

J. R. DINWIDDY

Radicalism and Reform  
in Britain, 1780–1850



Introduction by H. T. Dickinson

**RADICALISM AND REFORM IN BRITAIN**  
**1780-1850**

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**J.R. DINWIDDY**

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## *Contents*

Preface	vii
Publications by J.R. Dinwiddy not included in this Volume	ix
Introduction by H.T. Dickinson	xi
Acknowledgements	xix
1 Charles James Fox and the People	1
2 Charles James Fox as Historian	19
3 Christopher Wyvill and Reform, 1790-1820	31
4 The Patriotic Linen Draper: Robert Waithman and the Revival of Radicalism in the City of London, 1795-1818	63
5 Charles Hall, Early English Socialist	87
6 Sir Francis Burdett and Burdettite Radicalism	109
7 The Early Nineteenth-Century Campaign against Flogging in the Army	125
8 The Use of the Crown's Power of Deportation under the Aliens Act, 1793-1826	149
9 Conceptions of Revolution in the English Radicalism of the 1790s	169
10 Interpretations of Anti-Jacobinism	195
11 English Radicals and the French Revolution, 1800-1850	207
12 Utility and Natural Law in Burke's Thought: A Reconsideration	229
13 James Mill on Burke's Doctrine of Prescription	253
14 Burke and the Utilitarians: A Rejoinder	265
15 Bentham's Transition to Political Radicalism, 1809-10	273

16	Bentham and the Early Nineteenth Century	291
17	Bentham on Private Ethics and the Principle of Utility	315
18	Early-Nineteenth-Century Reactions to Benthamism	339
19	Adjudication under Bentham's Pannomion	363
20	Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties	371
21	Chartism	403
22	Bentham and Marx	421
	Index	437

## *Preface*

The essays in this book were written by John Dinwiddy over a period of twenty years. They reflect both his early interest in the radicals and reformers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and his subsequent growing absorption in the intellectual debates which accompanied and followed the passing of the 1832 Reform Act. A number of the later essays deal with the contributions of Burke and, above all, of Jeremy Bentham, on whose papers John worked extensively in the latter part of his career. He never, however, lost interest in the wider political scene; the comparatively recent essay on Chartism provides a fitting conclusion to the work of a professional lifetime spent studying the conceptual and political aspects of reform in the period 1780-1850.

We would like to thank the editors and publishers of books and journals who kindly gave permission for the various essays and articles in this book to be reprinted. Some of these have been reprinted in their original format, others reset; cross-references have been altered to refer to pages in the present text. The last essay in the book has not been published before; it is the draft of an inaugural lecture to have been delivered in May 1990.

Warm thanks are also due to those friends of John whose help, encouragement and advice led to the publication of this collection of essays; I am particularly indebted to Harry Dickinson, Alice Prochaska, Fred Rosen and Martin Sheppard. In addition to those already mentioned, we would like to thank others who contributed information for the Introduction: Ivon Asquith, James Burns, Tim Card, Ian Christie, Penelope Corfield, Hugh Dinwiddy, Mark Philp, Jonathan Riley Smith, Francis Robinson and Philip Schofield.

Caroline Dinwiddy

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*Publications of J.R. Dinwiddy  
not included in this volume*

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## *Introduction*

John Dinwiddy died in April 1990 at the age of fifty. He was at the height of his powers as a scholar and as an academic administrator and he was giving every indication of being in the most productive and influential phase of his distinguished career. Appointed the year before to a Personal Chair at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, in the University of London, he was still serving as Dean of the Faculty of Arts when he died. He had also recently produced two excellent short works of scholarly synthesis, *From Luddism to the First Reform Bill* (Oxford, 1986, reprinted in 1989) and *Bentham* (Oxford, 1989). The first of these, written mainly for students and their hard-pressed teachers, was a model of its kind. Although it was designed as an introduction to its subject, it is written with the authority of a scholar with an unrivalled knowledge of the ideas, personalities and events of the radical movement in the earlier nineteenth century. The second book is easily the best available introduction to Bentham's life and ideas. It is a brilliant little book which encapsulates many of John Dinwiddy's scholarly virtues – it is accurate, concise, and judicious, clear and well-written, based on much original research, showing a profound knowledge of different interpretations, and displaying a keen awareness of the complex relationship between Bentham's theories and his historical context.

There was every sign therefore that John Dinwiddy might go on to even greater success in his research on radicalism and reform in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and produce a major monograph in this field. His untimely death has denied us this pleasure, but those who have long admired his work, as well as those who have yet to be introduced to it, will find in the following essays good reason to lament his passing. These essays include most of the best work which he published in learned journals and collected volumes. To these has been added the draft Inaugural Lecture, on 'Bentham and Marx', which he did not live to deliver, but which he completed (minus notes) very shortly before he died.

John Rowland Dinwiddy, born on 16 May 1939, was descended from lawyers on both sides of his family. His father, Thomas Lutwyche Dinwiddy, belonged to a famous legal firm and was for fifteen years a Master of the Supreme Court (Chancery Division). Educated at

Winchester and at New College, Oxford, Tom Dinwiddy was anxious that his three sons, John, Charles and Bruce, should follow the same path. In fact, all three became head of school at Winchester, a remarkable family achievement. Although known at Winchester as rather reserved and dignified, John Dinwiddy was very well-liked and was able to display leadership qualities in what was to become his typically unobtrusive fashion. His record was distinguished: entering Winchester as twelfth on the Scholarship Roll, he won several academic prizes, was editor of *The Wykehamist*, was a fine cricketer who played for the 'Lords XI' in 1957, and was Senior Commoner Praefect. He clearly learned early to be a keen and successful competitor in the pursuit of all-round excellence.

In 1957 he went up to New College with a scholarship to read Modern History. While an undergraduate, he revealed once more his love of sport and social life, as well as his studies. He played cricket for his college and was for a time Secretary of the Canning Club. More important was his meeting with, and subsequent engagement to, Caroline Franks, the daughter of Sir Oliver (later Lord) Franks. John and Caroline very much enjoyed the social life at Oxford. John even shocked some of his colleagues, who cherished the traditional male exclusivity of the Chalet Reading Party in the Chamonix Valley, by taking Caroline with him. They subsequently married in December 1962 and had two daughters, Emma (born in 1967) and Rachel (born in 1973), both of whom followed in the family tradition by studying as undergraduates at the University of Oxford. Caroline also later followed an academic career in the University of London, lecturing on Economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies from 1973 onwards.

On leaving Oxford in 1960, perhaps not having devoted as much time to his studies as he later thought he should have done, John went as an assistant master to teach at Eton. There he indulged his passion for games and he taught the history of both early modern Britain and nineteenth-century Europe. He was also able to attract some very talented groups of boys to study African nationalism, not a subject then fashionable in schools, though one which was encouraged by his Head Master, Robert Birley. An interest in Africa led to the next important step in his career. Though a very promising school teacher, he and Caroline wanted to widen their horizons. They therefore welcomed the opportunity which, suddenly and fortuitously, presented itself of joining the teaching staff of the University College of East Africa, in Makerere, Uganda. In 1963 he joined the History Department and Caroline the Economics Department. Although unassuming as always, and attempting to teach British History at a time of intense political ferment in Africa, when many of his students had other more immediate interests in mind, John proved to be a very successful teacher, a valued colleague and a social asset to the whole community. In the academic work of the college, in playing cricket for the Makerere staff side, in looking after the welfare of students, in welcoming

a great range of visitors both to the college and to his home (these included Robert Birley, his former headmaster at Eton, and his old nannie), in assisting some Sudanese refugees from a war zone and other African victims of political upheaval, John set an example of professional service and social responsibility that was to characterize the rest of his career.

Although enriched personally and academically by his four years in East Africa, John was anxious to make his mark in the scholarly field of British History; to achieve that, he knew that he needed to return to Britain. In 1967 he was awarded a Research Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research, in the University of London, and embarked on a Ph.D. on the activities and thought of the constitutional reformers of early nineteenth-century Britain, under the supervision of Ian Christie. By now a little more confident of his intellectual abilities and a thoroughly competent researcher, he appears to have needed little guidance from Professor Christie, though he clearly imbibed from him the precision of thought and language, and the very high standards of scholarship, that were to mark all his subsequent publications. He rapidly completed his thesis in 1971, though he had already been appointed to a Lectureship in History at Royal Holloway College, also in the University of London, in 1969 and had to prepare new lectures for his students. Over the next twenty years he advanced through the ranks of Senior Lecturer (1978) and Reader (1983) to a Personal Chair in Modern History at the combined Royal Holloway and Bedford New College in 1989.

During more than twenty years of service in the University of London, John Dinwiddy demonstrated his wide-ranging talents, his lively concern for teaching and research, his well-developed notions of professional responsibility and his constant readiness to help others. His high standing in the academic world was widely recognized, not only throughout London University but much further afield. He was appointed to external examinerships, awarded prestigious Fellowships abroad, invited to lecture at major conferences across the world, asked to contribute essays to joint volumes and elected to the Council of the Royal Historical Society.

Throughout these years he produced a constant stream of stimulating, seminal, articles in learned journals or sometimes as contributions to collected volumes of essays. His work was accepted by many of the leading historical journals on both sides of the Atlantic and his essays were published across the world. He contributed valuable work on several important political thinkers, including Edmund Burke, James Mill, Charles Hall, and Jeremy Bentham and greatly increased our knowledge of such major radicals and reformers as Christopher Wyvill, Francis Burdett and Charles James Fox. In all of this work he showed a most impressive command of the available sources, an awareness of the current state of the historical debate and of how he could best contribute to it, and a concern to make his arguments clear and accessible to all his readers. Many of his essays reveal that rare blend of a thorough knowledge of the

historical context combined with a deep understanding of complex theoretical issues. They also demonstrate an enviable ability to communicate the importance, relevance and excitement of a topic to others. The essays collected here offer fresh perspectives or important re-examinations of major topics, they present a persuasive and well-argued thesis in precise yet lucid prose and, in several cases, entirely transform our understanding of a significant topic. While John's essays range widely, from the campaign against flogging in the army, through studies of English utilitarianism, of early nineteenth-century Luddites and of primitive socialists, to an assessment of the Chartist movement, together they add up to a remarkably coherent volume. As a consequence, *Radicalism and Reform in Britain 1780-1850* makes a spirited, significant and distinctive contribution to our understanding of Britain during the Age of Revolution.

In many of the essays John Dinwiddy engages in debate with other scholars or challenges their interpretations of particular problems. He does so in his distinctively courteous way. Always the serious scholar, but one who pursued excellence in a determined yet urbane, almost disinterested fashion, he attacks the problem and not the author. In his typically civilized manner, he points out error in the most kindly tone or gently rebukes a scholar who, he thinks, has overstated a case. He always expected others to do the same and he was mildly offended when they failed to do so. He well knew that historical understanding develops as the result of serious intellectual disagreements but passionately believed that the debate should always be a courteous and rational discourse between scholars who were ultimately seeking the same goal.

John's unimpeachable scholarship, his scrupulous attention to detail, and his ability to work so well with others, made him a natural choice for the exacting role of general editor responsible for the publication of the *Complete Works of Jeremy Bentham* when that post needed to be filled at University College, London. In 1977 he became joint editor of this massive enterprise, working with Professor J.H. Burns; and in 1979 he took over sole editorial responsibility for the next four years. Appointed during these years to an Associate Research Fellowship at University College, he was remarkably successful in encouraging, organizing and coordinating the work of the international team of Bentham scholars recruited to advance this major scholarly enterprise. Capable of receiving unrealistic suggestions with his usual benign scepticism, he speeded up the whole project and he saw it through its difficult passage from the Athlone Press to Oxford University Press. John also developed an unexpected talent for drumming up the financial support needed for this huge and expensive venture. With his combination of infectious enthusiasm and meticulous attention to detail he saw through the press five volumes prepared for the series by other individual editors. Thereafter he remained on the executive board and the full committee of the Bentham Project and he himself subsequently prepared two expertly edited volumes of *Bentham's Correspondence*.

These volumes (VI and VII) are models of their kind, with notes that are accurate, concise and unobtrusive. There can be no doubt that in undertaking all this editorial and administrative work on such a massive project, John Dinwiddy sacrificed much time and energy that might otherwise have been devoted to producing a major monograph in his chosen field of scholarly enquiry. At least he was able, as a spin-off from his editorial work, to produce the brilliant short study of Bentham in the *Past Masters* series. In happier circumstances, this might well have been the harbinger of the more exhaustive biography of Bentham that is still so clearly needed.

Throughout John Dinwiddy's academic life no call to service went unanswered. He played a major role in the academic affairs of his own college and of London University in general. To every task he brought shrewdness, balance, creative energy and resourceful initiative. From 1978 to 1984 he served on the committee of management of the Institute of Historical Research and on its finance sub-committee. Always a dedicated supporter of the intercollegiate degree programme at London University, he agreed in 1984 to take on the burdensome task of chairing the University's Board of Studies in History. He was the first non-professor appointed to this important post and he discharged his duties for two years with his usual exemplary efficiency. He also played a leading part in setting up a very successful combined degree course in Modern History, Economic History and Politics at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College.

As Dean of the Faculty of Arts in his college, from January 1988 until his death, he gave sterling service at a time when Royal Holloway and Bedford New College was still undergoing the strains of union and when the college was facing particularly difficult administrative and financial problems. For more than two years he served the Faculty admirably, performing a host of tasks to the best of his considerable abilities. He was always tolerant and rational, even in the most difficult of circumstances. He achieved his considerable success at some cost, however, especially as he still had his other teaching and research task to perform. He was in the unenviable position of those leading academics who find themselves committed to the three major tasks of administration, teaching and research. Seeking as always to be fair and judicious and controlling his own emotions in order to display the calm authoritative leadership needed in a difficult situation, he undoubtedly found the task a great strain. Unable always to achieve unanimous support for difficult decisions, yet unwilling to take the easy option of courting popularity, he often found his situation unpalatable and the satisfactory resolution of problems virtually impossible. Invariably genial in manner on the surface, he decided, for good or ill, not to give full vent to his feelings. Since he was a very private person, who often appeared aloof, self-contained and able to keep the world at arm's length, it was not obvious to most of his colleagues or even to those closest to him that his overdeveloped sense of duty was

taking its toll.

John Dinwiddy was widely admired as a first-rate teacher who took a close and sympathetic interest in the progress of both his undergraduate and postgraduate students. Despite all his other burdens, he cared deeply about standards of teaching and about the proper care of students' welfare. On this subject he was known to speak out forcefully, even sharply. His own Special Subject on 'English Radicalism, 1790-1820' was a particularly successful course. His personal kindness, his even temperament, his perceptive understanding of their particular strengths and weaknesses, and his evident love for his subject, were all qualities which combined to encourage the endeavours, improve the abilities and increase the enthusiasm of his students. With new research students, even those he was not supervising, he was extremely approachable and genuinely interested in the work they were doing. He was always ready to listen to any academic problem they might wish to discuss, to talk through any difficulty which they faced in their research, and to offer ideas for further and more fruitful lines of enquiry. He was happy to read through their drafts and make helpful suggestions for improvement. His own work was so meticulous, however, and he was so anxious to encourage the same thoroughness, accuracy and attention to detail in others, that his pursuit of excellence could occasionally be a little inhibiting. His own standards were set so high that few others could attain them. He sometimes feared, unnecessarily, that he himself did not quite match up to his own high ideals in scholarship.

John's qualities as a dedicated teacher and supportive colleague were seen most constantly and frequently in his work at the Institute of Historical Research in London. As one of the main coordinators for many years of the seminar on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British History he regularly met other scholars and researchers from many parts of Britain and much further afield. He assisted Professor Ian Christie to run this seminar from the 1970s, took over responsibility for it in 1983, organizing it more recently in conjunction with Penelope Corfield. Punctilious in his attendance, supportive of all the participants and eminently fair in his concluding remarks, he was for years a pivotal figure who strove to make these seminars not only scholarly and professional but spirited and entertaining. He was unobtrusive but unstinting with his advice. He relished a good debate but always sought to create a congenial and supportive atmosphere. No topic of research ever failed to capture his interest and he laboured to offer help on a whole range of subjects outside his main field of research. It was through the Institute's seminar that he made contact with so many other scholars and new research students and built up a wide range of people who respected his abilities and who owed him debts of gratitude, great and small.

Friends and colleagues in many other institutions also found him a firm friend and someone who was ever ready to offer advice or assistance. He

was always willing to answer a query, take on the task of external examining, address a conference or contribute an essay to a collective enterprise. The news that he was going to attend a conference was an excellent reason for attending. I was myself with him at conferences in Oxford, Edinburgh, Germany and China. On these occasions he gave excellent papers, made vital contributions to the formal discussions and was a charming companion in the social activities.

John's role in the international conference which I helped to organize in Nanjing in 1987 showed him at his best and demonstrated why he was such a welcome participant at scholarly gatherings. He was uncomplaining during a long and rather trying trip out. On a particularly uncomfortable flight in a Chinese airline a clumsy flight attendant spilt some food over the fine suit he was wearing. To our group's admiration, he put the embarrassed young woman at her ease and made it appear that the accident was somehow entirely his fault. At the conference John gave a very learned, but lively and wonderfully clear, lecture. In seminar discussions and more informal gatherings he did everything possible to support, advise and encourage the young Chinese postgraduates, who were clearly both highly intelligent and enthusiastic, but who had had no chance to visit Britain to consult original sources and who occasionally struggled to express complicated thoughts in English. When one distinguished British academic expressed open impatience with a young Chinese research student, who was making a genuine effort to communicate his views as clearly as possible, John made it very clear that this was a serious breach of manners at a conference where it was the host participants who were making every effort to speak the language of the visiting contributors. John was a great hit with the Chinese, despite the enormous gulf between his background and experience and theirs. I was absolutely delighted that I had made a point of inviting him to join my sponsored group. I was particularly struck by the fact that he showed just as much kindness, courtesy, concern and interest, when discussing a problem with young Chinese students he had never met before and might never meet again, as he habitually did when engaging in historical debate at a rather higher level with his own research students or his closest colleagues back home in Britain.

Tall, slim and distinguished, John Dinwiddy looked every inch the professor. He could often appear rather patrician, slightly distant and self-contained. There were other sides to him, however. He was affectionate, unassuming and modest. He was a fine sportsman and a graceful dancer. He always played a good game of tennis and golf and was such a keen and effective cricketer that he turned out for good club sides such as the Free Foresters and the Old Wykehamists until his late forties. Though widely, and justifiably, respected as being eminently fair, tolerant and judicious, his friends and colleagues also knew him as warm, engaging, amusing and supportive. He was a very social being who loved lively conversation,

good food, fine wine, and spirited companions. While on some occasions he was quiet and reserved, at other times he was genial, funny and even hilarious. He was never negative or overly critical in his response to life or to other people. He certainly took his scholarship seriously, but never solemnly.

To some, John Dinwiddy seemed the kind of man whose birth, background and connections made worldly success come easily, naturally and inevitably. A closer look at his career shows that he strove hard for many years before he made his academic mark. Despite his undoubted achievements, he was exceptionally modest and not at all confident of his own abilities. The apparently easy charm and effortless success were hard won. He always had to struggle against his natural reserve, even his innate hesitancy, before opening out to others and he had to labour long and hard before any significant academic rewards came his way. He was never the supremely confident, even aloof, scholar that some thought him to be after only a casual acquaintanceship. To those who knew him better, he was altogether more complicated and more interesting. It was only by the occasional oblique comment that he revealed his innermost doubts about his scholarly worth or his academic reputation. He was never entirely convinced that he had truly earned his success or the admiration of others. He was also more passionate and emotional than he was probably prepared to admit, even to himself, as he usually managed to control or hide this aspect of his character. He was fully aware of the benefits that nature and nurture had bestowed upon him and perhaps excessively conscious of the obligations and responsibilities that these undoubted advantages placed upon him.

In pursuing excellence in everything he did, John Dinwiddy revealed a range of abilities and a depth of quality possessed by few men. The abiding impression he leaves is that of a man of integrity, who brought conscientiousness, scrupulous honesty, great tact, a patient readiness to consider all points of view and unfailing courtesy to all that he did. These are the qualities mentioned repeatedly by those who knew him best. His kindness, his generosity, his 'sheer niceness' would be acknowledged by nearly all those who came in contact with him from the Sudanese school-boys who needed his help to complete their secondary education to his aged nannie whom he regularly visited and for whom he found her last home. As an academic, John was both a scholar and a gentleman. As a sportsman, he combined the very best of the professional and the amateur approaches to the games he played. These are a fitting tribute to a remarkable man. His death was an enormous shock and it has left many feeling a painful loss. He will undoubtedly be long remembered by his many friends throughout the world, not only for his intellectual integrity but for his liberal, tolerant, kindly and generous spirit.

## *Acknowledgements*

The articles reprinted here first appeared in the following places and are reprinted by the kind permission of the original publishers.

- 1 *History*, lv (1970), pp. 342-59.
- 2 *Historical Journal*, xii (1969), pp. 23-34.
- 3 Borthwick Papers, no. 39 (1971).
- 4 *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xlvi (1973), pp. 72-94.
- 5 *International Review of Social History*, xxi (1976), pp. 256-76.
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- 9 *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, edited by Eckhart Hellmuth (German Historical Institute, London/Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.535-60.
- 10 'Interpretations of Anti-Jacobinism': *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp. 38-49.
- 11 *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, iii, *The Transformation of Political Culture 1789-1848*, ed. F. Furet and M. Ozouf (Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1989), pp. 447-66.
- 12 *The Eighteenth Century* (formerly, *Studies in Burke and his Time*), xvi no. 2 (1975), Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037. Used by permission of Texas Tech University Press.
- 13 *The Eighteenth Century* (formerly, *Studies in Burke and his Time*), xviii, no. 3 (1977), Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037. Used by permission of Texas Tech University Press.
- 14 *The Eighteenth Century* (formerly, *Studies in Burke and his Time*), xix, no. 2 (1978), Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037. Used by permission of Texas Tech University Press.

- 15 *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xxxv (1975), pp. 683-700.
- 16 *Bentham Newsletter*, 8 (1984), pp. 15-33.
- 17 *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, xxxvi (1982), pp. 278-300.
- 18 *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, xxxiv (1984), pp.47-69.
- 19 *Utilitas*, 1 (1989), pp. 283-89.
- 20 *Social History*, iv (1979), pp. 33-63.
- 21 Historical Association (1987). *New Appreciations in History*, 2.
- 22 This chapter appears here for the first time.

*For*  
*Tom and Ruth*  
*Emma and Rachel*

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## *Charles James Fox and the People*

THERE WERE TWO PERIODS in Fox's life from which his claim to be entitled 'the man of the people' derived. Horace Walpole remarked in his journal for 1780 how curious it was 'to see Charles Fox, lately so unpopular a figure, become the idol of the people';<sup>1</sup> and in this year, as a fierce opponent of North's government and the American war, and as chairman of the Westminster Committee and a strong advocate of reform, Fox enjoyed a popularity which secured him one of the most coveted seats in parliament. Enough has been written about his career in the 1780s—about his desertion of reform when he coalesced with North, and his adoption of 'tory' principles at the time of the Regency Crisis—to show that the reputation he acquired at the beginning of that decade was soon largely forfeited. What is less well known is that the revival of his reputation as a man of the people in the decade of the French revolution, when he appeared once more as the friend of peace and reform and stood out against the suspension of civil liberties, was almost equally ephemeral. In the last phase of his life and the period following his death his public image was severely damaged—not so much by Pittites and anti-Jacobins as by the spokesmen of popular radicalism. There were still writers who praised his 'great humanity of heart and liberality of soul',<sup>2</sup> and the Whigs made a cult of his personality both before and after his death, but the spread of political awareness had made the public much more exacting than it had been formerly in its attitude to politicians. There was an increasing acceptance of the view that Fox had never been very interested in the people, except as an occasional ally in his conflict with the Court—a conflict in which he had mainly relied on party combinations in the House of Commons. How Fox's reputation came under attack from the left in the early nineteenth century will be examined in this paper; and particular attention will be paid to his attitude to reform during his later years, as this issue above all others was coming to be regarded as the crucial test of 'patriotism', of whether a politician was on the side of the people or not.<sup>3</sup>

An event which foreshadowed later developments was the Westminster election of 1790, when Fox, hoping to avoid the expense of a contest, arranged a compromise with the Pittites. This was regarded by many people as an

<sup>1</sup> *Last Journals of Horace Walpole*, ed. A. F. Stuart (2 vols., 1910), vol. II, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *The British Cabinet of 1806* (Liverpool, 1807), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> This paper will offer a different view from that of Fox's most recent biographer, Professor Loren Reid, who has written that Fox 'laid his roots in the people, and it was by what he said in their behalf that the nineteenth century principally remembered him'—'Charles Fox and the People', *The Burke Newsletter*, vol. VI (1965), p. 429.

attempt to 'disfranchise' one of the country's most democratic constituencies, and Horne Tooke offered himself as an independent reformer in opposition to what he described as the new coalition. Despite his refusal to spend money he won a substantial number of votes; and the Westminster radicals later looked back to this contest as the genesis of a new spirit in the constituency and a notable indication of Fox's lack of consideration for the people.<sup>4</sup> However, in the following years Fox's stock with the reformers rose steadily, owing to his sympathy for the French revolution and his hostility to the government's warlike and repressive policies. It is true that for some time his attitude towards parliamentary reform remained equivocal. He was irritated by the formation of the Society of the Friends of the People in 1792, since his chief aim at that stage was to preserve the unity of his party and keep divisive issues in the background. But as the parliamentary strength of the Opposition declined, Fox moved progressively to the left and began to follow Grey's example in looking outside parliament for support. In November 1795 he could write that while the House of Commons and the higher orders in general were firmly behind the government, the Foxites had 'the popularity', especially among the lower classes. He told his nephew that he did not much like this state of affairs, and he added frankly in a subsequent letter: '... unless the people are prepared to be completely hostile to Pitt, I have no desire for popularity'. But there was no other resource for combating the executive. Since the Whig party on its own was no longer in a condition to assert parliamentary (*scilicet* Whig) control over the Crown, it should, said Fox, 'go further towards agreeing with the democratic or popular party than at any former period'.<sup>5</sup> Consequently in the later 1790s he committed himself more strongly to reform than he had done since early in the previous decade. In his speech on Grey's reform motion of May 1797—which went through at least eleven editions in pamphlet form and appears to have been much the most popular of his printed speeches—he declared his approval of household suffrage; and ten months later, after seceding from the House of Commons, he announced that he would take no part in any administration until there was a radical reform in the representation of the people and a complete and fundamental change of system.<sup>6</sup> These public pledges, reinforced by private assurances,<sup>7</sup> led the veteran reformer Christopher Wyvill to place full confidence in the Whigs. In a published letter to Major John Cartwright, his fellow pioneer, he maintained that Fox merited the trust which the younger Pitt had betrayed:

There is in him a character formed by time, Experience, and Adversity, to that unbending Firmness which is fitted for the arduous task he has undertaken. With too much penetration to be deceived by a wily Court, with too much philanthropy, too strong a sense of Honour and Justice to betray the Public

<sup>4</sup> Place Papers, British Museum Additional Manuscripts (Add. MSS) 27849, fos. 129–35.

<sup>5</sup> *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox*, ed. Lord John Russell (4 vols., 1853–7), vol. III, pp. 126, 134, 135.

<sup>6</sup> *Cobbett's Parliamentary History*, vol. XXXIII, cols. 725, 1126, 1229.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Wyvill, *Political Papers* (6 vols., York, 1794–1808), vol. VI, part ii, p. 95.

to its ruin, he possesses that scorn of Power, ill-gotten and ill-employed, that philosophic dignity of mind, that grandeur of consistency, which his inferior Rival never could attain.

Wyvill claimed that the suspicion with which the radicals tended to regard all parliamentary parties should in this instance be relaxed; it would be folly, he said, to reject co-operation with men who had pledged themselves never to accept office without stipulating for reform.<sup>8</sup>

However, before long there were signs that the idea of co-operation with popular elements out of doors was being rejected, after a brief and inauspicious trial period, by the Whigs themselves. The secession from the House of Commons had been a kind of tacit appeal to the public—an attempt to awaken people to the inadequacy of the political system as it was then operating.<sup>9</sup> But perhaps it was not to be expected that the mere withdrawal of the Whigs to their country homes would produce a strong movement of opinion against the government. There was certainly no such response; and Fox, disgusted by the general quiescence, became disillusioned with the idea of a popular alliance. In September 1801 he wrote: 'I begin to think every day more, which even in better times I suspected, that whatever spirit of Liberty there was in this Country it belonged almost exclusively or at least was entirely owing to the Opposition in the two Houses of Parliament'.<sup>10</sup> He was coming to feel that the party would have to rely on its own efforts, in conjunction with whatever allies it could find among the parliamentary politicians. Professor Reid mentions that at the Westminster Election of 1802 Fox was still greeted with shouts of 'No Coalition!'—and he smiles at this popular memory of an event nearly twenty years in the past; it was as if, he says, 'the mature Churchill were rebuked for mistakes made as a Liberal early in the century'.<sup>11</sup> But a historian might well be struck by the timeliness of this cry. Writing to Dennis O'Bryen in the summer of 1803, Fox deprecated attacks on the Grenville party, explaining that though he was 'very far from wishing to make any Coalition at this time', he did not want unnecessary obstacles thrown in the way of any future alliance. In August he was trying to persuade himself and Grey that the Grenvilles were not as incorrigibly warlike as they had the reputation of being; and in December, while he had to admit that they were unpopular, he maintained that they were the only party from which the Whigs could expect cordial and fair co-operation.<sup>12</sup> Early in 1804 direct negotiations were opened, and by March an agreement had been reached whereby the two parties should work together for the purpose of overthrowing the Addington ministry. The great object in Fox's view was to beat the Court; he had spent most of his career struggling with it, and success in this contest was for him an end in itself. What he and his friends would be able to do if they ever succeeded in forcing

<sup>8</sup> *Letter to John Cartwright* (York, 1801), pp. 17–19.

<sup>9</sup> *Parliamentary History*, vol. XXXIII, col. 1260.

<sup>10</sup> Fox to Dennis O'Bryen, 17 Sept. 1801, Fox Papers, Add. MSS 47566, fo. 96.

<sup>11</sup> *Charles James Fox: a Man for the People* (1969), p. 380.

<sup>12</sup> Fox to O'Bryen, 26 June 1803, Add. MSS 47566, fos. 141–2. *Memorials of Fox*, vol. III, pp. 422, 443.

themselves back into power was a matter of less immediate concern.<sup>13</sup> Hence he did not scruple to ally with men whose ideas about policy were different from his own. Looking back in 1804 to the Fox–North coalition, all he could see against it was its ultimate failure; it would be difficult, he said, ‘to show when the power of the Whigs ever made so strong a struggle against the Crown, the Crown being thoroughly in earnest and exerting all its resources’. As for the Grenvilles, the great thing about them was that ‘among all their faults, they had one good quality, viz., that of being capable of becoming good party men’. Fox was unworried by the fact that the only questions of policy on which they seemed to agree with him were ‘the imperfect defence of the country and the affairs of Ireland’.<sup>14</sup>

There were of course a number of other subjects on which the Grenvilles and the Foxites differed widely—especially, in domestic policy, the question of reform. To many people Fox’s alliance with ‘those hateful villains’ (as Sir Francis Burdett called them) was no less reprehensible than his coalition with North—for the Grenvilles were in the eyes of the reformers ‘a set of men of the most arbitrary principles’, distinguished for nothing but their acumen in ‘seeking the sweets of office present and reversionary’.<sup>15</sup> When Wyvill wrote a long letter to Fox expressing his fears about the effect this alliance would have on his commitment to reform, Fox did his best to reassure him.<sup>16</sup> But before long there were signs of a new evasiveness on the part of the Whigs. The Melville affair in 1805 aroused a great deal of anti-ministerial feeling, and both Wyvill and Major Cartwright, believing that popular indignation against corruption in government departments could be directed also against corruption in the House of Commons, thought that the time was ripe for reviving the question of parliamentary reform; but their efforts to secure the co-operation of the Whig leaders were markedly unsuccessful. When Wyvill suggested that reform meetings should be held in and around the metropolis, Fox said that it would be much better for such a movement to originate in ‘more distant parts of the kingdom’; and he suggested that Leeds or Manchester should take the lead (though he must have known that both places were firmly dominated by anti-Jacobins). He was clearly anxious to avoid any situation in which a public statement of his views on reform would be expected from him; and Cartwright was still trying to press him into a private declaration on the subject when the Ministry of All the Talents was formed in February 1806.<sup>17</sup> There was then a move to

<sup>13</sup> Fox to Earl of Lauderdale, 30 Mar. 1804, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 35: ‘. . . I say there is a chance of his [Addington’s] being forced out. What then? you’ll say. Why then there is an inroad upon the power of the real enemy, I mean the Court, happen what may afterwards.’

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 40; vol. III, p. 443. Fox to William Smith, 12 Mar. 1804 (copy), Fox Papers, Add. MSS 47569, fo. 168.

<sup>15</sup> Burdett to Rev. R. N. French, 10 Mar. 1804, Burdett Papers, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. letters d. 97, fo. 123. W. H. Yate, *A Series of Letters on National Subjects* (Gloucester, 1806), p. 31. [F. Place and J. Richter,] *An Exposition of the Circumstances which gave rise to the Election of Sir Francis Burdett for the City of Westminster* (1807), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Wyvill to Fox, 27 Apr. 1804 (copy); to Sir John Swinburne, 4 May 1804 (copy), Wyvill Papers, North Riding Record Office.

<sup>17</sup> Frances D. Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (2 vols., 1826), vol. I, pp. 326–7. Wyvill to Fox, 21 Dec. 1805 (copy); Fox to Wyvill, 23 Dec. 1805, Wyvill Papers. Cartwright to Fox, 4 Feb. 1806, Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 51468.

raise the reform issue at the Westminster meeting that was necessary for Fox's re-election after his appointment as Secretary of State, but Fox having indicated that this would be unwelcome the proposal was staved off with talk of a separate meeting on the subject (which never took place). In his speech to the electors Fox confined himself to estimable generalities.<sup>18</sup>

Of course the Foxite retreat from reform had been carried out in a very discreet manner, and many people imagined that the Whigs—who in terms of parliamentary strength outnumbered the Grenvilles by two to one—would give a reforming tone to the new ministry. But Fox's first public act after being designated as Secretary of State was very disillusioning to such people. In the House of Commons on February 4th he introduced a special bill enabling Lord Grenville to retain the sinecure office of Auditor of the Exchequer at the same time as being First Lord of the Treasury. This was remembered by the radicals as one of the most disgraceful actions in Fox's career—Henry Hunt called it 'a death-blow to the fondly-cherished hopes of every patriotic mind in the Kingdom'. It seemed like a public sacrifice of Fox's professed principles to the arrogant rapacity of the Grenvilles; it was a sign (J. C. Hobhouse wrote later) 'that the Whigs despised all public opinion, and were, for the sake of a ministerial arrangement, quite careless how soon they gave a proof of their contempt'.<sup>19</sup> Hobhouse saw the coalition not as a matter of give and take between the Foxites on one side and the Grenvilles and Addingtonians on the others, but as a complete capitulation by the former. This was an over-simplification; but so far as home affairs were concerned Grenville did call the tune—and it was clear from the beginning that he was not prepared to make any significant move towards the 'entire radical reform in the whole system of our Government' which Fox had once declared to be necessary.<sup>20</sup>

Fox did not attempt a full public explanation of his conduct, but he was ready to explain himself in private to those whose good opinion he wished to retain. He argued that reform, however desirable it might be, was impracticable in existing circumstances and should be given up for the sake of other objects which might possibly be achieved. In particular, he maintained that the chance of obtaining peace should outweigh all other considerations. This was a sound enough argument, and it convinced that exceedingly upright man Christopher Wyvill, who wrote to Fox after a conversation with him early in February, wishing him success in his endeavours to obtain peace and Catholic relief and agreeing that parliamentary reform should be deferred until a more favourable time.<sup>21</sup> Yet what many radicals intuitively felt was that Fox had really sacrificed his reforming principles not so much

<sup>18</sup> Place Papers, Add. MSS 27850, fos. 10–12. *Morning Chronicle*, 14 Feb. 1806.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt, *Memoirs* (3 vols., 1820–2), vol. II, pp. 202–3. Hobhouse, *A Defence of the People in reply to Lord Erskine's 'Two Defences of the Whigs'* (1819), pp. 151–2.

<sup>20</sup> *The Speeches of the Right Hon. C. J. Fox, T. Erskine, etc. etc. at a meeting held at the Shakespeare Tavern on Tuesday, October 10, 1797* (1797), p. 9. Grenville to Fox (on the subject of offices granted in reversion), 28 Feb. 1806, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue preserved at Drogheda* (10 vols., 1897–1927), vol. VIII, pp. 44–5.

<sup>21</sup> Wyvill to Fox, 5 Feb. 1806 (copy), Wyvill Papers.

to his desire for peace as to his desire for power. After all, the alliance with the Grenvilles had originated at a time when the most sanguine Francophile could scarcely have imagined that Bonaparte was pacifically inclined. The historian, while conceding that Fox had adequate grounds for shelving reform in 1806, may doubt whether his commitment to the subject had ever been very firm. He had twice taken it up, in the early 1780s and the later 1790s, when he had wanted to secure popular support against the executive; but as soon as the opportunity had arisen of storming the closet in conjunction with other parliamentary factions he had abandoned the idea of a popular alliance and ceased to show any real interest in reform. One suspects that in almost any circumstances Fox would have chosen office in coalition with the Grenvilles rather than fidelity to reform in opposition; and if in 1806 he could produce strong arguments to justify his choice, one feels that their strength was largely fortuitous. In any case, it must be recognized that Fox's conduct in abandoning the position he had so definitely taken up in the previous decade had serious effects on the image of the Whig party and on public confidence in politicians in general. Thomas Creevey, who had at one time summed up his political creed as 'devotion to Fox', could write in 1808: 'With all the adoration I have for the memory of poor Fox, I do firmly believe that the first great blow to the publick opinion of this country respecting its statesmen was given by his coalition with Lord North and that almost its death blow was given by his administration in conjunction with Lord Grenville.'<sup>22</sup>

The Ministry of All the Talents certainly gave, by its limitations, a great stimulus to the emergence of a popular radicalism independent of the Whigs; and the earliest evidence of this development was provided by the press. Henry White, editor of the *Independent Whig*, later told Lord Grey that when he launched his paper at the beginning of 1806 he had been an enthusiastic Foxite. But he was doubtful from the start about an administration 'made up of *avowed Tories* as well as staunch Whigs', and he was shocked by some of its early measures—particularly the bill relating to the auditorship, and the inclusion of the Lord Chief Justice (Lord Ellenborough) in the cabinet.<sup>23</sup> On March 2 he said in an editorial that the new administration had commenced with 'some of the most outrageous violations of the Constitution . . . that ever disgraced the most venal government'. He repeatedly adjured Fox and Grey to honour their pledges; and before long he was accusing them of apostasy, maintaining that there had been a change of men but no change of measures, and that the efforts of the few independent radicals in the House of Commons were more likely to bring about the redress of public grievances than all the party manœuvres of Fox and his friends.<sup>24</sup> The same alienation from the Whigs can be traced in the pages of *Cobbett's Political Register*. Cobbett had left the ranks of the anti-Jacobins and gone

<sup>22</sup> *The Creevey Papers*, ed. Sir Herbert Maxwell (2 vols., 1904), vol. I, p. 22. Creevey to Whitbread, 11 Dec. 1808, Whitbread Papers, no. 373/6, Bedfordshire Record Office.

<sup>23</sup> *Independent Whig*, 9 Feb. 1806. White to Grey, 27 Sept. 1814, Grey Papers, University of Durham.

<sup>24</sup> *Independent Whig*, 23 Feb., 23 Mar., 4 May, 1 June 1806.

over to Fox some time before. By January 1806 they were on such cordial terms that Fox was undertaking to obtain a dog for him from Coke of Norfolk, and was expressing full agreement with Cobbett's view that this was 'no time for compromise of any sort, the system must be completely destroyed'.<sup>25</sup> But whereas what Fox was determined to avoid was any compromise with the Court, Cobbett (who did not share his hostility to the Crown) had other forms of compromise in mind. Like White, he felt obliged to criticize the early measures of the new ministry, and he showed particular resentment at the change in Fox's attitude to Indian affairs: Paull's motions for an inquiry into Lord Wellesley's administration had been supported by Fox while he was in opposition, but received no encouragement from Fox as Secretary of State. By the end of April Cobbett was writing that he had originally hoped to be able to support the ministry, but had been greatly pained by Fox's failure even to attempt the change of system which he and many others expected from him. After the end of the session he wrote that Pitt himself could not have devised a more effective means of stultifying Fox's party than a coalition with the Grenvilles under the leadership of Grenville himself; Cobbett maintained that the Foxites should never have yielded up the Treasury, but should have held out for the control over the ministry that their superiority in numbers entitled them to claim.<sup>26</sup>

Criticism of Fox was somewhat checked by his illness, which became serious in the summer of 1806; it aroused much public sympathy for him, and reminded his critics of his valuable qualities. Major Cartwright, after hearing rumours in June that Fox's life was in danger, wrote to him that although he lamented his connection with the Grenvilles and greatly deplored its consequences, he was extremely anxious for the re-establishment of his health. 'May it return,' he said, 'and may all the benefit to our country which your influence can produce be the fruit!' An even more impressive tribute came from Cobbett. At the end of July, when he was lacerating the ministry in public, he wrote in a private letter: 'I hope that Fox will live long yet; for I am always afraid, that if he were dead, *tyranny*, sheer unmixed tyranny, would be let loose upon the land.'<sup>27</sup> In the eyes of the radicals Fox's resistance to oppressive rule, especially in the 1790s, constituted his most lasting claim to public gratitude; and Cobbett evidently felt that the danger he had stood out against was not yet over. Also, it was remembered that he had been the champion of reform in the darkest period of Pittite repression, and many still believed that he had it in his power to do more for the people than any other politician could. Hence when he died in 1806 there was a widespread feeling of loss, which was reflected in the attendance at his funeral and in most of the obituaries. Francis Place, recalling in his 'History of general and Westminster politics' the revulsion in Fox's favour at the time of his death, said that by many who should have known better he was held up as everything he ought to have been and 'excused from the unpopular acts of

<sup>25</sup> Fox to O'Brien, endorsed Jan. 1806, Add. MSS 47566, fo. 262.

<sup>26</sup> Cobbett's *Political Register*, 15 Mar., 26 Apr., 16 Aug. 1806.

<sup>27</sup> Cartwright to Fox, 1 July 1806, Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 51470. Cobbett to Wright, 30 July 1806, Cobbett-Wright Correspondence, Add. MSS 22906, fo. 177.

the administration on the pitiful pretence that they did not originate with him'.<sup>28</sup>

However, radical criticism of Fox was not entirely stilled. The *Independent Whig*, for instance, said on 14 September (the day after his death) that while he had earned the character of a disinterested patriot during his thirty years in opposition, the thirty months which covered his three appointments as Secretary of State had been fatal to his reputation. A few weeks later, at the general election, Sir Francis Burdett roused the indignation of the Whigs by coming out strongly against them and aspersing Fox himself. Burdett had been supported by Fox and the Whigs at the Middlesex elections of 1802 and 1804; and on their coming into office he had published an address to the Middlesex freeholders, felicitating them on the change of ministry and assuring them that they could now look forward with confidence to 'a fair and substantial representation of the people'.<sup>29</sup> But in an address after the dissolution of parliament at the end of October he lumped both parties together and attacked them simultaneously: 'The watchword of one party is, "The best of Kings". The watchword of the other is, "The best of Patriots". But neither of these parties will choose to descend to particulars, and inform you what the best of Kings and the best of Patriots have already done, or will hereafter do, for you.' Speaking from the hustings at Brentford on November 20, Burdett said that he had had a very high opinion of Fox's ability, and when he came into power had hoped for 'some of those great schemes of National Reform, which his great mind was calculated to produce'. But when a considerable time had elapsed without any such scheme being brought forward, and without any hint being given that Fox intended to redeem his pledges, he had been forced to abandon his friendly attitude to the ministry.<sup>30</sup> At this Middlesex election, Burdett's attempt to appeal to the independent public against the parliamentary parties was unsuccessful. But his election for Westminster in the following May, brought about by a committee of radical tradesmen in defiance of both the new ministry and the Whigs, was a highly significant sequel to the Grenville-Fox coalition. Lord Cochrane, who was elected along with Burdett, wrote later: 'This election was remarkable as being the first in which public opinion firmly opposed itself to party faction. It had become unmistakably manifest that the two great factions into which the politicians were divided had no other object than to share in the general plunder.' And J. C. Hobhouse, looking back from 1819 to the events of 1806-7, said that Fox's coalition with Grenville and Sidmouth had been 'the signal for the resurrection of the people'.<sup>31</sup>

A striking illustration of the extent to which, within a year or two of his death, Fox's reputation as a man of the people had lost its hold over the minds of popular radicals was provided by an incident at the reform dinner

<sup>28</sup> Add. MSS 27850, fo. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Independent Whig*, 23 Feb. 1806.

<sup>30</sup> M. W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and his Times* (2 vols., 1931), vol. I, pp. 182-3, 185-6. For another radical's disillusionment with Fox, see John Gale Jones, *Five Letters to the Right Honourable George Tierney* (1807), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Earl of Dundonald, *Autobiography of a Seaman* (2 vols., 1860), vol. I, pp. 219-20. *Authentic Narrative of the Westminster Election of 1819* (1819), p. 340.

organized by Major Cartwright at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 1 May 1809. When Capel Lofft, who had participated in the reform campaigns of the 1780s and 90s, attempted to propose a toast to Fox's memory, he was shouted down with cries of 'Income tax!' and 'Hanover!'<sup>32</sup> The first of these cries referred to the fact that the income tax, which had been strongly opposed by Fox when it was first introduced, had been increased by the Ministry of All the Talents from six and a quarter to ten per cent; the latter cry referred to a remark said to have been made by Fox when he was Secretary of State to the effect that Hanover should be as dear to Englishmen as Hampshire.<sup>33</sup> But Lofft could not understand how such hostility to Fox could have arisen.<sup>34</sup> He belonged, like Wyvill, to the old school of gentlemen-reformers, and people of this type tended to regard Fox with admiration. Most radicals, however, were much more critical. It is true that William Hazlitt, in an essay on Fox written in 1807, enthusiastically praised him not only for his intellect and eloquence and good nature, but for his 'strength of moral character'. But a few years later, when the aura of Fox's personality had faded, he took a much less favourable view, maintaining that Fox had been *too* good-natured and *too* flexible: '... he made too many coalitions, too many compromises with flattery, with friendship (to say nothing of the baits of power), not to falter and be defeated at last in the noble stand he had made for the principles of freedom.'<sup>35</sup> There were others who had never been admirers of Fox and had always felt that behind his liberal sentiments there was a lack of real concern and constructive purpose. Bentham wrote to Sir James Mackintosh in 1808: 'My expectations of him were never sanguine. He was a consummate party leader: greedy of power, like my old friend Lord Lansdowne—but, unlike him, destitute of any fixed intellectual principles, such as would have been necessary to enable him to make, to any considerable extent, a beneficial use of it.'<sup>36</sup> And Francis Place, writing to John Cam Hobhouse in 1827 when the latter was radical M.P. for Westminster, said that much more was now required from a man of the people than had been in the previous century:

Time was when 'Wilkes and Liberty' and '45' made the silly people mad.

'It was the number 45 O  
Set the people all alive O.'

Yet none knew what the words meant, excepting those who in some way expected to profit by them, and the peoples folly. '*The Cause the Cause*' roared Charley Fox; '*the Cause the Cause*', echoed the Whigs, and the people ran after Fox and the Whigs and '*the Cause the Cause*'. This was playing the game of the factions admirably. *Then* there was no public—now there is a public,—not a good public

<sup>32</sup> The incident was vividly described by Crabb Robinson in a letter to his brother Thomas, 4 May 1809, Crabb Robinson Papers, Dr. Williams' Library, London.

<sup>33</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. VIII, col. 265. W. S. Landor, *Charles James Fox*, ed. Stephen Wheeler (1907), p. 16 & n.

<sup>34</sup> Lofft to Wyvill, 6 May 1809, Wyvill Papers.

<sup>35</sup> *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., 1930-4), vol. VII, pp. 313-22; vol. XVII, p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. Sir John Bowring (11 vols., Edinburgh, 1843), vol. X, p. 428.

certainly, but one which will in time become good. 'Wilkes and Liberty', and 'the Cause the Cause' will no longer answer the purpose of the would be 'peoples men'. . . . Would a man have any considerable weight with the people, he must tell them specifically and in words neither likely to be misunderstood nor capable of being perverted, I will endeavour to do so and so, naming particulars seriatim, and then what he says will be canvassed and criticized and pretty fairly appreciated; he must come to the test of utility if he would have consequence now.<sup>37</sup>

It would of course be wrong to assume that the voice of Francis Place was always the voice of the people, or that his hatred of Fox, whom he referred to as 'old Foxey',<sup>38</sup> was universal among the lower classes. Henry Brougham, when standing for Liverpool in 1812, reported that there Fox was remembered with affection even among the Burdettites. But he lamented that this was not the case in other populous places;<sup>39</sup> and there is every reason to think that Place, Cobbett and other radical leaders did speak for a large section of the community. The *Edinburgh Review* admitted in 1807 that Cobbett was merely the mouthpiece for 'a very general spirit of discontent, distrust and contempt for public characters, among the more intelligent and resolute portion of the inferior ranks of society'.<sup>40</sup> As Fox had been largely responsible for this resentment, it was only natural that his reputation should be one of its principal targets. Moreover, the fact that the Whigs went on brandishing his name as if it would 'accomplish all things'<sup>41</sup> exasperated those who felt that he had done little enough for the people while he was alive and (as Burdett had implied in his electoral address of October 1806) was unlikely to do any more for them now that he was dead. Cobbett wrote in April 1809 that at the next meeting of the Whig Club Sheridan was certain to make 'a flaming speech about *Liberty* and *Mr. Fox*. It is too much to tolerate this farce any longer'.<sup>42</sup> As time went on Cobbett's attitude to Fox became more and more hostile.

There was one highly respectable paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, which could be relied upon to stand up for Fox against his radical detractors. But an attempt to establish a weekly paper more specifically devoted to the protection of Fox's reputation and the dissemination of his principles was a marked failure. The projector was none other than Henry White, who along with Cobbett had led the attack from the left on the Ministry of All the Talents. After a number of prosecutions for seditious libel and a three-year spell in Dorchester Gaol, he decided that the vocation of a Foxite journalist might be less arduous than that of a radical one; and in October 1813, having obtained financial backing from several prominent Whigs, he launched a new weekly called *The Charles James Fox*.<sup>43</sup> But it ran for little more than

<sup>37</sup> Place to Hobhouse, 19 Dec. 1827 (draft), Place Papers, Add. MSS 35148, fo. 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 27842, fo. 42: '... old Foxey, who was always insincere, always the friend of the people when out of place, always willing to sacrifice them to get into place, and always their enemy when in.' (I owe this reference to Mr. William Thomas.)

<sup>39</sup> Brougham to John Allen, 25 Sept. 1812, Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 52178.

<sup>40</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, vol. X, p. 421.

<sup>41</sup> Place to James Mill, 5 Nov. 1818, Add. MSS 27842, fo. 46.

<sup>42</sup> *Cobbett's Political Register*, 15 Apr. 1809.

<sup>43</sup> There are numerous letters from White, asking for money and explaining his views and objectives at length, in the Grey Papers, University of Durham. There is a prospectus

six months—and it is not surprising that it failed to attract a wide readership. White did try, in a series of biographical articles, to present Fox himself in as popular a light as he could; and once or twice he went so far as to suggest that the contemporary Whig party was not doing all that it might to uphold its hero's 'best principles'.<sup>44</sup> But the basic tone of the publication was inevitably deferential—and this, in the age of Cobbett, was objectionable to 'the more intelligent and resolute section of the inferior ranks of society'. White had appealed very successfully to such people in his heyday as a radical journalist—Thomas Hardy had described the *Independent Whig* in 1807 as the most popular paper in London.<sup>45</sup> But there was little to attract them in a diet of laudatory articles on Fox and earlier Whig leaders, interspersed with letters to the Dukes of Norfolk and Devonshire congratulating them on their adherence to Whig principles. Indeed White not only failed to establish his new paper—he also, by suddenly appearing in Foxite Livery, caused the *Independent Whig* to lose over a thousand readers.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless in 1816 he made another attempt to commend himself to the Whigs and obtain their financial support by declaring his renewed intention—this time through the medium of the *Independent Whig* itself—'to do justice to the true principles of Whiggism' and 'to protect the memory of such a man as Mr. Fox against the pen and tongue of such vulgar defamers as Mr. Cobbett and Mr. Hunt'. But a few months later he had to report that the circulation of his own paper was dropping, while he calculated that Cobbett, through his cheap editions and the republication of his writings in *The Statesman* and various provincial papers, was reaching a total of three hundred thousand readers a week.<sup>47</sup> In the following years White sent a stream of begging letters to Grey, maintaining that he had a claim on the party because his support for Mr. Fox and Whig principles had caused so many defections from his paper.

Fox was posthumously unlucky in having as a journalistic champion a man who—at least by the time he took up Fox's cause—was more remarkable as a sponger than as a journalist.<sup>48</sup> But White did try, whatever his motives, to extend and popularize Fox's reputation; whereas the Whigs made little attempt to put across their hero to the public, confining themselves (White said) to 'the perpetuation of the memory of Mr. Fox in the occasional public meeting of a particular class of his friends'.<sup>49</sup> The annual dinners held in honour of Fox's birthday were not perhaps so exclusive as this phrase suggests. But they were essentially gatherings of the faithful, presided over by the grandees of the party. H. G. Bennet described a Newcastle Fox dinner chaired by Lord Grey as 'a beat up of political friends—a kind of levee'; and when Joseph Hume was planning a visit to Edinburgh in the winter

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of *The Charles James Fox* in the Whitbread Papers (no. 5038); and the complete run of twenty-nine issues, 3 Oct. 1814–17 Apr. 1815, is in the British Museum.

<sup>44</sup> See for instance *The Charles James Fox*, 9 Jan. 1815.

<sup>45</sup> Place Papers, Add. MSS 27818, fo. 64.

<sup>46</sup> White to Grey, 16 June 1816, Grey Papers.

<sup>47</sup> White to Grey, 9 & 17 Sept. 1816, 4 Jan. 1817, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> See Brougham to Grey, 1 Sept. 1814, Brougham Papers, University College London; and Place Papers, Add. MSS 35144, fo. 36.

<sup>49</sup> White to Grey, 26 July 1816, Grey Papers.

of 1824–5, Lord Archibald Hamilton told him that a dinner held in his honour would attract a considerably wider attendance than the annual Fox dinner, which was ‘a *Party* one exclusively’.<sup>50</sup> That the Whig cult of Fox’s memory was not a popular, expansive cult is suggested also by the nature of its literature. Fox’s *History of the early part of the Reign of James the Second*, written mainly during the period of his secession from parliament and published by his nephew Lord Holland in 1808, was greeted with enthusiasm by liberal-minded men of letters such as William Roscoe and Capel Lofft;<sup>51</sup> and Lord Holland’s introduction, which gave an account of Fox’s life at St. Anne’s Hill, replaced the picture of him as a gambler and libertine with that of a scholar and a gentleman<sup>52</sup>—which appealed to gentlemen and scholars. But the book (which cost thirty-six shillings) does not appear to have made a wide impact on the public.<sup>53</sup> Fox’s correspondence with Gilbert Wakefield, published in 1813, was concerned mainly with questions of classical literature; and Dr. Samuel Parr’s *Characters of the late Charles James Fox*—an unwieldy compilation with a mass of notes and notes on notes—was almost equally unfit for popular consumption. There was one work more calculated, in Francis Horner’s view, to spread affection for Fox’s memory ‘among the middle class of people throughout England’: John Bernard Trotter’s *Memoirs of the latter years of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox* (1811). But unfortunately this publication could not be given the seal of Whig approval, because although it gave a pleasant picture of Fox himself it was full of rancour against his friends and colleagues. (Trotter had been private secretary to Fox while the latter was Secretary of State, and his grievance was that after Fox’s death he had not been offered a position of the kind to which he thought himself entitled.) After a lot of discussion in Whig circles as to how the book should be dealt with in the *Edinburgh Review*, it was eventually treated as beneath the reviewers’ notice.<sup>54</sup>

It is not perhaps surprising that no ‘official’ work on Fox was published in the early nineteenth century,<sup>55</sup> for any such work would necessarily have involved some definition of what Fox had stood for, and it was doubtful whether such a definition was desirable. For the Whigs tended (in practice if not in theory) to treat the principles of Charles James Fox less as a gospel to be preached to the unconverted than as a cement for keeping the existing party in one piece. Francis Horner wrote despondently a couple of days after

<sup>50</sup> *Creevey Papers*, vol. I, p. 187. Hamilton to Hume, 1 Nov. 1824, National Library of Scotland, MS 2257, fos. 129–30.

<sup>51</sup> Roscoe to Lord Henry Petty, n.d. (draft), Roscoe Papers, Liverpool Public Library. Lofft to Wyvill, 6 May 1809, Wyvill Papers.

<sup>52</sup> The latter phrase was applied to Fox by J. W. Ward in *Quarterly Review*, vol. IX (1813), p. 328, and by Walter Savage Landor in one of his *Imaginary Conversations of Literary Men and Statesmen* (5 vols., 1824–9), vol. III, pp. 435–6.

<sup>53</sup> Sir James Mackintosh wrote later (to Holland, 6 Aug. 1820, Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 51633) that historical writings did not ‘reach low enough for popularity’.

<sup>54</sup> Horner to Lady Holland, n.d. (Oct. 1811), Horner Papers, vol. V, p. 147, London School of Economics. Brougham to Grey, 13 Oct. 1811, Brougham Papers. Holland to Francis Jeffrey, n.d. (Oct/Nov. 1811, draft), Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 51644. Holland to Grey, 7 Nov. 1811, *ibid.*, 51544.

<sup>55</sup> Except for John Allen’s largely factual article on Fox written for the Supplement to the 6th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Fox's death: 'I look upon what has been called Mr. Fox's party, the remains of the old Whig faction, as extinguished entirely with him; his name alone kept the fragments together.'<sup>56</sup> But in fact—there being so little besides devotion to Fox that Fitzwilliam on one wing of the party and the Mountain on the other could profess in common—Fox's ghost was to perform much the same unifying function. The principles of Charles James Fox were useful not only because they had a more up-to-date ring than 'the principles of 1688' or 'the cause for which Hampden bled in the field and Sydney on the scaffold', but also because they could be interpreted in almost as many different ways. Within the party an inconclusive argument was carried on as to how they *ought* to be interpreted. On the question of war and peace, Whitbread maintained that the pacific stand which he took up at the beginning of 1807 would have been approved by Fox—and that if Fox had remained in control of the peace negotiations in the previous year they would not have broken down as they did. Grey, on the other hand, asserted that those who had taken over the negotiation had continued it on the lines laid down by Fox, who had himself, at the time he wrote his last dispatch, considered it to have failed.<sup>57</sup> On domestic issues, also, the left wing of the party frequently claimed Fox's authority for its own policies. When Whitbread came out in favour of reform in 1809, he expressed his conviction that 'that wise man, whose principles he contracted at his outset in political life, would strongly recommend the conduct he was now pursuing'. And when under attack from the more conservative members of the party in the following year, he wrote that many of those who now thought his views 'new fangled' had formerly held the very same views along with Fox and himself in 1793—and had had the very accusation brought against them by the Portland Whigs which they now brought against him.<sup>58</sup> Brougham was another who made great play with Fox's name. He professed his devotion to Fox in order to establish his affiliation to the party, but he interpreted Fox's principles in such a way as to give himself considerable latitude for pursuing popular courses. He said in a speech during the Liverpool election of 1812:

By his principles it is my delight to regulate my conduct—and judging by what he did and said, of what he would have done had he been preserved to our days, I feel well assured, that he would now have followed a course if possible still more popular, because he would have seen, more and more clearly, the vital importance to the country of a strict union between the people and their leaders, against the growing corruptions and augmented insolence of the Court!<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner*, ed. Leonard Horner (2 vols., 1843), vol. I, p. 374.

<sup>57</sup> Roger Fulford, *Samuel Whitbread* (1967), pp. 173–4. Grey to Brougham, 29 Sept. 1908, *Life and Times of Henry Lord Brougham*, written by himself (3 vols., 1871), vol. I, p. 414.

<sup>58</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. XIV, col. 514. Whitbread to Bedford, 9 May 1810 (draft), Whitbread Papers in the possession of Earl Waldegrave, Chewton House, near Bath.

<sup>59</sup> Brougham to Holland, 8 Oct. 1811, Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 51561. Brougham to Grey, endorsed Nov. 1812, Brougham Papers. *The Speeches delivered during the Election at Liverpool in October 1812*, by Henry Brougham, Esq. (Liverpool, 1813), p. 39.

Brougham told Allen that he wanted to see 'the ancient intercourse between the Whigs and the people' re-established; but there was a limit to how far one could court the people without being disowned by the party. In January 1814 Brougham and other members of the Mountain were excluded from the annual dinner in honour of Fox's birthday. He wrote indignantly to Creevey: 'It is rather good to see the real and best Foxites so treated; us—who stand up for Fox *agt. Pitt* . . . We have lived to see the time when Foxite means Pittite—or something very near it.' In Brougham's view the party was divided into 'those who stand up for Fox *against Pitt*', and 'those who mince the matter as to Pitt's measures'.<sup>60</sup> By the latter he meant those who abstained from attacking Pitt out of consideration for the Grenvilles—and, partly for the same reason, discountenanced all kinds of reform. Men like Brougham and Whitbread chafed continuously in the ten years after Fox's death against the Grenville alliance and its inhibiting effects on the party. But of course any appeal from the Mountain for more truly 'Foxite' policies could be only too easily countered by a reminder that the Grenville alliance had been Fox's doing. Indeed the Duke of Bedford could tell Whitbread in 1809 that the union of Fox's party with the Grenvilles had been urged by Fox himself 'as his dying hope and left as his last legacy to his surviving friends'.<sup>61</sup>

An illustration of the difficulty the Whigs had when it came to defining Fox's principles in a way that would be acceptable to all sections of the party is provided by the story of his epitaph. Westmacott's statue of Fox for Westminster Abbey was finished by 1819, and the sculptor having left a space for an inscription the committee responsible for the monument invited Sir James Mackintosh to compose one. Sir James, despite his radical youth, was by now one of the staid members of the party, and produced what he himself called 'a sober and modest composition . . . I have so laboured to avoid exaggeration that I hope a reasonable opponent will not consider the commendation as excessive proceeding from an affectionate adherent.' He mentioned Fox's efforts in the cause of toleration, his Libel Act, his abolition of the slave trade, the fact that he had 'contended for the rights of the people of America and Ireland', and the rather more dubious fact that he had 'sacrificed power for the hope of bestowing a just government on India'. But there was no reference to reform, and no specific mention of what many people regarded as his chief claim to fame—in Brougham's words, 'his truly glorious career as leader of the patriot band which, during the almost hopeless struggle from 1793 to 1801, upheld the cause of afflicted freedom'.<sup>62</sup> Such omissions—in the winter when the Six Acts were passed—aroused the indignation of the more militant Whigs. Brougham called on Creevey to help him in suppressing this 'cursed, bad and timid epitaph', and a kind of competition ensued, Brougham putting in a draft of his own. There followed

<sup>60</sup> Brougham to Allen, 28 Oct. 1812, Add. MSS 52178. Brougham to Creevey, 7 Feb. 1814, Creevey Papers (microfilm), University College London. Brougham to Grey, 24 Oct. 1812, Brougham Papers.

<sup>61</sup> Fulford, *Whitbread*, p. 253, citing Whitbread Papers (Bedford), no. 2462.

<sup>62</sup> Mackintosh to Holland, 9 Sept. 1819, Add. MSS 51653. R. J. Mackintosh, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh* (2 vols., 1835), vol. II, pp. 376–8. Brougham, *Historical Sketches of the Statesmen who flourished in the time of George III* (Paris, 1839), p. 108.

several years of discussion and intrigue, but no consensus emerged; and the decision eventually reached was that the monument should simply be inscribed with Fox's names and the dates of his birth and death.<sup>63</sup>

Cobbett would have made something out of this story had he known about it. He enjoyed making the point that so long as the Whig party stood for 'the principles of Charles James Fox' it stood for almost everything and almost nothing. In 1812 when the Prince Regent was being accused by the Whigs of having abandoned the principles of Mr. Fox, Cobbett asked which of Mr. Fox's principles they had in mind:

The principles he maintained when on the side of Lord North before the American war, at which time I remember a speech of his in support of Ex-Officio Informations; the principles he maintained during the American war against Lord North; the principles he maintained in conjunction with Lord North after the American war; the principles he maintained during the Anti-jacobin war against Lord Grenville and in the present war against Lord Sidmouth; or, the principles he maintained when he came into office with both of those Lords at once.<sup>64</sup>

But although there was certainly a good deal of vagueness and ambiguity about Fox's principles, there was—at least during the last thirty years of his life—one consistent theme: his hostility to the Crown. This orientation may have been largely accidental—Lord Carlisle reckoned that originally (after his quarrel with North in 1774) Fox had adopted the principles of the Whig party 'not from inclination but from resentment';<sup>65</sup> and subsequently it was his personal antipathy to George III that lay at the basis of his anti-monarchism. But he liked to claim an impressive ancestry for his views and to regard himself as in the mainstream of the Whig tradition; perhaps his chief aim in writing his *History* was to show how close his own political position was to that of the Whig heroes of the 1680s.<sup>66</sup> Thus one might say that although 'the principles of Charles James Fox' sounded more up-to-date in the early nineteenth century than 'the principles of 1688', they amounted in fact to much the same thing: distrust of the crown, and a belief in aristocratic government on behalf, but only to a limited extent under the control, of the people. Henry White took as the motto for *The Charles James Fox* a quotation from one of his speeches: 'I ask you to examine with attention the History of this Country, and to reflect upon it;—you will see that all its calamities have been chiefly owing to that system which tends to increase the Influence of the Crown, and to encroach upon the Rights of the People.' But in the early nineteenth century it was considerably more difficult than it had been earlier to maintain that such a system existed. Although Lord John Russell in the 1820s could still echo Fox's alarm about the increasing influence of the Crown and the approaching euthanasia of the constitution, such language

<sup>63</sup> Brougham to Creevey, n.d., Creevey Papers. *Creevey Papers*, vol. II, pp. 299–300. Memorandum dated 30 May 1823, Holland House Papers, Add. MSS 51472.

<sup>64</sup> *Cobbett's Political Register*, 28 Mar. 1812.

<sup>65</sup> 'Character of Fox' (1806), Carlisle Papers, cited by I. R. Christie, 'Charles James Fox', *History Today*, vol. VIII (1958), p. 114 n.

<sup>66</sup> J. R. Dinwiddy, 'Charles James Fox as Historian', *Historical Journal*, vol. XII (1969), pp. 23–4, 33–4; see below, 19–20, 29–30.

sounded distinctly archaic.<sup>67</sup> For while the Whigs continued to appear in their traditional role as defenders of the people's rights against the encroachments of the executive power, the people themselves were no longer satisfied with the protection of their existing rights, but wanted to extend them—and they felt that their quarrel was not simply with the Court but with the mass of the governing class. Fox's idea of liberty was inadequate at a time when increasing numbers of people were coming to regard self-government through real representatives as the only satisfactory way of securing their interests; and appeals by the Whigs to Fox's principles seemed symptomatic of a backward-looking stance and a lack of sympathy for new ideas and aspirations. John Nicholls, who had been an independent member of parliament at the turn of the century, wrote in 1820:

Mr. Fox is no more; but they [the Foxites] endeavour to acquire popularity by assuming his name. They find that it is in vain; they feel that the people are not with them. . . It is well known that the leaders of the Foxite party are among those who are the most averse to Reform. How can they expect that the people should wish to see them in office?<sup>68</sup>

It was not of course necessary for the Whigs to adopt the programme of the extreme radicals; what they needed to do to ensure their own survival was to enlist the support of the 'middling classes' by committing themselves to moderate reform. Francis Jeffrey had said in 1810 that the Whigs stood 'without power or popularity' between two great armies—on the one hand that of Church and King, and on the other that of the democrats; and he had urged the Whigs to abandon their 'cold and repulsive neutrality' and join forces with the more respectable of the latter.<sup>69</sup> For some time, even after the Grenvilles had parted company with the Whigs, the conservative elements in the party remained strong enough to prevent the adoption of such a policy. The party continued to stagnate, and in the 1820s came near to extinction. But eventually reform did supersede 'the principles of Charles James Fox', and gave the Whigs a new lease of life.<sup>70</sup>

After 1832, Fox cannot be said to have had any real influence.<sup>71</sup> In the age of improvement, of classical economics, of democracy, there was less and less to connect the Liberal party with him. Russell, looking back from the 1860s, saw the founders of nineteenth-century liberalism as Grey, Canning and Peel.<sup>72</sup> (After all, of the three great leaders of Victorian liberalism one

<sup>67</sup> *An Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution* (2nd edition, 1823), p. 455.

<sup>68</sup> *Recollections and Reflections, personal and political* (2 vols., 1820–2), vol. I, pp. 212–13.

<sup>69</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, vol. XV (1810), pp. 504–5, 520.

<sup>70</sup> Norman Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics 1832–52* (Oxford, 1965), p. 157.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas De Quincey, writing in mid-century, contrasted the increasing prestige and influence of Burke with Fox's faded reputation; Fox, he wrote, 'is known only as an echo is known, and, for any real effect of intellect upon this generation, for anything but the "whistling of a name", the Fox of 1780–1807 sleeps where the carols of the larks are sleeping that gladdened the spring-tides of those years.' *Collected Writings*, ed. David Masson (14 vols., 1896–7), vol. XI, pp. 35–40.

<sup>72</sup> *An Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution* (3rd edition, 1865), pp. c–cvi.

had started life as a Canningite and another as a Peelite.) As early as 1838 Fox's reputation was being cut down to size by the *Edinburgh Review* itself:

Of Mr. Fox it must be said that whilst his political principles were formed upon the true model of the Whig School, and led him, when combined with his position as opposing the Government's warlike and oppressive policy, to defend the liberty of America, and the cause of peace, both in that and the French war, yet he constantly modified these principles, according to his own situation and circumstances as a party chief;—making the ambition of the man and the interest of his followers the governing rule of his conduct.<sup>73</sup>

The author of this article was none other than Lord Brougham. In stressing the force of Fox's ambition he was echoing Bentham's judgement; and there can be little doubt that they were right on this point—indeed Fox had admitted it himself.<sup>74</sup> As for the emphasis on Fox's concern for the interests of his followers, here again Brougham's assessment coincided with that already current in radical circles. The *Newgate Magazine* (published by the Painite Richard Carlile) had said in 1826 in a passage which Francis Place approvingly transcribed into one of his guard-books:

Party had never a more decided leader than Mr. Fox: no chieftain of banditti was more faithful to his troop than he was to his followers . . . That he should be loved by his friends and enthusiastically admired by his followers, may be easily conceived: but that he should be held up . . . as an object of national gratitude cannot be so easily explained.<sup>75</sup>

There certainly was this feeling that for all Fox's speeches from the hustings at Westminster and the banners that proclaimed him 'the man of the people', he had really belonged less to the people than to his friends. It is true that he had (as Landor said) 'more and warmer friends than any statesman upon record'.<sup>76</sup> Of the amazing potency of his charm there can be no doubt whatever; it captivated many who had no personal contact with him, and to a remarkable extent it retained its power after his death. But there were many who were unsusceptible or out of range. Those on the fringes or beyond the pale of the eighteenth-century political nation could not 'identify' with Fox as they had done with John Wilkes, for there was nothing of the outsider about him. Sir Francis Burdett, on the other hand—wealthy patrician though he was—was more of an outsider in the sense that, at least during the first twenty years or so of his political career, he was more uncompromisingly hostile to 'the system' than Fox had ever been. And he patently relied more on popularity than on friendship; the Westminster radicals could describe him as 'the man indeed of the people, for the people themselves have raised him to the pinnacle on which he stands'.<sup>77</sup>

It would be wrong for the historian to follow Francis Place in maintaining that Fox cared and did virtually nothing for the people. He was courageous

<sup>73</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, vol. LXVIII (1838), p. 217.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Green, *Extracts from the Diary of a Lover of Literature* (Ipswich, 1810), p. 174.

<sup>75</sup> *Newgate Magazine*, vol. II (1826), p. 467; Add. MSS 27837, fo. 97.

<sup>76</sup> W. S. Landor, *Charles James Fox*, p. xxiii.

<sup>77</sup> *Authentic Narrative of the Westminster Election of 1819*, p. 51.

and impressive in his defence of traditional liberties; and he opposed the war with France partly on the grounds of the hardship which it caused to the people of England.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps Henry White was justified in claiming that Fox deserved more gratitude for what he did than censure for that which he left undone.<sup>79</sup> But this essay has shown that there was in the early nineteenth century a strong reaction, among all but the most gentlemanly radicals, against Fox's claim to be entitled the man of the people. The reaction was partly due to a change in the political climate; the emergence of a politically informed and independent public<sup>80</sup> set up a powerful challenge to the 1688 view of politics which Fox had taken for granted. But the reaction arose also out of a real ambivalence in Fox's career—an ambivalence that became apparent in time even to men who had greatly admired him. One writer argued after Fox's death: 'He was accused of rank democracy; but with much injustice. He entered political life among the aristocracy, and with them closed his career. It was by their prevailing influence against the crown that he twice became a minister; and by them he was supported throughout.'<sup>81</sup> This is no more the whole truth about Fox than the view that he was a 'people's man'. But the element of truth in both views needs to be recognized.

<sup>78</sup> *Parliamentary History*, vol. XXXII, cols. 165–8.

<sup>79</sup> *The Charles James Fox*, 6 Mar. 1815.

<sup>80</sup> Add. MSS 27850, fos. 39–40. *Politics and Public Men for the year 1812* (1813), pp. 28–32.

<sup>81</sup> Extract from *The Epics of the Ton*, in Philopatris Varvicensis [S. Parr], *Characters of the late C. J. Fox* (2 vols., 1809), vol. I, p. 129. In a print of 1802 (by J. T. Smith) Fox is represented with his great paunch inscribed 'Victualled by Subscription of the Nobility'—an allusion to the subscription raised on his behalf in 1793. M. D. George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, vol. VIII (1947), p. 91.

## *Charles James Fox as Historian*

Several British statesmen have also been historians: Clarendon, Russell, Rosebery, Churchill—and Charles James Fox, although he produced only one volume. His *History of the early part of the Reign of James II* is a fragment of what might have been a much larger work; it was published posthumously, with a preface by his nephew Lord Holland, in 1808. Although it was given a mixed reception by the critics, it was regarded for several decades as something of a classic. It was translated into French, German, and Dutch; and was republished several times in England during the nineteenth century (most recently as a threepenny paperback in Cassell's National Library in 1888). It cannot be claimed that this work is a landmark in the history of historiography—although it is mentioned by writers on that subject.<sup>1</sup> But it is valuable for the light which it reflects on the author. Fox's talents and versatility are almost legendary; he has been taken by G. M. Trevelyan as the representative figure of the eighteenth-century aristocracy<sup>2</sup>—whose ideal (in the words of another scholar) was 'the Renaissance ideal of the whole man.'<sup>3</sup> An article has been written on Fox's literary taste;<sup>4</sup> but his activity as a historian is an aspect of his career which has hitherto been neglected. However, his *History*, together with the correspondence relating to it,<sup>5</sup> is a source which anyone aiming at a full assessment and understanding of Fox should take into account. It was the only considerable piece of serious writing which he attempted;<sup>6</sup> and its publication was welcomed by James Mill as 'affording evidence of the real extent of Mr Fox's abilities and knowledge, more decisive and accurate than anything we have yet received'.<sup>7</sup> It also has political significance in that one of the author's chief motives was to vindicate his own Whiggism, by implicitly demonstrating how close his political position was to that of the Whig heroes of

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Firth, 'The Development of the Study of Seventeenth-century History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3rd series, vii (1913), p. 40, and *A Commentary on Macaulay's History of England* (London, 1938), pp. 56-7; T. P. Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830* (New York, 1933), pp. 195-6.

<sup>2</sup> *English Social History* (London, 1944), pp. 404-5.

<sup>3</sup> Lord D. Cecil, *The Young Melbourne* (2nd edn. London, 1954), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> J. Dechamps, 'Charles Fox et Racine', *Modern Language Review*, xxxvi (1941), 467-72.

<sup>5</sup> This is mostly to be found in the C. J. Fox and Holland House Papers, British Museum Additional Manuscripts (hereafter referred to as Add. MSS.) 47578 and 51510. The latter bundle is unfoliated. For the original manuscript of the *History*, see Add. MSS. 51508-9.

<sup>6</sup> On Fox's other publications, see Lord Holland's introduction to C. J. Fox, *A History of the early part of the Reign of James the Second* (London, 1808—cited hereafter as *History*), p. xiv n.

<sup>7</sup> Aikin's *Annual Review and History of Literature* (1808), p. 101.

the 1680s; in this sense (as will be suggested below) the *History* can be regarded as an indirect reply to Burke's *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*.

Fox's work as a historian belongs to the quietest, and in some ways the most pleasant, period of his life. In May 1797, when it had been clear for some time that the war with France and the split in the Whig party had made Pitt's position in the House of Commons impregnable, Fox and most of his followers seceded from Parliament. For the next year or two at St Anne's Hill Fox seems to have been happy enough with Homer, Vergil, Ariosto and other favourite authors. But in due course he came to feel the need for some more constructive employment of his time. He might have taken to literary criticism; one of the projects he had in mind during his years of retirement was an edition of the works of Dryden. But Fox, who already felt somewhat uneasy about his withdrawal from Parliament,<sup>8</sup> was too much in the grip of politics to devote himself to serious literary studies. A historical work, however, would not mean turning his back so completely on politics. It was clear that the political principles in which he believed were currently out of fashion, and an ephemeral pamphlet expressing these principles would be no more useful than speeches in the House of Commons. But in a history of the Revolution, which is what he planned to write,<sup>9</sup> he could hope to give more lasting and more dignified expression to his constitutional ideas—ideas which he regarded as central to the Whig tradition. As Trotter, his adoring ex-secretary, put it, 'in having recourse to history (still continuing his exertions in favour of liberty), he shewed the generous struggles of a noble mind to serve his country and posterity in the only way left open to him'.<sup>10</sup>

At this period, such motives were not regarded as inconsistent with aspirations to historical scholarship. The eighteenth century was the age of 'philosophical history'. According to Bolingbroke and Voltaire, to study the past for its own sake was mere antiquarianism; history was 'philosophy teaching by examples', and it was the business of historians to expound its lessons. Political history was expected to illustrate political principles—the nature of which depended largely on the outlook of the writer; and impartiality was a phenomenon so rare as to be virtually unrecognizable to contemporaries. When Hume tried to write an impartial history of England, he had to throw his weight against the prevalent Whig interpretation<sup>11</sup>—and was inevitably regarded as a Tory. The position at the end of the eighteenth century was that

<sup>8</sup> He admitted that neither Cato nor Brutus would have approved of it—see *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox*, ed. Lord John Russell (4 vols. London, 1853-7—cited hereafter as *Memorials*), III, 278.

<sup>9</sup> He seems at one stage to have aimed to cover also the reigns of William III and Anne (see an undated letter to the Hon. George Walpole, Add. MSS. 47578, fo. 85); but in January 1804 he told Holland that he did not intend to go beyond the Revolution (*Memorials*, III, 241).

<sup>10</sup> J. B. Trotter, *Memoirs of the latter years of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox* (London, 1811), p. xvi.

<sup>11</sup> See Hume's *History of England* (8 vols. London, 1782), VIII, 323.

Hume's so-called Tory interpretation held the field. As Malcolm Laing, the historian of Scotland, wrote in a letter to Fox in 1800:

his history has certainly contributed, more perhaps than any other cause, to fashion the opinions of the present generation. It is the first, and almost the only history of England ever read, and there is nothing to counter-act the general impression which its fascinating narrative and philosophical researches are calculated to produce, but Mrs Macauley's transcripts of Oldmixon's dull controversial malignity. A historian of England is still wanting, equally remote from the virulence of republican, and the apologetical strain of prerogative writers.<sup>12</sup>

So far as the Stuart period (which was the chief battleground) was concerned, the Tory position had been reinforced by Dalrymple and Macpherson.<sup>13</sup> In setting out to overthrow this Tory predominance in the historiographical field, Fox aimed to do what Macaulay eventually succeeded in doing.

It was an ambitious undertaking for a man who had written almost nothing and had no experience of research; and it has been suggested that Fox merely dabbled in history.<sup>14</sup> But—although he never approached the level of learning attained by Mackintosh, who was the next Whig statesman to embark on a history of the Revolution<sup>15</sup>—he did set about his task in a fairly scholarly way. In a letter to Lauderdale at the beginning of 1800, expressing his intention of becoming a historian, Fox explained that he had been working on an introductory chapter (a 'cursory review' of the historical background to James II's reign), but had not yet 'looked into any manuscript papers, or other documents not generally known'; he was anxious for any information Lauderdale could give him about where such materials could be found.<sup>16</sup> During the next few years Lauderdale and his friend Malcolm Laing gave Fox a considerable amount of help, particularly with regard to Scottish sources. Fox also had two advisers in London: Samuel Heywood, Serjeant-at-law, who subsequently wrote a whole book in defence of Fox's *History*; and William Belsham, a Whig pamphleteer and author of a massive (though undistinguished) history of England since the Revolution.<sup>17</sup> Fox exchanged letters with Belsham on the

<sup>12</sup> Add. MSS. 47578, fos. 9–10. Cf. Holland to Fox, 10 September 1800 (Add. MSS. 47574, fos. 115–16): 'the tendency of Hume's History... has certainly led many many people in England to consider their History which ought to be as it were a magazine of proofs and examples against Toryism as the strongest justification for High Church doctrines or at least the strongest satire against the contrary principles'.

<sup>13</sup> Sir John Dalrymple, *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland* (2 vols. London and Edinburgh, 1771–3); James Macpherson, *The History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (2 vols. London, 1775).

<sup>14</sup> J. W. Derry, *The Regency Crisis and the Whigs, 1788–9* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Forty volumes of historical materials collected by Sir James Mackintosh are preserved in the British Museum (Add. MSS. 34487–526).

<sup>16</sup> *History*, p. xvi.

<sup>17</sup> There are articles on Laing and Belsham in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. For Heywood see H. W. Woolrych, *Lives of Eminent Serjeants-at-Law* (London, 1869), pp. 701–33.

characters of Sunderland and Shaftesbury;<sup>18</sup> and Heywood provided various information, including a lengthy legal opinion as to 'Whether Conspiracy to depose the King or to levy War is a compassing of his Death within the Statute 25 Ed. 3'<sup>19</sup>—which was used by Fox when he considered (in his introductory chapter) the fate of Russell and Sidney. Fox showed a laudable anxiety to check his authorities, and to track down original documents. For instance he tried, though unsuccessfully, to trace the notes written by Argyle in prison before his execution, which Woodrow had apparently seen;<sup>20</sup> and he managed, with the aid of two Roman Catholic friends, Henry Howard of Corby Castle and Charles Butler of Lincoln's Inn, to ascertain the fate of James II's papers which had been in the Scotch College in Paris up to the French Revolution.<sup>21</sup> But his most notable piece of research was carried out in the archives of the French Foreign Office. The correspondence of Louis XVI and Barillon (who was French ambassador in London throughout James's reign) had previously been examined by Sir John Dalrymple, who had published extracts from it in his *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*. But Fox thought a re-examination of the original correspondence would reveal much new material. After the Peace of Amiens he obtained permission from the French Government to study these papers in the *Dépôt des Affaires étrangères*. He went to France at the end of July 1802; and during the next few months, with the aid of Lord St John, Robert Adair, and John Bernard Trotter, he transcribed most of Barillon's correspondence from the time of James's accession. Trotter has left a description of how this work was carried on:

I shall not easily forget Mr Fox walking upstairs, taking off his hat, and sitting down in our room, oppressed with heat and the fatigue arising from it; taking a few minutes to recover himself and then applying with the same ardour and industry every day, copying, reading aloud the passages leading to any discovery, keeping his friends busily employed, and always cheerful and active.<sup>22</sup>

When he returned from France, Fox proceeded to incorporate the new material he had collected into what he had already written about the months

<sup>18</sup> Add. MSS. 47578, fos. 12-13 and 23.

<sup>19</sup> Add. MSS. 51510.

<sup>20</sup> Add. MSS. 47578, fos. 30 and 42.

<sup>21</sup> *History*, pp. xxiv-xxxii. The original Memoirs of James II in his own hand-writing covering the years 1652-60 were burnt at St Omer during the French Revolution; but a French version of these Memoirs has recently been discovered and published in an English translation—see A. Lytton Sells, *Memoirs of James II* (London, 1962). Of the Life of James II, compiled by William Dicconson with the aid of James's papers, there appear to have been two copies extant in the early nineteenth century. One of these was tracked down by Fox and his agents; it was in the possession of Alexander Cameron, Roman Catholic bishop at Edinburgh, and Laing examined it and described it to Fox. The other copy, which had been in the hands of the English Benedictines at Rome, was acquired by the Prince Regent, and an edition by J. S. Clarke was published on his orders in 1816. For Fox's correspondence relating to the papers, *Memoirs and Life of James II*, see Add. MSS. 47578, fos. 49-52, 58-60, 66-8, 71, 76-7, 80 and 109.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 339. See also St John to Holland, 21 April 1808, Add. MSS. 51824.

following James's accession.<sup>23</sup> He also tried to obtain the correspondence of Don Pedro de Ronquillo, who was Spanish ambassador in London during James's reign. Lord Holland, while travelling in Spain, was urged to search for these papers, which Fox said would give him an 'advantage of the greatest consequence over all other historians'. Holland did find and purchase Ronquillo's original letters of the years 1689 to 1691, but could not trace his earlier correspondence.<sup>24</sup>

There are many indications in Fox's letters of his determination to achieve the highest possible standard of accuracy. Writing to Laing he asked for information as to whether Argyle actually addressed the crowd from the scaffold before his execution, or merely handed a written speech to the Dean of Edinburgh who attended him. Fox went on: 'After all, this is all very immaterial, but one becomes sometimes too curious about trifles from a great desire of stating the truth with a minute correctness.'<sup>25</sup> This exactitude was one of the reasons for the rather slow progress of his work. In addition, perhaps surprisingly for such a fluent speaker, Fox found actual composition a great labour. He wrote to Holland in January 1804: 'History goes on, but it goes on very slowly, the fact is I am a very slow writer. . . I am too scrupulous both about language and facts.'<sup>26</sup> Other retarding factors were the distractions of literature and politics. As to the former, when Lauderdale wrote saying that he hoped Fox had turned his classical books out of the house, Fox replied that he had no intention of doing so, and would give up the whole project if he thought it incompatible with his giving a little time to them.<sup>27</sup> In the years when he was engaged on his history, Fox was carrying on a very learned correspondence with Gilbert Wakefield on matters of classical scholarship; and at the end of his famous letter to Grey on nightingales in literature he said: 'I am afraid I like these researches as much better than those that relate to Shaftesbury and Sunderland, as I do those better than attending the House of Commons.'<sup>28</sup> Between May 1797 and the summer of 1802 Fox appeared very rarely in the House of Commons. But during the session which opened in November 1802 he attended and spoke more regularly, feeling that it was his duty to exert what influence he could in favour of peace; and towards the end of 1803 he became preoccupied with the possibility of creating a strong opposition through a junction with the Grenvilles. With the formation of this alliance, early in 1804, Fox once more devoted his chief energies to politics. His history

<sup>23</sup> When Fox's historical fragment was published, Holland subjoined to it an appendix of documents consisting mainly of the Barillon correspondence between December 1684 and December 1685. The letters of subsequent years which Fox and his friends had transcribed were not published, as being irrelevant to the short period covered by Fox's work; but these copies were later used by Mackintosh and Macaulay.

<sup>24</sup> *Memorials*, III, 219; *History*, p. xxxv n.

<sup>25</sup> Add. MSS. 47578, fo. 46.

<sup>26</sup> *Memorials*, III, 232.

<sup>27</sup> Lauderdale to Fox, dated 'Sunday', Add. MSS. 51510; Fox to Lauderdale, 2 May 1800, *Memorials*, III, 301.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* III, 311. Cf. Fox to Wakefield, 26 January 1801, *ibid.* IV, 401.

by that stage had been carried up to the execution of Monmouth (he reported Monmouth's death to General Fitzpatrick on 1 January 1804); thereafter he seems to have written only a few paragraphs of his fourth chapter, although he continued (at least during that year) to devote some of his time to historical studies.<sup>29</sup>

Fox died in office in September 1806; and in due course his friends decided that his historical work should be published. Early in 1808 Holland let it be known that he intended to sell the copyright on behalf of Mrs Fox. After some competition it was sold to William Miller for £4,500<sup>30</sup>—an unprecedentedly high price for a single volume (although Robertson had received the same sum for his three-volume *History of the Reign of Charles V*).<sup>31</sup> The work was published in June 1808—the standard edition, of which 5,000 copies were printed, being offered for sale at thirty-six shillings. The book consists of a fifty-page preface by Lord Holland, some 270 pages by Fox, and 150 pages of documents. Fox's introductory chapter is a sketch of the period 1640 to 1685; the second chapter deals with James's measures in the opening months of his reign and the proceedings of his first parliaments in Scotland and England; and the third chapter describes the expeditions of Argyle and Monmouth. Without attempting a minute analysis of Fox's work, I shall try to pick out its main themes and points of interest.

The general tone is, of course, strongly anti-Stuart. The chief preoccupation of Fox's political career was his jealousy of the powers of the crown; and the later Stuart period gave him many opportunities of showing the need for such jealousy. In the passage on the Restoration, Monk was heavily censured for laying the nation prostrate at the feet of the returning monarch, without a single provision in favour of the cause of liberty.<sup>32</sup> Fox went on to describe Charles II's reign as an era of good laws and bad government; and he pointed out 'the inefficacy of mere laws in favour of the subjects, in the case of the administration of them falling into the hands of persons hostile to the spirit in which they had been provided'.<sup>33</sup> When he came to the case of Sidney, Fox criticised Hume for glossing over the king's responsibility for Sidney's prosecution and death. Hume, Fox said, showed 'a spirit of adulation towards deceased princes' which prevented him from fulfilling his moral responsibilities as a historian; as men in situations of unlimited authority need not fear the censure of their contemporaries, it was only 'the dread of posthumous infamy' which might restrain them from crime: but if historians like Hume

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* iv, 13 and 65; Add. MSS. 47578, fo. 64.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, determined to outbid Longman, actually offered 4,525 guineas; but as Longman declined to raise his bid from the 4,000-guinea level, Holland agreed to accept £4,500. On the publication of Fox's *History*, see Add. MSS. 47578, fos. 89-103 and 123-4, and T. F. Dibdin, *Bibliographical Decameron* (3 vols. London, 1817), III, 442.

<sup>31</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, xvi, 1313.

<sup>32</sup> *History*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 20-2 and 36.

apologized for 'their foulest murders' there would be no such deterrent.<sup>34</sup> Fox's conclusion concerning Charles II was that 'his desire of power was more unmixed with the love of glory than that of any man whom history has recorded'. He could find little to say in his favour, except that he was kind to his mistresses (from one of whom, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Fox was himself descended through his mother).<sup>35</sup> In the second chapter, Fox moved on to James II and analysed his aims and measures at the outset of his reign. He maintained that the new king's primary motive at this stage was 'the desire of rendering himself independent of Parliament, and absolute, not that of establishing Popery in England, which was considered as a more remote contingency'. Fox's purpose in insisting on this distinction was made quite clear; he was anxious to refute the view of historians such as Macpherson that it was James's unfortunate religious enthusiasm which cost him his throne. These Tory historians, said Fox,

have taken much pains to induce us to attribute the violences and illegalities of this reign to James's religion, which was peculiar to him, rather than to that desire of absolute power, which so many other princes have had, have, and always will have in common with him.

If this interpretation was accepted, the sole inference would be that no Catholic should be allowed to become king of England. But Fox maintained that James was committed to the system pursued by all the Stuart kings—and that the true lesson of his reign was that Englishmen should never

abate of that vigilant and unremitting jealousy of the power of the crown, which can alone secure to us the effect of those wise laws that have been provided for the benefit of the subject.<sup>36</sup>

The other main point which Fox aimed to establish—though it is only foreshadowed in the fragment he wrote—was that the Tories eventually turned against James II not through any attachment to political liberty, but simply because of the threat to the Church. Bolingbroke, in his *Dissertation upon Parties*, had argued that the Whigs and Tories had co-operated, at the time of the Revolution, on much the same principles:

The Revolution was a fire, which purged off the dross of both parties; and the dross being purged off, they appeared to be the same metal, and answered the same standard.<sup>37</sup>

The Revolution showed, according to Bolingbroke, that when oppression was carried to a certain stage the Tories regarded resistance as justifiable. But Fox

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. pp. 48–50. Cf. Voltaire: 'Le jugement de la postérité est le seul rempart qu'on ait contre la tyrannie heureuse'—*Essai sur les Mœurs*, ch. CLXVI; quoted by J. B. Black, *The Art of History* (London, 1926), p. 32 n.

<sup>35</sup> *History*, pp. 62–4.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. pp. 101–3.

<sup>37</sup> Bolingbroke, *Works* (5 vols. London, 1754), II, 102–3.