *Manchester Observer* were sent to the Home Office by the Manchester authorities and the military commander of the Northern District Sir John Byng, and survive in the Home Office disturbances papers in the National Archives, HO 40/11–17 (1820–22), HO 42/176–203 (1818–20), and HO 44/1. The National Library of Scotland has a short run from 2 October to 20 November 1819.

3 Ian McCalman, *Radical Underworld* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988); Michael Scrivener, *Poetry and Reform* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1992); David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790–1820* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1992); Worrall, '*Mab* and Mob: the Radical Press Community in Regency England', in S. C. Behrendt (ed.), *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 137–56; Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998); Paul Keen (ed.), *The Popular Radical Press in Britain 1817–21*, 6 vols (London, Pickering & Chatto, 2003); Kevin Gilmartin and James Chandler, *Romantic Metropolis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005). John Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) also covers this ground but extends its coverage to Manchester and Peterloo.

4 James Epstein, 'Feargus O'Connor and the Northern Star', *International Review of Social History*, 21:1 (1976), 51–97; Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (eds), *Papers for the People* (London, Merlin Press, 2005); Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside, 1829–1900* (London, Merlin Press, 2007).

5 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968), p. 742.

6 Donald Read, *The English Provinces, c.1760–1960: A Study in Influence* (London, E. Arnold, 1964), pp. 73–6.

7 British Academy Small Research Grant SG 130774, 'The English Reform Movement of 1816–17: Understanding the Home Office disturbances papers'. The material is explained and explored in Nathan Bend, 'The Home Office and Public Disturbance, *c*.1800–1832' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Hertfordshire, 2018).

8 Francis Philips, *An Exposure of the Calumnies, Circulated by the Enemies of the Social Order, and Reiterated by their Abettors, Against the Magistrates and the Yeomanry Cavalry of Manchester and Salford* (2nd edn, London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819), p. 46.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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9 Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 750.
10 For a survey of Manchester in this period, see Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, chs 2–3.
11 *Manchester Observer* (hereafter *MO*), 9 January 1819. The article was taken from the *Monthly Magazine.*
12 Donald Read, 'Introduction' to Archibald Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester* (3rd edn, London, Cass, 1970 [1851]), p. viii; Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society 1695–1855* (New York, Longman, 2000); Peter Brett, 'Early nineteenth-century Reform Newspapers in the Provinces: the *Newcastle Chronicle* and the *Bristol Mercury*', *Studies in Newspaper and Periodical History*, 3:1 (1995), 49–67.
13 Quoted by Viscount Canning in the House of Lords debate on repeal of the newspaper stamp duty, 24 May 1855.
14 William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 186–209.
15 E. G. West, 'Literacy and the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 31:3 (1978), 369–383; D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 22–32, 95–119; Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society in England 1780–1870* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1991); I am grateful to Robert Glen for sight of the manuscript of his *Stopfordiana: Printing and the Book Trade in Stockport* (forthcoming: Manchester, Chetham Society).
16 Arthur Aspinall, *Politics and the Press c.1780–1850* (London, Hone and Van Thal, 1949; repr. Brighton, 1973), pp. 9–12; Robert Southey, *Letters from England*, vol. 1 (New York, 1836), p. 375. Note. All ellipses [. . .] are inserted by the author.
17 Jeremy Black, 'Continuity and Change in the British Press, 1750–1833', *Publishing History*, 36 (1994), 39–85, at 75; Addington papers, Devon Record Office, 152M/C/1819/OH56, Sidmouth to W. L. Caldecot, 7 August 1819.
18 Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, pp. 38–43, 47–9; *The Times*, 3 January 1817.
19 Francis Place, 'Politics: Proceedings in Parliament and among the People 1815–1818', 113–18, in Place Papers xxi, British Library Additional MS 27809; Philip Harling, 'The Law of Libel and the Limits of Repression, 1790–1832', *Historical Journal*, 44:1 (2001), 107–34 (at 121).
20 *The Guardian*, 5 May 2011.
21 Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, pp. 6–34 and 57–60; Hannah Barker, 'England 1760–1815', in H. Barker and S. Burrows (eds), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 93–112, is more positive about the independence of the press than earlier writers such as Aspinall and Read.
22 Home Office disturbances papers (hereafter HO), National Archives, HO 42/156 fo. 21, Chippendale to Fletcher, 2 December 1816.
23 *MO*, 4 September 1819.
24 On the Manchester press, see Donald Read, *Press and People* (London, Edward Arnold, 1961), pp. 59–79; David Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London, Collins, 1971), pp. 42–8.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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25 F. Leary, *History of the Manchester Periodical Press* (unpublished MS, Manchester Central Library, *c.*1898), pp. 121–4.
26 *MO*, 5 August 1820.
27 Read, *Press and People*, pp. 70–3; John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales 1790–1810* (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 113; Craig Horner, 'The Rise and Fall of Manchester's "set of infernal miscreants": Radicalism in 1790s Manchester', *Manchester Region History Review*, 12 (1998), 18–26.
28 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 109; Katrina Navickas, *Radicalism and Loyalism in Lancashire 1789–1815* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 145–51.
29 Katrina Navickas, '"Theaw kon ekspect no mooar eawt ov a pig thin a grunt", Searching for the Radical Dialect Voice in Industrial Lancashire and the West Riding, 1798–1819', in *J*. Kirk, A. Noble and M. Brown (eds), *United Islands? The Languages of Resistance* (London, Pickering & Chatto, 2012).
30 Leary, *Manchester Periodical Press*, p. 121; *The Courier*, Newsplan project microfilm, Manchester Central Library (hereafter MCL). The paper is said to have been published for two years in 1817–18 but there appears to be no physical evidence, and its seems unlikely given the other reforming papers that existed at this time. The paper has been confused with the later *Manchester Courier*, founded by the Tory Thomas Sowler in January 1825, and with the contemporary London *Courier*, images of which for 1825 are included in the same microfilm.
31 HO 42/180 fo. 62, anonymous press correspondent, 2 September 1818.
32 *Manchester Spectator*, 7 November 1818.
33 St Clair, *The Reading Nation*, pp. 574–5.
34 R. Poole, 'Petitioners and Rebels: Petitioning for Parliamentary Reform in Regency England', *Social Science History*, forthcoming 2019; also *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, chs 4–5.
35 *MO*, 26 December 1818 (advert); 'Account of weekly newspapers published in the metropolis, 1817–20', *House of Commons Papers* 1821, xvi, 387; 'Account of number of stamps issued for newspapers, 1801 and 1821', *House of Commons Papers* 1822, xxi, 381; *Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1822. No figures were included for individual provincial newspapers.
36 Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, pp. 24–32; Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 48; Harling, 'Law of Libel', 131.
37 *MO*, 10 January 1818.
38 *State Trials* n.s. i (1888), 370–1; Henry Hunt, *The Trial of Henry Hunt and Others* (Manchester, R. & W. Dean, 1820), pp. 135–9 (evidence of Robert Wright).
39 *Ibid*., p. 110 (evidence of William Ellson).
40 HO 42/184 fo. 90, Norris, 3 February 1819; HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Norris, 27 March, 10 April 1819.
41 Shuttleworth Scrapbook, MCL BR.F942.7389 Sc13, fo. 89. The double-sided circular is pasted in but the reverse is, just, legible; a transcript is given as an appendix, below.
42 Leary, *Manchester Periodical Press*, 125–8; *MO*, 3 January 1818.
43 *Ibid*., p. 117.
44 *Ibid*., pp. 117–18; HO 42/158 fo. 719.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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45 Shuttleworth Scrapbook, fo. 27.
46 *MO*, 1 February 1818; HO 42 159 fos 35–51.
47 Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, ch. 6.
48 *MO*, 24 January 1818.
49 *Wardle's Manchester Observer*, 5 June 1819 (hereafter *WMO*). This issue is in the MCL set but not in the bound volumes in the Rylands; a microfilm is available at the British Library.
50 Shuttleworth scrapbook, fo. 111.
51 James Epstein, *Radical Expression* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 29–69.
52 *MO*, 18 April 1818. The *Observer* had recently given extensive coverage to allegations of corruption against the Deputy Constable Joseph Nadin, who ran several pubs and was believed to have abused his office to prosecute rivals for licensing offences: *MO*, 14 February 1818 (two letters).
53 HO 42/178 fo. 308, Lloyd to Hobhouse, 25 July 1818.
54 HO 42/179 fo. 164, Byng to Hobhouse, 3 August 1818.
55 HO 42/179 fos 285–91, Norris to Hobhouse, 5 August 1818; Bagguley, 23 July 1818.
56 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Lloyd, 27 and 29 July, 7 and 10 August 1818; HO 42/179 fos 120–3, Lloyd to Hobhouse, 8 and 23 August 1818.
57 HO 42/179 fos 102–4, Lloyd to Hobhouse, 12 and 15 August 1818.
58 HO 42/179 fos 302–4, Lloyd to Hobhouse, 16 and 18 August 1818.
59 HO 42/179 fos 300–2, 275, Lloyd to Hobhouse, 19, 22, and 29 August 1819.
60 HO 42/182 fo. 2, Norris to Sidmouth, 18 November 1818.
61 *MO*, 16 January 1819. Thomas Wilkinson also printed in Manchester Joseph Harrison's *Report of the Proceedings of a . . .. Meeting held at Stockport, 28 September 1819* (HO 42/181 fo. 190 and HO 42/182 fo. 641). Wilkinson was one of the 38 Manchester reformers arrested, tried and acquitted in 1812, and continued to publish into the 1830s: Glen, *Stopfordiana*.
62 *Manchester Spectator*, 7 November 1818 (Chetham's Library, Manchester). In early January Citizen Howarth Cowdroy advertised another new periodical, *The Citizen, or, Political and Literary Mirror*. Costing 3½*d*. a week it offered 'a selection of Political, Philosophical, Literary, and other entertaining matter', optimistically aimed at 'the labouring classes'. Shuttleworth scrapbook, fo. 111.
63 HO 42/183 fos 386, 391, No. 2 to Chippendale, 4 and 7 January 1819.
64 HO 42/183 fo. 388, 'B', 8 January 1819.
65 HO 42/183 fo. 24, [c.7] January 1819, Boroughreeve and Constables of Manchester; *MO*, 26 December 1818.
66 Ibid.
67 HO 41/4, Hobhouse, 7 January 1819; HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Fletcher, 14 January 1819.
68 HO 42/184 fo. 329, Chippendale to Fletcher, 9 February 1819.
69 *MO*, 23 January 1819; Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 147; *The Memoirs of Henry Hunt, written by himself*, iii (1820), unpaginated searchable text at Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org/; Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, ch. 9.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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70 HO 42/183 fo. 349, Chippendale to Norris, 27 January 1819.
71 HO 42/183 fo. 256, Norris to Sidmouth, 30 January 1819.
72 HO 42/183 fo. 258, Jackson to Freeling, 25 January 1819.
73 National Archives TS 11/155/467, *MO*, 23 January 1819; also TS 25/2034, p. 240.
74 HO 41/4 p. 248, 3 February 1817.
75 HO 42/183 fo. 274, Norris to Sidmouth, n.d. [received 26 January 1819].
76 *MO*, 23 January 1819.
77 HO 42/183 fo. 362, Norris to Sidmouth, 23 January 1819.
78 Shuttleworth scrapbook, fo. 101; HO 42/184 fo. 27 Chippendale, 18 February 1819; HO 79/3 p. 476, Hobhouse to Stamp Office, 2 August 1819.
79 *MO*, 2 December 1820, report of King v. Chapman.
80 *MO*, 12 June 1819.
81 *MO*, 30 October 1819; HO 42/198, fos 120–7, 'W.M.', 7 November 1819 (in Read, *Peterloo*, pp. 218–23).
82 *MO*, 2 May 1818.
83 Shuttleworth scrapbook, fo. 97, 'To the Public'.
84 *MO*, 6 June and 4 July 1819.
85 *MO*, 30 January 1819; Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, ch. 9.
86 *Memoirs of Henry Hunt*, iii (1820).
87 *MO*, 13 February 1819.
88 *MO*, 20 February 1819.
89 *MO*, 6 March 1819.
90 *MO*, 22 May 1819.
91 *MO*, 17 April, 8 May, 22 May 1819.
92 Andrew Hobbs and Claire Januszewski, 'How local newspapers came to dominate Victorian poetry publishing', *Victorian Poetry*, 52:1 (2014), 65–87. On pre-Chartist radical poetry, see: Michael Scrivener, *Poetry and Reform: Periodical Verse from the English Democratic Press 1792–1824* (Detroit, Wayne University Press, 1992); Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest*; Alison Morgan, *Ballads and Songs of Peterloo* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019).
93 John Gardner, 'Charles Lamb and the *Manchester Observer*', *Notes and Queries*, 60:2 (2013), 238–41. The poems appeared in *MO* on 10 January 1818 (Canning), 3 October 1818, and 5 August 1820 (Lamb).
94 Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest*, pp. 21–32.
95 *MO*, 6 March 1819 onwards; 3 July 1819.
96 *MO*, 20 February 1819.
97 *MO*, 15 May 1819.
98 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Fletcher, 1 March 1819; HO 42/185 fo. 329, Norris to Sidmouth, 4 March 1819; *MO*, 30 January, 13 February 1818. It is not clear what comments were found actionable; the detailed report promised on 30 January was pushed out by the report of the brawl between Hunt's company and members of the Hussars in the theatre.
99 *MO*, 20, 27 February 1819.
100 *MO*, 18 December 1819.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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101 *MO*, 13 March 1819. On 20 March Chapman published a list of the excessive prices for gas pipes charged by the contractors Peel and Williamson.
102 *MO*, 13 March 1819.
103 *MO*, 8 May 1819.
104 *MO*, 6 February 1819; *Manchester Gazette*, 15 April 1820; Harling, 'The Law of Libel', 113, 117–18 and 131.
105 *MO*, 22 May, 4 September 1819.
106 *MO*, 8 May 1819, letter from 'A Reformer'; Phillips, 'J T Saxton: a Chesterfield Radical', *Derbyshire Miscellany*, 18:2 (2007), 32–7; HO 42/192 fo. 21, Norris to Sidmouth, 19 August 1819.
107 *WMO*, 5 June 1819.
108 HO 42/188 fo. 535, Norris to Sidmouth, 10 June 1819; enclosure at HO 42/181 fo. 167.
109 *WMO*, 12 June 1819.
110 *WMO*, 5 June 1819.
111 *WMO*, 19 June, 3 July 1819; *MO*, 26 July 1819.
112 HO 42/188, Johnston to Harrison, 18 June 1819; Harrison to Bagguley, 30 June 1819, in *Chester Chronicle*, 14 April 1820. Both available at Anthony Youngman's site, https://revjosephharrison.wordpress.com/ (accessed 13 December 2018).
113 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Stamp Office, 2 August 1819.
114 *MO*, 8 May 1819; HO 42/190 fo. 164, Hay to Hobhouse, 28 July 1819; Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 56–63.
115 *WMO*, 3 July 1819; HO 42/191 fos 305–6; HO 41/4, Hobhouse to Ethelston, 17 August 1819.
116 Milne to Maule, 1 April 1821, in TS 11/697/2210.
117 *MO*, 7, 14, 21 February 1818, 19 December–9 January 1819.
118 *MO*, 12 June 1819.
119 HO 42/188 fo. 535, Norris to Sidmouth 10 June 1819.
120 Philips, *An Exposure of the Calumnies*, p. 46; HO 42/188 fo. 535, Norris to Sidmouth, 10 June 1819.
121 Paul Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 209–10; HO 42/175 fos 23–5, 277.
122 *MO*, 21 March 1818, 3 October 1818 (advert).
123 Autobiography of James Weatherley, Chetham's Library, Manchester, entry under 'James Wroe, bookseller'; HO 42/181 fo. 289, James Hanley to Maule, 12 October 1818; HO 42/181 fo. 341, Norris to Sidmouth, 20 October 1818.
124 *MO*, 17 July 1819.
125 HO 40/3 part 2, fo. 810 (Cobbett's Register); HO 40/5/4a items 10, 11, 65 (Blanket meeting); HO 40/10 fos 143–4 (address); HO 42/156 fos 6–7 (meetings); HO 42/159 fos 21 and 43 (meetings); HO 42/162 fo. 209 (arrest).
126 Metropolitan Relief Committee report, 1820; W. E. A. Axon (ed.), *Manchester a Hundred Years Ago* (Manchester, Heywood, 1883; repr. Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1968), pp. ii-xxii; Charles Hadfield, 'A Forgotten Lancashire Poet', *Manchester Literary Club Proceedings* (1873–4), 67–70; *MO*, 16 March 1822 (obituary).

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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127 British Book Trade index, http://bbti.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/; D. R. Evans, *Preliminary History of the Book Trade in Manchester to 1851* (unpublished MS, Chetham's Library); Michael Powell and Terry Wyke, 'Penny Capitalism in the Manchester Book Trade: the Case of James Weatherley', in *The Reach of Print: Making, Selling, and Using Books*, ed. P. Isaac and B. McKay (Winchester, 1998); Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789–1848* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 51–81; HO 42/156 fo. 6; HO 42/159 fos 21, 43; HO 42/162 fo. 209; HO 40/5/4a fos 1348–50. Worrall's statement ('*Mab* and Mob', 147) that James Molineux printed *The Gorgon* is inaccurate; it was William.
128 HO 42/179 fo. 424, Norris to Hobhouse, 7 August 1818.
129 HO 42/172 fo. 585, Charlotte Johnston to John Johnston, 30 December 1817; *Peterloo Massacre* (Manchester, 1819), p. 162.
130 *MO*, 23 January 1819; HO 42/182 fo. 2, Norris to Sidmouth, 18 November 1818.
131 *MO*, 6 February 1819; HO 42/184 fo. 33.
132 HO 42/182 fo. 2, Norris to Sidmouth, 18 November 1818.
133 HO 42/183 fo. 386, No. 2 to Chippendale [4 January 1819]; HO 42/185 fo. 132, Chippendale, 10 March 1819.
134 HO 42/183 fo. 386, No. 2 to Chippendale [4 January 1819].
135 *The Times*, 11 August 1819, elaborating on a report from John Tyas; copied in *The Courier*, 11 August 1819.
136 Oswald Milne, Lancaster, to George Maule, London, 1 April 1821, in TNA TS11/697/2210, *R.* v. *Evans*, 31 March 1821.
137 *MO*, 24 July 1819.
138 *The Times*, 11 August 1819; Hunt, *Trial of Henry Hunt*, pp. 112–15.
139 Phillips, 'J T Saxton'; HO 42/158 fol. 404, anonymous report, 27 Jan. 1817; HO 42/183 fos 325–8, anon. account of meeting at St Peter's Field, 18 January 1819.
140 HO 42/183 fos 323–4, Chippendale, *c.*6 January 1819. A word is obliterated.
141 *MO*, 19 June 1819. The poem had appeared (with Saxton's name omitted) in Bamford's first volume of verse, *The Weaver Boy* (1819).
142 *MO*, 19 June 1819.
143 HO 42/192 fo. 354, Johnson, 20 August 1819.
144 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Byng, 9 August 1819; HO 40/12 fos 339–58.
145 HO 42/190 fo. 164, Hay to Hobhouse, 28 July 1819; HO 40/11 fo. 153, Byng, 12 March 1820.
146 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Stamp Office, 2 August 1819.
147 HO 42/191 fo. 405, Fletcher to Sidmouth, 10 August 1819, reprinted in 'Papers Relative to the Internal State of the Country', *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) xii (1819–20), 249–50.
148 HO 42/191 fo. 305–6; Michael Lobban, 'From Seditious Libel to Unlawful Assembly: Peterloo and the Changing Face of Political Crime *c.*1770–1820', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 10:3 (1990), 329; Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, chs 10–11.
149 *MO*, 10 July 1819; Lord Stanley, House of Commons debates, 26 November 1819 (xli p. 324).
150 *MO*, 17 July 1819.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
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151 HO 41/4, Hobhouse to Norris, 21 July 1819, Hobhouse to Ethelston, 24 July 1819.
152 *MO*, 24 July 1819.
153 *Black Dwarf*, 27 July 1819.
154 *MO*, 31 July 1819.
155 HO 42/190 fo. 114, Norris to Sidmouth, 29 July 1819.
156 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Hay, 23 July 1819 and to Norris, 31 July.
157 *Manchester Chronicle*, 24 July 1819.
158 TS 25/2035 (law officers' opinions), p. 165.
159 HO 79/3 p. 478, Hobhouse to Stamp Office, 3 August 1819.
160 *MO*, 7, 14 August 1819.
161 *MO*, 14 August 1819; *The Times*, 11 August 1819.
162 HO 42/192 fo. 354, Joseph Johnson, 20 August 1819.
163 W. H. Mills, *The Manchester Guardian: A Century of History* (1922), p. 28.
164 HO 42/192 fos 348–50, Hay, 16 August 1819.
165 *Trial of Henry Hunt*, pp. 41–5 (evidence of Henry Horton).
166 *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8, evidence of Matthew Cowper.
167 *Ashton Reporter*, 17 August 1867, cited in Robert Hall, 'Creating a People's History: Political Identity and History in Chartism, 1832–1848', in Owen R. Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts (eds), *The Chartist Legacy* (Rendlesham, Merlin, 1999), pp. 232–54.
168 J. A. Dowling (ed.), *The Whole Proceedings before the Coroner's Inquest at Oldham on the Body of John Lees* (London, William Home, 1820), pp. 179–80, 540–7.
169 *The Times*, 19 August 1819.
170 HO 42/192 fo. 73, Garnett, 16 August 1819.
171 On the role of the press at Peterloo, see Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, chs 13–14.
172 HO 42/192 fo. 374, Dyneley, 21 August 1819 (copy).
173 *MO*, 29 January, 5 February 1820.
174 *MO*, 21 August 1819.
175 HO 42/192 fo. 21, Norris to Sidmouth, 19 August 1819; fos 353–4, Johnson, 19 August 1819.
176 HO 42/192 fo. 345 Byng, Pontefract, to Hobhouse, 23 August 1819; HO 41/4, Hobhouse to Norris, 25 August 1819; *MO*, 25 September 1819.
177 *Memoirs of Henry Hunt*, iii; *Leeds Mercury*, 29 September 1819.
178 HO 42/199 fo. 52, 19 November 1819; HO 40/11 fos 134–5, Chippendale to Byng, 2 March 1820.
179 Shuttleworth scrapbook, fo. 123; *MO*, 28 August 1819.
180 HO 42/193 fo. 78, Norris to Sidmouth, 23 August 1819 + enclosure fo. 230; HO 41/4 Hobhouse to Norris, 25 August 1819.
181 *Peterloo Massacre* (1819), MCL Q130/1; *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 26 November 1819.
182 *MO*, 18 and 25 September 1819. The image can be seen in the JRL online Peterloo collection, R52983.2.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

183 The paper portrait is pasted into the copy of Baines' *History of Lancashire* owned by the Rochdale antiquarian Jesse Lee, MCL 942.72 L28 vol. 2 part 1. The small cloth portrait is pasted into a copy of the Dolby edition of *The Trial of Henry Hunt*, MCL 942.730731 P88.

184 The copper plate turned up in 2018 in an auction of items from the collection of the Manchester publisher Abel Heywood and was obtained by Paul Edwards, to whom I am grateful for a print. It can be compared with the smaller Slack version in the JRL online Peterloo Collection, R52983.2, and the larger Slack version in the British Museum online print collection, 1893,0106.39 and in several Manchester collections.

185 *MO*, 1 September 1821.

186 HO 42/198 fo. 308.

187 Epstein, *Radical Expression*, p. 35.

188 *MO*, 27 November 1819; Read, *Peterloo*, p. 218.

189 *Republican*, 1 March 1822.

190 HO 79/3, Hobhouse to Norris, 23 August 1819; HO 42/197 fo. 500, handbill.

191 *MO*, 28 August, 11 September 1819.

192 TS 25/1035 pp. 174–232; Katrina Navickas, 'Political Trials and the Suppression of Popular Radicalism in England, 1799–1820', in G. Pentland, E. Macleod and M. T. Davis (eds), *Political Trials in an Age of Revolution: Britain and the North Atlantic, 1793–1848* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

193 Robert L. Patten, *George Cruikshank's Life, Times and Art. Vol. 1. 1792–1835* (Cambridge, Lutterworth Press, 1992), pp. 157–9.

194 *MO*, 28 August 1819.

195 HO 42/198 fo. 134.

196 HO 42/194 fos 25–6, Norris to Sidmouth, 9 September 1819; HO 41/5 p. 26 (with thanks to Katrina Navickas).

197 *MO*, 2 October 1819; *Democratic Recorder*, 2 October 1819, 11 (Hay Portfolio, Chetham's Library).

198 J. G. Wright, 'An Anglo-Irish Radical in the Late Georgian Metropolis: Peter Finnerty and the Politics of Contempt', *Journal of British Studies*, 53:3 (2014), 660–84.

199 Dowling, *Body of John Lees*, pp. 104–5, 189–92 and 402–6.

200 *MO*, 16 October 1819.

201 TS 11/2035, pp. 165–232: Harling, 'Law of Libel'.

202 Aspinall, *Press and People*, pp. 206, 429, citing HO 42/192, Hay to Hobhouse, 14 August 1819, HO 79/4, Hobhouse to Hay, 29 September 1819.

203 *MO*, 30 October 1819. Johnson later wrote of this period: 'Sometime about michaelmas, I went to London with the intention of meeting Mr Wroe there, and putting in bale [*sic*] for him at the judge's chambers, it being found difficult, and appeared impossible to procure the excessive bale demanded from him in Manchester.' Although Wroe did find bail, such a move seems entirely plausible. Joseph Johnson, *Letter to Henry Hunt* (2nd edn, Manchester, J. Wheeler, 1822), p. 16. JRL English MS. 1197/49 is a note to James Wroe about bail, undated, in circumstances which are unclear.

204 *MO*, 30 October 1819; HO 42/198, fo. 462, Birley to Sidmouth, 1 November 1819.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

205 HO 42/197 fos 348–72, Norris to Sidmouth, October 1819, quotation at fo. 355, 30 October 1819; *MO*, 6 November 1819.

206 HO 42/198 fos 120–7, report of 'W. M.' enclosed in Norris to Sidmouth, 7 November 1819; HO 42/198 fos 140–1, 'Y' to Boroughreeve of Manchester, 6 November 1819. The first report is reproduced in Donald Read, *Peterloo*, 2nd edn (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1973), Appendix B. On the disputes over radical strategy, see John Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 90–109; Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Folkestone, William Dawson and Son, 1979), pp. 117–31.

207 On Walker, see Belchem, 'Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform', *English Historical Review*, 93:369 (1978), 739–73, at 764; Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt*, pp. 128–9 and notes 165–7; Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 766–7. On Bradbury, see Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, chs 5–7.

208 HO 42/200 fo. 135, Norris to Sidmouth, 7 December 1819. If Chorlton had turned informer it did him no good, for he was later sentenced to four months' imprisonment.

209 HO 42/198 fos 108–9, Fletcher to Sidmouth, 17 November 1819; HO 42/199 fo. 52, Anon., 19 November 1819; HO 42/200 fo. 122 *et seq.*, Norris to Sidmouth, December 1819; *MO*, 11 December 1819.

210 HO 42/203 fo. 386, Alpha to Fletcher, 9 January 1820.

211 *MO*, 29 January, 5 February 1820.

212 HO, 42/203 fo. 124, Norris to Sidmouth, 27 January 1820.

213 *MO*, 25 December 1819.

214 *MO*, 8 April 1820.

215 Autobiography of James Weatherley, entry under 'Hopper Bookseller and the Police'. The books concerned were 24 volumes brought from the United States, described by Weatherley as 'Aristotles Works of a size very unusual it was the make and shape of the common Spelling book.' This was probably the manual of sexual reproduction widely circulated as 'Aristotle's Masterpiece'.

216 *MO*, 12 February 1820.

217 *MO*, 11, 18 December 1819.

218 *MO*, 13 and 20 March 1819, 12 June 1819, 4 September 1819, 26 February 1820.

219 *MO*, 19 February 1820.

220 *The Trial of Henry Hunt*, pp. 135–9 (evidence of Robert Wright, hat manufacturer).

221 *Ibid.*, pp. 135–9 (evidence of Robert Wright), pp. 149–51 (James Scholfield, dissenting minister), pp. 116–20 (John Shuttleworth (merchant), pp. 112–15 (John Smith, editor of the *Liverpool Mercury*), pp. 30–3 (Roger Entwisle, attorney).

222 Hunt, *Trial of Henry Hunt* p. 192; Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, ch. 13.

223 Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1839–41), ed. W. H. Chaloner (1967), ii, pp. 86–7.

224 *Manchester Gazette*, 15 April 1820.

225 *Manchester Gazette*, 15 April 1820; *MO*, 11 March, 8 April 1820; HO 79/4, Hobhouse to Hay, 25 April 1820.

226 *MO*, 9 September 1820.

227 *MO*, 12 February 1820.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

228 Michael T. Davis, 'Alexander Galloway (1776–1847)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *Oxford DNB*), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/74200 (accessed 13 December 2018); Chase, 'Evans, Janet (*d*. 1822x30?)', *Oxford DNB*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/69661 (accessed 13 December 2018); HO 42/158 fo. 406, 'G. R.', 29 January 1817;.

229 *Black Dwarf*, 21 January 1818; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 182–5.

230 Worrall, '*Mab* and Mob', 142.

231 J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London 1796–1821* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982), pp. 344–5, suggests this, although the source she cites, the address in *MO*, 19 February 1820, does not mention such an arrangement. Place was approached by John Cam Hobhouse in October 1818 for helping setting up Thomas Evans Jr in business, too early for this particular episode but possibly significant: Dudley Miles, *Francis Place, 1771–1854* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 103–4, citing BL Add. MS. 27844 fos 42–3.

232 McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 98–112 and 182–5; Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, 2nd edn (London, Breviary Stuff Publications, 2010), pp. 89 and 98; Chase, 'Evans, Janet', *Oxford DNB*; Worrall, '*Mab* and Mob', 142–3; *MO*, 22 July 1820, biographical sketch of Thistlewood by Evans.

233 *Manchester Observer* prospectus, 9 February 1820, Shuttleworth scrapbook, fo. 167; *MO*, 12 February 1820.

234 *MO*, 19 February 1820.

235 HO 40/11 fos 147–8, Bennett to Sidmouth, 9 March 1820, and fo. 149, Byng, 10 March 1820; *MO*, 14 April 1821 (trial of Evans).

236 HO 40/13 fo. 113, Sharp to Sidmouth, 7 May 1820. For a similar instance in Wigan in 1816, see HO 42/153 fo. 445.

237 *MO*, 26 February, 4 March and 6 May 1820; Bamford, *Passages* ii, pp. 159–61.

238 On political prisoners, see Katrina Navickas, 'The "Bastilles of the constitution": Political Prisoners, Radicalism and Prison Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Labour History Review*, 83:2 (2018), 97–123, and '"A reformer's wife ought to be an heroine": Gender, Family and English Radicals Imprisoned under the Suspension of Habeas Corpus Act of 1817', *History*, 101:345 (2016), 246–64.

239 *MO*, 27 May 1820, 9 August 1820.

240 *MO*, 10 June, 8 July 1820; *Oldham Chronicle* supplement, 9 April 1859.

241 *MO*, 12 August 1820.

242 *MO*, 10 March 1821, 26 January 1822.

243 *MO*, 5 and 19 August 1820.

244 HO 79/4, Hobhouse to Hay, 25 April 1820.

245 *MO*, 8 and 15 April 1820.

246 *MO*, 29 April 1820.

247 *MO*, 29 April, 6 and 13 May 1820. Several of these passages are marked in the copy of the *Observer* for 29 April in HO 40/13.

248 HO 40/13, fos 60 and 72.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

249 HO 40/13, fos 11 and 94; newspaper report, 29 April 1820, MCL cuttings book Q 942.7389 M1, p. 39.
250 *MO*, 6 May 1820.
251 HO 41/6, Hobhouse to Norris, 3 May 1820; HO 48/23, report on Oldham affray; *MO*, 5 August 1820.
252 HO 40/14 fos 76 and 82, Byng, 25 July and n.d. (early August) 1820.
253 *MO*, 5 August 1820.
254 *MO*, 9 September, 29 April 1820.
255 *MO*, 9 September 1820, 21 April 1821.
256 *MO*, 21 and 28 October 1820.
257 HO 40/15 fo. 108, Fletcher to Sidmouth, 15 November 1820; *MO*, 4 and 11 November 1820.
258 *MO*, 22 July 1820 *et seq*.
259 *MO*, 17 February 1821 (editor's note).
260 *MO*, 7 April 1821. The editor was Evans's immediate successor, G. W. Service.
261 *The Spectator* (Rochdale), 1844–7, e.g. October–December 1844; *The Yeomanry Papers* (Rochdale, n. d.).
262 *MO*, 23 September 1820.
263 *MO*, 25 November–30 December 1820; R. Poole, 'The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England', *Past and Present*, 192:1 (2006), 109–53, at 141–3.
264 *MO*, 12 August 1820, in HO 40/14 fo. 109; HO 40/14 fo. 105, Byng, 12 August 1820, and fo. 75, Sharp to Sidmouth, 13 August 1820; TS 25/2035 p. 585; TS 11/156/512.
265 *MO*, 19 and 26 August, 23 and 30 September 1820.
266 HO 40/14 fos 315, 327, 329, 344 and 392 (Bury); HO 40/15 fo. 53 (Manchester).
267 HO 40/14 fo. 344, Fletcher to Sidmouth, 9 October 1820.
268 *MO*, 12 August 1820.
269 *MO*, 11 November 1820, 15 July 1820.
270 *MO*, 5 August, 2 December 1820.
271 *MO*, 2 December 1820, 3 February 1821.
272 *MO*, 26 May 1821; HO 42/192 fo. 374, Dyneley, 21 August 1819.
273 Owen R. Ashton, 'The *Western Vindicator* and Early Chartism', in Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (eds), *Papers for the People*, p. 69.
274 HO 40/16 fo. 172, Norris to Sidmouth, 18 March 1821.
275 HO 40/16 fo. 180, Eckersley to Byng, 24 March 1821.
276 *MO*, 14 April 1821.
277 Lobban, 'From Seditious Libel to Unlawful Assembly'; *MO*, 14 April 1821; National Archives TS 11/697/2210, *R.* v. *Evans*, 31 March 1821.
278 Milne to Maule, 1 April 1821, in TS 11/697/2210.
279 *MO*, 21 April 1821.
280 TS 11/697/2210; HO 40/14 fos 90 (Norris, 31 October 1820) and 120 (copy of libel); HO 40/15 fo. 251: warrant against Evans, December 1820; *MO*, 26 May 1821.
281 Glen, *Stopfordiana*; *MO*, 22 September 1821. Interestingly, the solicitor acting for the prosecution here was Ashworth, who had acted for the town of Manchester at the chaotic Oldham inquest.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

282 *MO*, 31 March, 7 April 1821.
283 *Report of the Metropolitan and Central Committee appointed for the relief of the Manchester sufferers* (1820); McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 182–5.
284 *MO*, 14 April 1821.
285 Michael J. Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, Chetham Society new series, xl (1995), pp. 68–78.
286 *MO*, 23 June 1821.
287 *MO*, 1 September 1821.
288 *Ibid*.
289 HO 40/16 fo. 400, Eckersley to Byng, 29 July 1821.
290 *MO*, 2 June 1821.
291 *MO*, 29 September 1821.
292 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, 237–8.
293 *MO*, 23 June 1821.
294 HO 40/16 fo. 423, Eckersley to Byng, 21 August 1821; *MO*, 11 May 1822; Shuttleworth Scrapbook, fo. 199.
295 *MO*, 1 September 1821.
296 Ben Wilson, *The Laughter of Triumph: William Hone and the Fight for the Free Press* (London, Faber & Faber, 2006), pp. 198–221; Poole, 'Petitioners and Rebels'.
297 Michael L. Bush, *The Friends and Following of Richard Carlile* (Diss, Twopenny Press, 2016), pp. 108 and 114; F. D. Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright*, ii (1826; New York, Kelley, 1969), pp. 137–41; Poole, 'French Revolution or Peasants' Revolt?'
298 *MO*, 19 July 1819, p. 20; *MO*, 26 December 1818, 10 July 1819.
299 *Morning Chronicle* 23 June 1817, letter from Wooler; HO 42/175 fos 46–7; HO 42/174 fo. 598, Chippendale to Fletcher, 23 February 1818.
300 James Epstein, 'Wooler, Thomas Jonathan (1786?–1853)', *Oxford DNB*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29952 (accessed 13 December 2018); Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 29–69; *MO*, 23 March, 6 April 1822.
301 *MO*, 26 December 1818; *Black Dwarf*, 16 December 1818.
302 Shuttleworth Scrapbook, fo. 199.
303 *MO*, 1 September 1821, 22 September 1821.
304 *MO*, 6 April 1822.
305 Hunt, *To the Radical Reformers*, 24 September 1821, cited in Bush, *Richard Carlile*, 107–8; *MO*, 1 and 15 September 1821.
306 Bush, *Richard Carlile*, 107–12; *MO*, 2 February 1822.
307 *MO*, 6 April 1822.
308 Bush, *Richard Carlile*, ch. 9; *MO*, 22 March 1822; *The Republican*, 12 April 1822, 451–65; *MO*, 31 July 1819; *Black Dwarf*, 4 August 1819; *Morning Post*, 23 August 1819; Michael L. Bush, '"Dear Sisters of the Earth": the Public Voice of Manchester Women at the Time of Peterloo', *North West Labour History Journal*, 29 (2003), 14–21; Bush, 'Richard Carlile and the Female Reformers of Manchester', *Manchester Region History Review*, 16 (2002–3). On this last issue, see Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, ch. 11, and Poole, 'Mary Fildes', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, entry forthcoming 2019.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

309 *MO*, 23 March 1822.
310 *MO*, 13 April 1822.
311 *MO*, 26 January 1822.
312 *MO*, 26 January 1822; HO 40/17 fo. 49, Eckersley to Byng, 14 February 1822.
313 *MO*, 29 June 1822 onwards.
314 *MO*, 6 April 1822.
315 *MO*, 11 May, 14 September 1822.
316 *MO*, 8 December 1821.
317 *MO*, 24 August 1822.
318 Hunt, *To the Radical Reformers*, 14 October 1822.
319 *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1822, cited in Phillips, 'J. T. Saxton'.
320 *Manchester Comet* and flier, Hay Portfolio, Chetham's Library.
321 MCL cuttings Q 942.7389 M1. p. 79.
322 'The Manchester Guardian, born 5 May 1821: 190 years – work in progress', *The Guardian*, 5 May 2011; Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 63–70.
323 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 204, 163.
324 John Edward Taylor, *Notes and Observations on the papers relative to the internal state of the country* (London, Effingham Wilson, 1820), pp. 174–6.
325 Bruton, *Story of Peterloo*, pp. 257–9; Ayerst, *Guardian*, pp. 22–5 and 49; *Manchester Guardian*, 16 June, 23 June, 9 June 1821.
326 *MO*, 26 August 1821.
327 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 202–8.
328 *MO*, 29 May 1819.
329 Ayerst, *Guardian*, p. 63.
330 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 207–14, 233–5.
331 *Ibid*., pp. 238–9; Read, *Press and People*, pp. 84–5.
332 *Peterloo Massacre* (Manchester, 1819), pp. 56–62. This is identified as the *Courier* account but the *Manchester Courier* was not published at this time and the London *Courier* had its own reporter there: the injured Charles Wright, whose story Garnett helped to write and send to the Home Office (HO 42/192 fos 73–5). This might account for the mistake. Garnett, giving evidence at *Redford* v. *Birley*, spoke of writing a report that was rejected by the *Manchester Chronicle: Report of the Proceedings in the Cause of Redford vs Birley and others* (Manchester, 1822), pp. 100–8.
333 Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 18–20.
334 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 245; on Prentice, see Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 7–12.
335 Arthur Redford, *History of Local Government in Manchester*, vol. 1 (London, Longmans, 1939), pp. 256–77; *Manchester Observer*, 18 and 25 December 1819.
336 *A Full and Accurate Report of the Trial of Mr John Edward Taylor* (Manchester, 1819); Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 18–19; Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 132–45.
337 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 239–41; Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, p. 67.
338 *Manchester Guardian* prospectus, April 1821, JRL GDN 150/1.
339 Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 202–3.

IP: 193.61.240.162 On: Tue, 02 Apr 2019 13:20:58
Delivered by Ingenta

340 David Walsh, 'The Lancashire "Rising" of 1826', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies,* 26:4 (1994), 601–21.
341 Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 102–3.
342 M. Milne, 'The *Tyne Mercury* and Parliamentary Reform, 1802–1846', *Northern History*, 14:1 (1978), 227–42.
343 Nancy Lopatin, 'Refining the Limits of Political Reporting: The Provincial Press, the Political Unions, and the Great Reform Act', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 31:4 (1998), 337–55.
344 Joan Hugman, '"A small drop of ink": Tyneside Chartism and the *Northern Liberator*', in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds), *The Chartist Legacy* (Rendlesham, Merlin Press, 1999), pp. 24–47.
345 Ashton, 'The *Western Vindicator*'.
346 Epstein, 'Northern Star', pp. 69 and 97.
347 *Ibid*., pp. 70, 76–7 and 90. See also Aled G. Jones, 'Chartist Journalism and print culture in Britain, 1830–1855', in Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (eds), *Papers for the People* (Rendlesham, Merlin Press, 2005), pp. 1–24.
348 McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 152.
349 Navickas, *Protest and Politics* and *Radicalism and Loyalism*.
350 On the role of the press at Peterloo, see Poole, *Peterloo: the English Uprising*, ch. 14.
351 Harling, 'Law of Libel'; Navickas, 'Political trials and the Suppression of Popular Radicalism in England', in Michael T. Davis *et al.* (eds), *Political Trials in an Age of Revolutions: Britain and the North Atlantic, 1793–1848* (forthcoming, 2019).
352 Malcolm Chase, 'Benbow, William (1787–1864)', *Oxford DNB*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/47096 (accessed 13 December 2018).
353 Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 838–44; Bush, *Richard Carlile*.
354 Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1 (2004), 94–117.
355 David Worrall, *Theatric Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006) and *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787–1832* (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
356 Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 32.
357 Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 137.
358 Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 130–8, 209–10.
359 Phillips, 'J. T. Saxton'.
360 *Northern Star*, 17 August 1844; Weatherley, *Autobiography,* entry under 'James Wroe bookseller'.
361 Shuttleworth Scrapbook, MCL BR.F942.7389 Sc13 fo. 89. The reverse side is pasted down; illegible portions (usually only a word or two) are indicated by an ellipsis.

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