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1831 Reform Riots: Attitudes and Impacts surrounding Rioting and Reform in
Nottingham.

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Abstract

In 1831, despite gaining assent in the House of Commons, the House of Lords rejected the Reform Bill. This legislation would have addressed issues relating to parliamentary reform, including widening the franchise. News of the rejection sparked scenes of rioting in several towns including Nottingham. This dissertation seeks to understand why Nottingham was amongst those that rioted, how rioting was understood and what impact the riots had, on national, local, and individual levels. The introduction outlines the national and local contexts in the first half of the nineteenth century, before separate chapters address the attitudes and impacts of reform and rioting.

Current scholarship specifically on the reform riots in Nottingham are largely focused on qualitative, focusing on who the rioters were and the motives. This became a qualitative study, instead focusing on various sections of societies understandings. The riots have often been dismissed due to the lack of meaningful reform, and the lack a wider uprising as proof that England was not ripe for revolution. The study looks to reassess the impact of the riots and Reform Act as informing later movements. It also looks at the local significance alongside the impact on those who experienced them. Criticism has also been levelled at the authorities' response to the riots, and the study seeks to assess their capacity for control, but also their understandings of the situation.

The study concludes that the Nottingham reform riots would had little immediate impact but added to wider concerns to help pass the First Reform Act. They also found influence in later political movements with Nottingham Castle remaining a symbol of the potential of violent popular action. The importance of collective identity amongst workers is argued throughout, and the understanding of rioting as a legitimate tool for the disenfranchised in pursuit of a collective cause. The authorities are presented as constrained by limited resources and forced to prioritise municipal buildings in town, leading to the reluctance to prevent the destruction of Nottingham Castle

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Personal Statement

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution.

Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

Chapter 1: Introduction

By the morning of 11th of October 1831, Nottingham Castle, the ducal palace that occupied the site of the former military stronghold and royal residence, was a smouldering ruin. The previous night, inhabitants of the town below forced their way in and set the building ablaze. It was an act that would sear an imprint on the landscape and into the minds of the people. The flashpoint was the rejection of the Reform Bill by the House of Lords, leading to an outbreak of public disorder referred to as the Reform Riots. This dissertation seeks to use the Reform Riots in Nottingham to explore attitudes surrounding parliamentary reform and rioting in the nineteenth century, as well as the impact of the Reform Riots, on a national, local, and individual level. This study fits within the theme of crime, policing, and penal policy, touching on the ways in which rioting was both understood and managed. It also touches on the intangible aspects of urban history, with consideration of the urban experience in Nottingham.

Due to the limitations imposed by archive closures, primary sources were limited to those available online. The key sources are the various letters and ephemeral items belonging to Henry Pelham-Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne in the collections of the University of Nottingham.¹ These are from his family, associates and town officials all reporting the nature and experiences of the riots. These give personal accounts of those targeted in the riots and others involved in acting against them. These only allow understandings of those that were connected to Newcastle or involved with local authorities, keen to justify their actions. It is harder to reconstruct the voices of the rioters. The key sources giving voice to those outside of power are the national newspapers that carried reports of the special assizes, the trails of those accused of various acts of

¹ Nottingham, University of Nottingham (UoN), Ne C 4999-5052; ChM/Pr/2; EMSC o/s Not1.H64 ALB.

incendiarism. Whilst local reports are unfortunately inaccessible at present, these show the national interest in events. They cannot be taken as an accurate account of the rioters' attitudes however as they were facing capital punishment and so are not necessarily as candid about their actions, meaning other studies must be used to suggest more common attitudes towards rioting and reform.

In the secondary sources, John Beckett and Valentine Yarnspinner provide good quantitative studies, helpfully tabulating details of both perpetrators and victims.² Beckett focuses on their impact and contemporaneous understandings, whilst Yarnspinner shows the working-class nature of the crowds and their motivations.³ As both greatly detail those involved and the timelines of the riots, this dissertation became a qualitative study of the attitudes of those that experienced them and the impact the riots had. William White's directory of 1832 gives the first history of Nottingham to include the riots, acknowledging their impact in local history, and used for initial narratives of the events.⁴ Harold Carmichael Wylly's compiling of the military memoirs of, then Colonel, Joseph Thackwell, commander of the local garrison, the 15th Hussars, gives an insight into the attitudes of those involved in subduing the riot locally.⁵ This couples with Nathan Bend's national study of Home Office response, highlighting the fears of revolution.⁶ As shred identity is a common theme, the work of E.P. Thompson frames the reform movements in terms of class consciousness.⁷ The impact on later politics and reform movements is

² John Beckett, 'The Nottingham Reform Bill Riots of 1831', *Parliamentary History*, 24.1 (2005), p.124, p.132; Valentine Yarnspinner, *Nottingham Rising: The Great Cheese Riot of 1766 & the 1831 Reform Riots*, (Nottingham: Loaf on a Stick Press, 2014), pp.138-48.

³ Yarnspinner, pp.60-61; Beckett, pp.114-15.

⁴ William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Nottinghamshire, and the[...] town of Nottingham [...]*, 1832 (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1832) pp.109-17.

⁵ Harold Wylly, *The Military Memoirs of Lieut.-General Sir Joseph Thackwell [...]* (London: Murray, 1908), pp.94-104.

⁶ Nathan Bend, 'The Home Office and Public Disturbance, c.1800-1832' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2018).

⁷ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* ([n.p.]: Gollancz, 1963; repr. London: Penguin, 2013), pp.888-909.

informed by Dorothy Thompson's discusses the impact of reform agitation on the later Chartist movement.⁸

The study begins by briefly setting the local and national contexts, accompanied by an overview of the riots. Although many facets are forgone due to space constraints, it highlights the most pertinent events: the burning of Colwick Hall, the burning of Nottingham Castle and the destruction of William Lowe's silk mill in Beeston. These were the focus of the subsequent special assizes, and so became the focal point of this study. The study is then divided into two broad chapters. Chapter two considers the attitudes surrounding public disorder and parliamentary reform in a provincial setting at a time of widespread revolutionary concerns. This will cover those who both supported and opposed reform, and attitudes towards popular disorder as a political tool. The response by the authorities will also be discussed, focusing on their understanding of the situation and consider their ability to control events. Chapter three moves the study onto the impact of the reform riots. It discusses the riots influence in passing the Reform Bill, and the impact of the subsequent Act itself. This is followed by arguments on the political impacts of the reform riots and Act, particularly on later movements such as Chartism. The authorities are once again considered when looking at the riots influence on changing systems of controlling public disorder. After considering impacts for individuals in both human and economic costs, the study concludes with a look at the lasting impacts, and the legacy of Nottingham Castle today.

Historic context

The post-Napoleonic peace saw England's focus turn to domestic concerns. Bohstedt highlights that amongst economic slumps there were several political crises had already afflicted the nation.⁹ Each show the widespread unrest in the first decades of the nineteenth

⁸ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* ([n.p.]: Temple Smith, 1984; repr. London: Breviary Stuff, 2013).

⁹ John Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, C. 1550-1850* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.213.

century. In Nottingham, two events strongly suggest support for violent bargaining. The first was the period of frame destruction by Luddites around 1811-1816. Although differing motives and county based, their impact and influence were felt in the town. Archer views these as part of the 'insurrectionary tradition in provincial England'.¹⁰ Richard Gaunt agrees that Nottingham came to be considered a 'potentially 'revolutionary' town'.¹¹ Archer sees Luddism as driven by issues such as poor harvests, high food prices, insecure employment, and low wages and similar patterns were experienced in the years prior to 1831.¹² Serious social unrest had occurred once and seemed certain to happen again. The second is the Pentrich revolt: the last armed insurrection in England.¹³ Connected to reform but driven by economic pressures and with the ultimate goal of overthrowing the establishment and establishing a new republic, much of the organisation took place in Nottingham, and it was to here that the rebels were marching when intercepted by the 15th Hussars in 1817.¹⁴ Archer points to the work of E.P. Thompson in suggesting that these events took place in a 'pre-existing revolutionary conspiracy' and that the latter was 'historically significant because it was the first example of working-class insurrection'.¹⁵ Wider events also factor into the context. The French Revolution remained a bogeyman for the European aristocracy, and 1830 saw revolutions across Europe including the July Revolution in France which ousted Charles X. Whilst too complex to detail all the nuances and intricacies here, the riots should be placed against a background of continental revolution and domestic unrest, with recent acts of serious public disorder in Nottinghamshire.

¹⁰ John E. Archer, *Social unrest and popular protest in England, 1780-1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.66.

¹¹ Richard A. Gaunt (a) 'The Fourth Duke of Newcastle, the 'Mob' and Election Contests in Nottinghamshire, 1818-1832', *Midland History*, 33.2 (2008), p.197.

¹² Archer, p.49

¹³ Richard A. Gaunt (b) 'The Pentrich Rebellion – A Nottingham Affair?', *Midland History*, 43.2 (2018), p.212.

¹⁴ Gaunt (b), pp.208-11.

¹⁵ Archer, p.67.

In the local context, Yarnspinner paints a quite depressing picture of life for many in Nottingham, succinctly summarising: ‘In a nutshell, economical despair, politics and religion fuelled social tensions in Nottingham and riots occurred regularly, averaging one a year at the turn of the century’.¹⁶ Nottingham has been well known for its production of lace, but from the late 1820s until the eve of the reform riots the cycle of boom and bust in the industry was repeated several times, created by stagnant demand, fluctuating prices, changing fashions and the increasing numbers of stocking frames.¹⁷ Though lacking the dominating factories as other urban centres, Nottingham was still an industrial town and the proliferation of domestic frames led to a life of ‘grinding, stupefying toil’ where misery ‘ran like a dirty thread through Nottingham’s industrial life’.¹⁸ Compounding matters, the 1820s saw considerable population increase across the country; in Nottingham the population almost doubled in just a few decades, from under 30,000 in 1801 to 50,000 in 1831.¹⁹ This occurred within an area that was still within medieval boundaries, leading to Nottingham having a higher population density than anywhere else in the British Isles, even London, and some of the worst slums in the British Empire.²⁰ Cramped conditions and repeated periods of impoverishment led people to seek change in a variety of forms, and parliamentary reform was seen as part of the remedy to many ills, rightly or wrongly. These conditions meant Nottingham became very receptive of reform. Yarnspinner sees Nottingham having a ‘long history of social struggles’, a town that was ‘always at or near the front of’ reform movements with a ‘tradition of political and religious dissent’.²¹ Beckett agrees that Nottingham had a ‘long tradition of political radicalism’ and views crowds as having a significant role in Nottingham’s urban life during the nineteenth century, with ‘the five-and-a-half-acre marketplace acting as an extended arena able to

¹⁶ Yarnspinner, p.68.

¹⁷ Yarnspinner, p.70.

¹⁸ Yarnspinner, p.71.

¹⁹ Yarnspinner, p.66.

²⁰ Yarnspinner, p.66; Roy Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham 1815-1900* (London: Routledge, 1966), p.163.

²¹ Yarnspinner, pp.60-64.

accommodate as many as 20,000 people without undue squeeze'.²² As will be discussed throughout, this all set the scene for Nottingham being a radical town prone to bouts of popular disorder.

The Riots

On Saturday 8th October 1831, news that the Reform Bill had been rejected reached Nottingham.²³ On the Sunday morning, the crowd mistakenly believed that London reformers had taken up arms.²⁴ Despite the excitement in town, Nottingham for the moment seemed peaceful and the military were stood down, with the 15th Hussars instead occupied by riots that had broken out in Derby.²⁵ Sunday evening saw crowds and tensions grow. Names of those who allegedly signed an anti-reform petition had been published in the *Nottingham Review* in September.²⁶ These became the principal targets of the riots, with stones and other missiles injuring both property and person. Influential speakers were given a platform in attempts to calm the crowd, but the Mayor was soon forced to read the riot act, and no sooner had he finished than he was struck by a stone.²⁷ The 15th Hussars arrived to disperse those gathered.²⁸

Despite the disturbances, the meeting the town officials had called for the Monday went ahead, attended by as many as 15,000.²⁹ Beckett describes this meeting as 'typical of its genre, organized by the authorities, addressed by prominent local pro-reformers, and ending peacefully'.³⁰ By early afternoon, the crowd had dispersed and the town clerk was confident enough in the peace holding to stand down the military.³¹ Within a couple of hours, the situation had changed. The 'hunt' resumed for anti-reformers around the town,

²² Beckett, pp.115-20.

²³ Yarnspinner, p.83.

²⁴ Yarnspinner, p.84.

²⁵ Beckett, p.119; Wylly, p.95.

²⁶ Beckett, p.118; Yarnspinner, p.87.

²⁷ Beckett, p.118; Yarnspinner, p.87.

²⁸ Wylly, p.96

²⁹ Yarnspinner, p.89; Beckett, p.120.

³⁰ Beckett, p.121.

³¹ Wylly, p.96.

before the crowd, once again harried by the arriving military, left the town for the first substantial target: Colwick Hall, home of John Musters.³² John Musters was a magistrate ‘well known for his strict enforcement of the Game Laws’, targeted for his reputation as ‘an arch Tory who waged a vendetta equally against radicals and poachers’ and was a ‘well-known opponent’ of the Reform Bill.³³ Musters was not home, but his family were present and forced to abandon the house. Colwick Hall was broken into, ransacked and fires started, though they failed in destroying the house.³⁴

As the crowd returned to Nottingham, extinguishing lights and breaking more windows, they divided, making simultaneous attacks on the House of Correction and Nottingham Castle.³⁵ Thackwell received requests for reinforcements at the county gaol and finding this and other municipal buildings in immediate danger he felt compelled to defend these sites, leaving the Castle relatively undefended.³⁶ Nottingham Castle was now the site of the seldom used ducal mansion belonging to the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire, peer in the House of Lords and staunch anti-reformer. He was a prime target for the rioters’ anger, as will be discussed later. The crowd scaled the remnants of the medieval outer walls and eventually broke through the stubborn gatehouse. Once inside, the crowd began to plunder, destroy, and burn furnishings, this time being successful in setting the whole building alight.³⁷ It burned through the night, the sight drew in many spectators and inspired local artists, such as in Figure 1. William Howitt’s notes published over fifty years later in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* give a stylized account of the spectacle: ‘the whole place filled with a deep fiery glow’, ‘glittering sparks and smoke as from a volcano’ heaved into the wet night, beams ‘fell with a loud thunder’, and the roof

³² Becket, p.121.

³³ Yarnspinner, p.92.

³⁴ Beckett, p.122.

³⁵ Wylly, p.97.

³⁶ Wylly, p.97.

³⁷ Yarnspinner, pp.93-94.

gave way in ‘torrents of melted lead’.³⁸ The whole scene is portrayed as ‘magnificent’ despite the ‘demonic’ nature and hellish scene.³⁹

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 1- Nottingham Castle on Fire, 10 October 1831, Henry Dawson (1811-1878), n.d., Oil on Canvas, 52x72.5cm, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, NCM 1878-196

By Tuesday morning, the Castle was nothing but a blackened skeleton. Groups again gathered in the grounds but were driven out by a small force of constables and soldiers.⁴⁰ Gatherings continued around the town and Thackwell and the Hussars were called back in, confronting a large crowd on the Derby road, but without a magistrate present Thackwell found the crowd more resistant.⁴¹ The afternoon was spent dispersing numerous groups in Nottingham, whilst the Derby road crowd had moved out to nearby Beeston. The target here was a silk mill owned by William Lowe; his warehouses in Nottingham having already been attacked on the Sunday evening.⁴² Not listed on the anti-reform petition, the reason instead, Beckett believes, was that he was a known Tory, and ‘being a local Tory was enough to render a man vulnerable’.⁴³ This demonstrates the wider political divide

³⁸ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, October 12, 1889.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Yarnspinner*, p.96.

⁴¹ *Wylly*, p.99; *Yarnspinner*, p.96.

⁴² *Beckett*, p.127.

⁴³ *Beckett*, p.122.

between a handful of influential Tory supporters and the Whiggish nature of the town. The rioters, operating with ‘military precision’, systematically looted goods, destroyed machinery, and burned the mill down.⁴⁴

This act immediately precipitated the last major action before the authorities were able to assert their control. Beckett puts it:

‘the crowd made next for Wollaton Hall, the home of Lord Middleton where, for the first time, they encountered resistance. Defence of areas in the county fell to the volunteer South Nottinghamshire Hussar Yeomanry ... like the regular troops, could not act without the authority of a magistrate ... [Middleton] had equipped them with several pieces of cannon...and when the crowd battered down the gate, the yeomanry attacked. The gate was forcibly closed, and 16 or 17 arrests were made’.⁴⁵

Returning to Nottingham, the remainder of the crowds were met with by better prepared forces and turned away. Small groups rallied but were similarly repulsed as it became ‘clear that the authorities had re-established control’.⁴⁶ Only minor incidents were further reported, and although Hussar patrols continued for the next few days and an Officers picket remained in town until the 20th, by Wednesday the riot was considered over and business resumed.⁴⁷ Special assizes were arranged for the following January, in which twenty-three principal cases connected to the riots were heard.⁴⁸ A total of six accused were sentenced to transportation, and three were hanged.

⁴⁴ Yarnspinner, p.97.

⁴⁵ Beckett, pp.128-129.

⁴⁶ Beckett, p.129.

⁴⁷ Wylly, p.101; Yarnspinner, p.99.

⁴⁸ Yarnspinner, p.104; ‘Appendix II’, pp.143-146.

Chapter 2: Attitudes

The focus of this chapter is on the way rioting and reform was understood by different sections of nineteenth century society. Although well covered in historiography, there is still room for expanding understandings in specific local contexts. Supporters and opponents of reform are discussed in turn, exploring conflicting attitudes that led to violence. Related to Nottingham's history of popular politics, identity amongst the rioters is discussed, as are understandings of rioting as a part of the urban experience and collective action. The attitudes of the Duke of Newcastle help establish the attitudes of opposition. There is focus on parliamentary opposition, derived predominantly from fear of a general revolution, but also of the local opposition. As they came under criticism, attitudes of the authorities are also discussed, giving insight into the old systems of controlling public disorder, discussing the experiences of both officials and those on the 'front line'. It is argued that rioting was seen as a legitimate tool of the disenfranchised as part of collective action and was particularly effective in conjunction with the fear of revolution. The argument on authorities suggests that there was little more they could do with the resources available and within the confines of the existing system of crowd control.

Rioters and Reformers

Before discussing the attitudes of those involved in the rioting, it needs to be established who the rioters were. Initial accounts blamed youthful ruffians from out of town coming in for the Goose Fair and races, but studies prove this to be untrue.¹ Beckett has collated biographical information on those that were brought before the special assizes for their part in the rioting, finding them to have an average age of twenty-six, mostly living and

¹ William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Nottinghamshire, and the[...] town of Nottingham [...]*, 1832 (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1832), p.114; John Beckett, 'The Nottingham Reform Bill Riots of 1831', *Parliamentary History*, 24.1 (2005), p.134.

working in town with a ‘clean bill of social health’.² Similarly, Stevenson found that in Bristol rather than the ‘criminals and paupers’ accused, almost all the arrested rioters were free of convictions.³ Expanding on this, Yarnspinner found that the majority of the rioters were from the working-classes, including framework knitters - a typical occupation in Nottingham during the early nineteenth century.⁴ John Armstrong, hanged for his part in the destruction of Lowe’s mill, alongside a number of witnesses are identified as framework knitters.⁵ The framework knitters were influential in Nottingham radical activities. Prior to the reform riots, they were active in the county during the luddite disturbances, and involved in rioting as early as 1790 when a three day riot over prices occurred, with an ‘almost routine’ attack on those viewed as acting against the workers’ interests, in which the military had to restore order.⁶ Riots with similar components occurred in 1799, when a bill to regulate framework knitting was rejected, and in 1783 over wages.⁷ In both, windows were broken, businesses targeted, and the homes of leading opponents attacked, but whilst the former ended successfully ‘from the workmen’s point’, the latter was brought to peace by a ‘full regiment’.⁸ After the Reform Act, framework knitters were highly influential in Nottingham Chartism, with further rioting in 1842.⁹ Why this section of society had a such a degree of influence is worth further discussion, but this study will have to be satisfied with Roy Church’s conclusion that the framework knitters shaped ‘the character of local working-class movements’.¹⁰ In this framing, the reform riots are not a unique moment but an episode in Nottingham’s history of collective bargaining through disorder.

² Beckett, p.134

³ John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1832* (London: Longman, 1979; repr. 1992), p.292

⁴ Valentine Yarnspinner, *Nottingham Rising: [...] the 1831 Reform Riots*, (Nottingham: Loaf on a Stick Press, 2014), p.135; Roy Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham 1815-1900* (London: Routledge, 1966), pp.10-15.

⁵ UoN, EMSC o/s Not 1.H64 ALB; *The Times*, January 09, 1832.

⁶ Yarnspinner, p.166; Stevenson, p.152.

⁷ Yarnspinner, p.166; Stevenson, p.152.

⁸ Stevenson, pp.151-152.

⁹ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* ([n.p.]: Temple Smith, 1984; repr. London: Breviary Stuff, 2013), p.154; Church, p.128; *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, August 26, 1842.

¹⁰ Church, p.14.

There existed a tolerance of violence in support of a collective cause. Christopher Williams's study of disorder argues that collective action can be legitimate when the 'under-privileged' sought to address the societal imbalances.¹¹ Yarnspinner views the actions of the crowds, such as extinguishing gas lamps prior to the assault on the Castle, demonstrating their the 'practical experience in direct action', and Beckett finds 'careful planning' in the 'orderly' destruction of Lowe's mill.¹² It is apparent that disorder was a common and legitimate resort for the disempowered, and radicals sought to capitalise on this, recognising the need for 'impressive displays of support' and fear of violence.¹³ Lang writes that radicals whipped up, claiming 'reform would pave the way to further change, in living conditions, in food prices, in social justice', and the heightened public level of expectation helps explain the serious rioting that broke out in Nottingham.¹⁴

Yarnspinner believes many in Nottingham indulged hopes that parliamentary reform might result in 'an alleviation of suffering' and a 'change of fortune' after recent economic slumps.¹⁵ Nottingham's support of reform was expressed in the return of two reform candidates in the May election and the near 13,000 signatories in petitioning for the Reform Bill.¹⁶ Nottingham was recognised by contemporaries for its radical tendencies, being 'well known for radicalism since the 1790s'.¹⁷ William Cobbett, radical pamphleteer and post-reform MP, wrote in his *Political Register* to the people of Nottingham, declaring that 'amongst those towns [of] England which have [shown] the best spirit, for many years past, as to political matters, Nottingham stands at least as forward as any'.¹⁸ It has been said that Cobbett's works were 'read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts' including Nottingham; 'their influence was speedily visible', instructing readers

¹¹ Christopher Williams '1842: The Dynamics Of Urban Disorder, Using a Model of Disorder to Examine Leicester in 1842' (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Leicester, 1992), p.39.

¹² Yarnspinner, p.93; Beckett, p.127.

¹³ Stevenson, pp.288-289.

¹⁴ Sean Lang, *Parliamentary Reform 1785-1928* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.29.

¹⁵ Yarnspinner, p.77.

¹⁶ Yarnspinner, p.81.

¹⁷ Beckett, p.207.

¹⁸ 'To the people of Nottingham', *Cobbett's weekly register*, Jan. 7, May 6, 1815

on ‘the true cause of their sufferings— misgovernment; and to its proper corrective— parliamentary reform’.¹⁹ Historians including Thompson have established the widely known and well established ‘tradition of popular politics’ in Nottingham, and reform gave cause for collective action.²⁰

Collective action derived from a sense of shared identity amongst those that felt rejected, predominantly amongst the working classes.²¹ E. P. Thompson in his work on the development of class-consciousness, and the emergence of a working class in the 1830s, argues that there was recognition of shared interests amongst workers, but also of the ‘productive classes’ against the other classes.²² Yarnspinner highlights this divide in Nottingham, illustrated by the Duke of Newcastle’s words in January 1831 that ‘the people in this county generally are in full work and at good wages ... at Nottingham the trade has never been better’ despite that by 1830 ‘an estimated half of the town’s inhabitants were in receipt of poor relief’.²³ Invariably, peoples’ attitudes are influenced by their experiences and this shows that some were polar opposite, either unable to understand or totally ignorant of the other side’s views. These deep divisions mixed with a lack of political franchise and a history of violent collective action and created a sense of justification in rioting amongst many of the town’s workers.

¹⁹ Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1844), p.7.

²⁰ Thompson, p.186; Yarnspinner, p.64; Beckett, p.115.

²¹ Andrew J. Pierce, *Collective Identity, Oppression, and the Right to Self-Ascription* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), p.87.

²² E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* ([n.p.]: Gollancz, 1963; repr. London: Penguin, 2013), pp.887-88.

²³ Yarnspinner, p.72.

A sense of community amongst the crowds is clear from the witness testimonies of the special assizes.²⁴ Samuel Binks, a stockinger from Basford caught in the crowd when visiting his sisters, knew of one accused since he was ‘a little un’, while John Freeman, a shoemaker from Sneinton, knew two of the accused and ‘several other persons’ amongst the rioters.²⁵ Charles Berkins, reprieved for his part in the destruction of Colwick Hall, visited a number of people during the disturbances and was amongst the many couples and groups that visited the Castle ruins the next morning.²⁶ In all, 250 witnesses were put forward, demonstrating the wide involvement.²⁷ There is a clear familiarity amongst the crowds, marking the event as a social one, which included women and children, as in Figure 2. Gaunt has found similar familiarity in the Pentrich revolt.²⁸

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Figure 2 -Drawing of Nottingham Castle on fire, 1831, by Thomas Allom, engraved by R. Sands. East Midlands Special Collection Not 1.D14 ALB os (6001692403)

²⁴ Rodney Harrison ‘Heritage as social action’, in *Understanding Heritage in practices*, ed. by Susie West (Milton Keynes: Open University, 2010), p.246.

²⁵ *The Times*, 13 Jan 1832

²⁶ *The Times*, 13 Jan 1832

²⁷ *The Times*, 07 Jan 1832

²⁸ Richard Gaunt (b), ‘The Pentrich Rebellion – A Nottingham Affair?’, *Midland History*, 43.2 (2018), p.209

At times there seems to have been a party like atmosphere: a buoyant crowd ‘drunk with success’ took to ‘dancing’ through the burning Castle.²⁹ Some revelled in the riots. Figure 2 shows a scene of dancing and merriment, and William Turton, a worker at Lowe’s silk-mill, recalls the crowd ‘huzzaing and firing off pistols’.³⁰

Similar sympathies are found in the response to the executions. A petition to the King asking for pardon attracted 25,000 signatures.³¹ This evidences the general support in town when the population of Nottingham was around 50,000.³² When two of the condemned were reprieved, there was a ‘general feeling of delight throughout the town’.³³ Support was shown on the day of the execution with the street of the courthouse ‘crowded with the friends and relatives’ alongside ‘2,000 or 10,000 people’.³⁴ Despite the wide range, this shows the significant support even up to the point of execution, with many remaining until the bodies had been removed.³⁵ The sense of legitimacy for rioting is paralleled in the sense of injustice at the executions. The donning of the hoods induced cries of ‘murder!’ and ‘blood!’.³⁶ Not everyone blamed the rioters’ for their actions. Henry Hunt, a leading radical, expressed his belief that the press were instead responsible for inciting people to riot, and asks why those moved to riot had suffered the gallows whilst those who encouraged them ‘escape[d] with impunity’.³⁷ Nathan Broadhurst, another radical, felt ‘society would benefit more considerably if the judges were hung instead of the criminals’.³⁸ Ideas of community, shared identity, and legitimate collective action meant many had sympathies for the rioters, and felt executions unjust.

²⁹ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, October 12, 1889

³⁰ *The Times*, 09 Jan 1832

³¹ *The Times*, February 02, 1832

³² *Yarnspinner*, p.66

³³ *The Times*, February 02, 1832

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Stevenson, p.284; *Hansard*, 3rd series, volume 9, 31 January 1832, cols. 1027-1091; *The Times*, February 01, 1831.

³⁸ *The Times*, January 25, 1832.

Not all supporters of reform supported the riots. Thomas Bailey, then a failed candidate but a speaker at the Monday meeting, decried that his fellow townsmen would ‘ruin the best cause in the world, by the adoption of the worst possible means for its alleged support’.³⁹ Bailey exhorted them to not attack ‘person or property of any individual, however opposed to this grand scheme of our social amelioration’.⁴⁰ Though supportive of reform, he could not condone the riots. The riots were not universally supported amongst workers either. George Turton, brother of William and overseer at the mill, claims that employees of the mill made an unsuccessful plea to not disrupt the livelihood of the near two hundred workers.⁴¹ These must have felt some resentment towards the rioters as economic distress was about to befall them. Bystanders were similarly fearful of the riots: Mary Margerison and her daughter Mary Ann were ‘anxious’ to get ‘work done by day-light’ as they were ‘afraid of the riots’.⁴² Several servants faced threats and personal injuries. A servant for the Doctor Alexander Manson was injured when his employer was targeted by the crowd’s missiles.⁴³ James Lowesby, a groom at Colwick Hall, rode for assistance but found himself surrounded.⁴⁴ Following a brief remonstrance and being dragged from his horse, it was only the intervention of cooler heads in the crowd that persuaded the others to leave him be.⁴⁵ Elizabeth Lind, housemaid at Colwick Hall, similarly recalled the fear of when the mob broke in.⁴⁶ Trapped upstairs, she was informed that neither she would nor the other servants would be harmed.⁴⁷ Similarly, the servant that resided in the gate-lodge at Nottingham Castle was promised safety in return for opening the gates.⁴⁸ Even though he declined, there is no evidence to suggest he suffered as a consequence. Despite the tensions and intended destruction, working-class consciousness extended a sense of

³⁹ White, p.114.

⁴⁰ White, p.114.

⁴¹ *The Times*, January 09, 1832.

⁴² *Times*, 14 Jan 1832.

⁴³ UoN, Ne C 4998.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, January 13, 1832.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *The Times*, January 14, 1832.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Times*, 16 Jan 1832; *Yarnspinner*, p.93.

collective identity to those who were understood to be simply earning a living for the landed classes.⁴⁹

Similar attitudes of class cohesiveness and the division between the disenfranchised are found nationally. The Home Office were wary of the connection between manufacturing towns, such as Nottingham and Manchester, and instructed the magistrates to warn one another of any dangers, fearing an attempted rising in one could easily trigger similar activity in the other.⁵⁰ Soon after, a meeting of operative manufacturers in Manchester addressed the events of Bristol and Nottingham, calling to petition for pardons.⁵¹ However, the target also drew ridicule. William Ashmore, a speaker at the meeting was dismissive and ‘laughed at the idea of Nottingham Castle...being made so much about and compared it to an old rotten building opposite to him’.⁵² In suggesting the burning of Nottingham Castle should not be a capital crime, it suggests it was not viewed as symbolically as it was locally, feeding into Lang’s argument that local factors were key drivers of the riots. Although clearly of some national interest, being carried in national papers, there are few immediate mentions of the riots outside of the reporting. This is perhaps due to a lack of accessible evidence, as the impact of the burning of Nottingham Castle would filter into national debates, as is discussed in the next chapter.

Opposition

Elite attitudes towards reform generally fell into two main camps: those that saw reform as necessary to prevent revolution, and those that were entrenched in maintaining the status quo for fear of further demands. Whatever the reality, the fear in Westminster of revolution was real. Ian Marsh argues that the fears of the French Revolution had permeated British society and that by the 1790s an ‘age of unreason’ seemed to threaten: ‘the excesses and

⁴⁹ Thompson, E.P, pp.888-90.

⁵⁰ Nathan Bend, ‘The Home Office and Public Disturbance, c.1800-1832’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2018), p.199.

⁵¹ *The Times*, January 25, 1832.

⁵² *Ibid.*

upheavals of the French Revolution appeared ready to cross the Channel'.⁵³ Sir Robert Peel remarked in 1836 that he was surprised that England had not experienced a revolution such as the French.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that England was not an isolated island, but the focus of a sprawling, global empire, affected by international events.⁵⁵ More contemporary events on the continent further fuelled fears of an uprising, with Stevenson arguing that by November 1830 the country had an 'atmosphere already excited by the July Revolution'.⁵⁶ Whilst supporters were keen to use this fear to pass the bill, conservatives 'were able to use the threat to public order supposedly posed by the 'lower orders' against radicals who stood accused of deliberately using fear of revolt to drive the aristocracy into making concessions to them'.⁵⁷ Little can be more symbolic of insurrection than the burning of Nottingham Castle, property of a Duke and sitting Lord, and former seat of royal power. This left the radicals open to accusations of being a threat to the national peace. Although there are many personal factors that would influence opposition, it is easy to understand how the news of violence and threats to established powers from across the Channel would have spread fear, especially amongst the elites.

It is harder to know how other sections of society reacted to these events, but a sum of five thousand francs was raised by subscription in Nottingham and sent to Paris with a 'congratulatory address', suggesting sympathetic attitudes.⁵⁸ Although there is no indication of who raised this, it does raise the possibility that the people of Nottingham appeared open to similar actions. It is harder to conclude that Nottingham would have been supportive of a general revolution, but some in the crowd alluded to this with cries of 'The Bill and no Lords!', 'It's a revolution!' and referring to themselves as 'rebels'.⁵⁹ It is hard

⁵³ Marsh, Ian, et al., *Crime and Criminal Justice*, (London: Routledge, 2011), p.296; Yarnspinner, p.79.

⁵⁴ Richard Gaunt (a), 'The Fourth Duke of Newcastle, the 'Mob' and Election Contests in Nottinghamshire, 1818–1832', *Midland History*, 33.2 (2008), p.197.

⁵⁵ Prasun Sonwalkar, 'Indian Journalism in the Colonial Crucible', *Journalism Studies*, 16.5 (2015), p.628.

⁵⁶ Stevenson, p.289.

⁵⁷ Williams, p.39.

⁵⁸ White, p.109.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, January 09, 1832.

to know how far these sentiments were genuinely believed, but with deadly riots already underway in neighbouring Derby, and the refusal to believe that London was peaceable, wider agitation was anticipated.⁶⁰ Events such as the Pentrich revolt suggest that support for revolution could have been expected in Nottingham, but during the reform riots the crowds were not protesting the whole of the establishment. *Yarnspinner* portrays the Monday meeting as ‘a patriotic, not a revolutionary event’.⁶¹ Patriotic cheering was reported at various points, such as the arrival of the 15th Hussars.⁶² Frustration was directed at the House of Lords, not the King. Petitions engaging with the state further suggest Nottingham wanted reform and not revolution. As debatable as revolutionary support is, it certainly shows that the town was aware of, and more importantly affected by, events in Europe.

Opposition also derived from the apprehension that any acquiescence would result in further demands.⁶³ The French revolution, and the ‘reign of terror’ that followed, inculcated attitudes amongst the political elite that any constitutional change would breed further violence.⁶⁴ This, in part, drove the Duke of Newcastle, a ‘staunch defender’ of the House of Lords, to be an ‘outspoken critic of social change and vehemently opposed to parliamentary reform’.⁶⁵ Newcastle’s power was already being challenged in the area. The May election saw defeat for the Duke’s electoral interests in Newark, a defeat that Gaunt views ‘as symbolic, in its own way, as the burning of Nottingham Castle’ and ‘almost as revolutionary’.⁶⁶ His lands in Nottinghamshire gave him great political leverage in the area, but not necessarily popularity; previous evictions of opposition supporters had furthered ‘popular hostility against him’.⁶⁷ Gaunt sees Newcastle as ‘always likely’ to be the victim

⁶⁰ *Yarnspinner*, p.99; White, p.112.

⁶¹ *Yarnspinner*, p.90.

⁶² *Freeman’s Journal*, October 15, 1831.

⁶³ Pearce, p.98, in *Yarnspinner*, p.80.

⁶⁴ Gaunt (a), p.196.

⁶⁵ Gaunt (a), p.198.

⁶⁶ Gaunt (a), pp.208-212.

⁶⁷ Gaunt (a), p.208.

of ‘political assault’, a ‘ready and extreme focus for opposition’ due to his political interests.⁶⁸ Malcolm Thomis sees his reactionary views as so extreme that Nottingham Whigs appeared ‘popular egalitarians’ in comparison.⁶⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that he became a target of the crowds. As recently as the January, Newcastle had been physically assaulted on a visit to Newark.⁷⁰ Newcastle himself took pride in saying that he caused a riot wherever he went, although even he recognised his appearance in Nottingham would do ‘more harm than good’ during the reform riots.⁷¹ The riots ‘only served to reinforce Newcastle’s prejudices against the Bill’.⁷² Yarnspinner concludes that Newcastle was not an opponent, but an enemy of the Whig’s Reform Bill.⁷³

Newcastle was clearly at extreme odds with much of the town and was both fearful and angry at the ‘outrages’ committed by the ‘mob...impelled by the worst spirit’.⁷⁴ To Newcastle, the whole country was in a ‘horrid & fearful state’.⁷⁵ His feelings were shared by others in Westminster. Sir Charles Wetherell, who would go on to be the key antagonist in the Bristol riots, was quick to denounce the ‘scandalous and social outrages’, insisting on greater suppression.⁷⁶ The immediate fear of spreading violence is evidenced locally. George Flower, of the Mansfield Poor Law Union, writes ‘in haste’ to John Parkinson at Clumber House, another of Newcastle’s properties in Nottinghamshire, to warn him to ‘prepare’ for the crowd coming to both.⁷⁷ Out at Bingham, about twelve miles from Nottingham, there was ‘much uneasiness...in the minds of the principal inhabitants’.⁷⁸ The local gentry hastened to hide valuables, make arrangements for their families and conscript

⁶⁸ Gaunt (a), p.197.

⁶⁹ Yarnspinner, p.80.

⁷⁰ Gaunt (a), p.210.

⁷¹ Yarnspinner, p.80; Harold Wylly, *The Military Memoirs of Lieut.-General Sir Joseph Thackwell [...]* (London: Murray, 1908), p. 95.

⁷² Gaunt (a), p.200.

⁷³ Yarnspinner, p.81.

⁷⁴ UoN, Ne 2 F 4/1, p. 69.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Mark O’Neil and Ged Martin, ‘A Backbencher on Parliamentary Reform, 1831-1832’, *The Historical Journal*, 23.3 (1980), p.554.

⁷⁷ UoN, Ne C 5001.

⁷⁸ UoN, Ne C 5015.

men for the protection of property.⁷⁹ The possibility of rioting spreading caused alarm in towns within marching distance of Nottingham, echoing concerns at Westminster.

Newcastle received news from Nottingham reinforcing these fears. Thomas Winter, agent to the Duke, was threatened and felt compelled to leave his home.⁸⁰ Sam Parsons, a resident of one of the Duke's properties in The Park, an area next to the Castle, wrote that he armed himself ready to protect his house from the 'Revolutionizing Mob'.⁸¹

Many in the area prepared for serious violence. Those at Clumber House formed a garrison of 200 men, including farmers from the estate and members of the Yeomanry, and furnished themselves with an arsenal of 24 cannon and 150 muskets.⁸² Widespread arming shows that many were prepared to use deadly force. Godfrey Mundy, whose property was also targeted in Derby, wrote to Newcastle advising on the situation and in engaging crowds in a militaristic manner, noting to keep swords 'well sharpened'.⁸³ Spreading violence was generally anticipated in the region, and fear drove many to arm and prepare to defend their property with deadly force. This would have been reinforced by the knowledge that personal injury could be incurred. William Musters, son of John Musters, in beseeching the crowds to disperse at Colwick Hall was pelted and suffered a 'severe blow' to his arm.⁸⁴ His account details the fear as the crowds forced their way into the house, with Mary Ann Musters, wife of John, and family forced to hide in the grounds for most of the night.⁸⁵ Doctor Manson, alleged to have signed a petition against reform, found himself a target and fearful for his life after seeing his servant injured.⁸⁶ There was a genuine fear that both property and life were at serious risk.

⁷⁹ UoN, Ne C 5010.

⁸⁰ UoN, Ne C 4999.

⁸¹ UoN, Ne C 5016.

⁸² UoN, Ne C 5010.

⁸³ UoN, Ne C 5003.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, January 13, 1832.

⁸⁵ UoN, Ne C 5003.

⁸⁶ UoN, Ne C 4998.

These threats were not just against those connected to the Duke. It has already been discussed how workers were caught up with target of the riots. Merchants, many of whom had arrived for the fair, were forced to pack up and leave.⁸⁷ Public houses were emptied by crowds demanding food and drink without payment.⁸⁸ Residents at private houses were also intimidated for the like, as well as goods and money.⁸⁹ These were mostly all politically motivated.⁹⁰ In any case, soon ‘every house in town [was] closed, and all business [was] at a stand-still’, with some being forcibly shut by constables.⁹¹ Business owners were wary, if not fearful, of exciting the crowd.

However, as much as this would have impacted individuals and businesses, rioting was nothing new. As well as other riots discussed previously, similar patterns emerge in earlier food riots, with targeted attacks on those held responsible for various outrages and the difficulties faced by the authorities.⁹² Although individuals would have experienced each riot differently, riots more broadly were not unusual, nor was damage to businesses. It cannot be said that this led to the acceptance of rioting but does suggest that even those harassed by rioters may have understood it as part of urban life. A travel writer later advocated:

‘Some allowance...ought to be made for men who, in the prime of their physical powers, are confined all day in steamy factories, or in their own hot and stifling garrets; and we can but connect the riot ... with the natural reaction which ensues in their escape from enervating toils to the full freedom of life and limb in the fresh, free air’.⁹³

It would have been useful to have access to more sources regarding more business owners’ attitudes, as their testimonies in the assizes focused on identifying offenders rather than

⁸⁷ White, p.110.

⁸⁸ White, p.113.

⁸⁹ White, p.113.

⁹⁰ Yarnspinner, p.127; Beckett, p.135.

⁹¹ *The Times*, October 12, 1831; Jan 13, 1832; White, p.96..

⁹² White, p.96.

⁹³ Macauley, James (ed.), ‘A Peep at Nottingham’, *The Leisure hour: a family journal of instruction and recreation*, 770 (1866), p.618.

giving an insight into their personal views. However, it can be determined that, despite the outrages, even amongst the targeted, the rioters were not wholly condemned.

Authorities

The authorities had two key beliefs that facilitated the Castle's destruction. First, that the safety of the town came above that of private property, and second that their initial forces were inadequate to completely dispel the rioters. The authorities appear to have believed that the crowd were using deliberate tactics, using multiple approaches and diversionary attacks to move about town, ultimately facilitating the attack on the Castle.⁹⁴ Throughout, they found that as one group was dispersed, another would gather elsewhere.⁹⁵ On returning to the town from Colwick, the crowd 'separated into divisions, moving in different direction, so that the magistrates could not discover where the next attack would be made'.⁹⁶ Too large or dispersed to quell in a single engagement, the authorities responded with pragmatism in prioritising possible targets. Thackwell, having received requests for reinforcements at the county gaol and already sending all available resources to repel an attack here, found it more prudent to remain and defend these functional buildings as it became clear that there was an attack on the empty palace of Newcastle.⁹⁷ Thackwell states that by the time his troops had finished defending the gaols and gasworks, the Castle was already aflame.⁹⁸ The authorities were eventually able to venture into the castle yard, but, finding no hope of controlling the fire or apprehending those that had committed the incendiarism, they took no action against the crowd.⁹⁹ Beckett notes, that like Colwick Hall, the Castle stood outside the town boundaries, and its protection was

⁹⁴ White, p.111.

⁹⁵ Wylly, p.96.

⁹⁶ White, p.111.

⁹⁷ Beckett, p.125; White, p.111; Wylly, p.97.

⁹⁸ Wylly, p.97.

⁹⁹ Yarnspinner, p.95.

therefore a matter for the county justices.¹⁰⁰ Despite the cross-over of responsibilities, both agreed that the town should come first.¹⁰¹

The local authorities were subject to considerable criticism for their response. Residents of the town, chiefly targets of the riots, were some of the first to assign blame, with much of it recorded in letters to Newcastle. A particularly vehement critic of the authorities, Dr Manson, portrays the Mayor as dismissive of the dangers.¹⁰² It could be that the Mayor simply wished to be reassuring through a sense of control, but accusations of inaction and indifference are repeated by other residents. Sam Parsons wrote that he felt abandoned to his own defence when his request for assistance was met with ‘coldest indifference’.¹⁰³ An unnamed ‘Freeholder of the County’ so too remarks that ‘every application for assistance, with marked indifference’.¹⁰⁴ John Musters was also compelled to write of the apathy of the authorities.¹⁰⁵ Those targeted felt that authorities had not done enough and simply did not care. Ronald Ferguson, MP for Nottingham, reported to parliament that the magistrates had been ‘remiss in their duty’.¹⁰⁶ The criticism of inaction, coupled with preparations for deadly force, suggest that there may have been some amongst the propertied townsfolk who wished to see the 15th Hussars repeat their actions at Peterloo.¹⁰⁷ Each, however, exonerate Colonel Thackwell. He is portrayed by each as eager to oblige with the locally garrisoned troops but reserved due to confusion over jurisdiction.¹⁰⁸ The tension between the targets and local authorities is also hinted at when Newcastle trusts that Thackwell will give ‘an impartial account’, alluding to the more positive ones he received from the

¹⁰⁰ Beckett, p.129.

¹⁰¹ UoN, Ne C 5004; Beckett, p.126.

¹⁰² UoN, Ne C 4998.

¹⁰³ UoN, Ne C 5016.

¹⁰⁴ UoN, Ne C 5026.

¹⁰⁵ UoN, Ne C 5021.

¹⁰⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series, volume 9, 31 January 1832, cols. 1027-1091

¹⁰⁷ Yarnspinner, p.88; Ian Herson, *Riot!: Civil Insurrection from Peterloo to the Present Day* (London: Ann Arbor, 2006), pp.28-38.

¹⁰⁸ UoN, Ne C 5016; 5026; 5021.

Mayor.¹⁰⁹ Thomas Moore, the High Sheriff of Nottingham, in a letter to the Duke is keen to promote successful interventions, rather than the destruction they could not prevent.¹¹⁰

Perceptions of inactivity were perhaps linked to resources being considered insufficient. Yarnspinner argues the ‘few constables were unable to effectively suppress the town’s inhabitants’ during civil unrest, a situation exacerbated by events that drew in the wider area such as fairs.¹¹¹ Certainly Thackwell was concerned that the military strength was ‘inadequate’ for the needs, considering it ‘totally impossible’ to manage the crowds and fearing detachments would be overrun.¹¹² The local paper recognised both the efforts of the policing forces in attempting to apprehend offenders but also the general futility of the task in such large crowds.¹¹³

Come the executions, the authorities had learnt their lesson. Passions were running high and the fear of further rioting prompted the authorities to go to great lengths to suppress the gathered crowds.¹¹⁴ There was a show of force with nearly 1,500 police, specials, and military on hand to keep the peace, including the 15th Hussars, although this was still criticised as an ‘unnecessary display of military force’.¹¹⁵ It appears that the authorities would be damned if they did, and damned if they did not. Bend argues that they were further frustrated by the lack of legislation from the central government to help control reform agitation.¹¹⁶ No new powers were created in the preceding years for fear that any attempt at repressive legislation would trigger a response from the reformists, and the forces of law and order were considered not in any position to repress a popular rising.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Wylly, p.95.

¹¹⁰ UoN, Ne C 5011.

¹¹¹ Yarnspinner, p.64.

¹¹² Wylly, p.97; p.98.

¹¹³ *Nottingham Mercury*, October 15, 1831.

¹¹⁴ *The Times*, February 02, 1832

¹¹⁵ *The Times*, February 02, 1832.

¹¹⁶ Bend, p.223.

¹¹⁷ Bend, p.223.

Despite the criticisms, it appears that the authorities were quick to realise the potential for violence. They knew the rejection of the bill would not be well met in Nottingham and come the Monday meeting they feared ‘something serious’ occurring due to the ‘sullen looks of discontent’ amongst the crowd.¹¹⁸ Soon after, as groups gathered in various parts of the town, immediately ‘respectable housekeepers’ were summoned and sworn in as special constables, instructed to await the Exchange bell to assemble.¹¹⁹ In hindsight, Stevenson argues that the riots in Derby may have been avoided if the authorities had allowed a public meeting and freed prisoners taken.¹²⁰ Nottingham arguably then took appropriate measures in fortifying the gaol and calling the meeting on the Monday.

There is less available evidence for the attitudes of the ‘front line’ amongst the authorities, those tasked with suppressing the riots. Beckett calls on the evidence of Special Constable Jackson who had several years’ experience and on the day of the riots did not perceive a riot likely.¹²¹ This suggests that those on the ground, and the reports to the officials coordinating the response, were also of the persuasion that a riot was unlikely. This may go some way to justifying the authorities’ response, whilst Yarnspinner finds that those sworn in as Specials were more concerned with preserving ‘much private property from plunder’, often their own.¹²² There must also have been some fear for these individuals. Constable Jackson was aware of what the crowd was capable of, having witnessed attacks on persons and property, even being present when the Mayor was struck.¹²³ The various forces did meet with active resistance. Stones were thrown and at times they had to drive the crowd with the flats of their swords and occasional pistol shots.¹²⁴ The actions did not just finish with quelling the riots, but also supervising property and apprehending culprits, and ‘troops and constables continued patrolling the streets until a late hour’ and for a number

¹¹⁸ White, p.110.

¹¹⁹ White, p.110.

¹²⁰ Stevenson, p.291.

¹²¹ Beckett, p.116.

¹²² Yarnspinner, p.93.

¹²³ Beckett, p.119.

¹²⁴ Yarnspinner, p.96.

of days after.¹²⁵ It would be interesting to explore these attitudes further, but what is clear is that the suppressive forces shared the same fears for property and of personal harm that many experienced.

Summary

It is hard to avoid the connotations with class politics. With social and economic contexts differing vastly, differing experiences such as disenfranchisement and economic instability were divisive in society. Attitudes towards reform were largely divided along class lines. Framework knitters were once influential in Nottingham's penchant in violent collective bargaining. Nottingham was well known for radicalism, and, as supporters portrayed reform as salve for their sufferings, the disenfranchised working classes felt justified in rioting at the rejection of the Reform Bill. The sense of shared identity amongst the workers, even those who were associated with the targets of the riots, helped shape people's attitudes towards the riots, with this potentially extending across urban centres. It also explains the familiarity and sense of community in rioting. Not all supporters of reforms condoned the riots, and many workers were fearful, and some threatened, by the riots.

Support in town contrasted with Newcastle, the personification of opposition. Against social amelioration, the riots were part of a challenge to his power locally, and to that of the established elites nationally. The burning of Nottingham Castle was highly symbolic of this, but left radicals open to being presented as enemies of the nation's peace. Those that enjoyed power were influenced heavily by fears of revolution. The experiences of the French Revolution led many to believe that any concession would lead to more demands and further turmoil. Debates remain about a general revolt; some in the crowd called for it, and it was understood that other towns were up in arms, however, there were spats of patriotism and engagement with the state. Despite being a particularly serious riot, rioting

¹²⁵ White, p.110.

in general and targeted attacks on those held in opposition were all part of nineteenth century urban life. As violence broke out, the genuine fear of it spreading is clear, though. With reports of serious harm to property and persons, the local elites began to arm, anticipating growing violence.

Criticism of the authorities is prominent amongst those that personally suffered. The inactivity and lack of concern portrayed is at odds with the constant activity in a rapidly changing situation. Considering their resources inadequate and hampered by conflicting jurisdictions, the authorities prioritised the town and municipal buildings above private property that fell under the county. The futility of apprehending those responsible in the crowd was acknowledged at the time, whilst hindsight suggest appropriate measures were taken. When they were well prepared, such as at the executions, they were still criticised. Reconstructing experiences of those on the 'front line' was hampered by available sources and would benefit future study, but they too were fearful for property and person, exerting themselves in dangerous situations in the name of peace and justice.

Chapter 3: Impacts

Having discussed attitudes towards them, attention now turns to the impact that riots and reform had. This chapter begins by discussing the impact of the Nottingham reform riots in relation to the passing of the Reform Bill, with the debates over the impact of the Reform Act. This moves on to consider what impacts the reform riots had on later political movements and changes in crowd control. This chapter also attempts to understand the impact of the reform riots on an individual level. Lastly, consideration will be given to the longer legacy of the burning of Nottingham Castle and the use of the current site. It is argued the Riots and Reform Act were limited in their initial impact, the burning of Nottingham Castle continued to influence the rhetoric of reform, leading to wider changes in politics and has a legacy associated with violent collective action.

The Reform Act

The most immediate impact of the reform riots was their exploitation by supporters of reform to reinforce fears of revolution to help force through the Reform Bill. The riots brought the ‘nation to the verge of a baneful revolution’.¹ Sir George Staunton, MP for Heytesbury, feared that after the riots ‘the issues of Reform were unchanged’, questioning ‘not how shall we improve the system of our Representation, but how shall we prevent a Revolution’.² Lang argues that whether revolution was a likely or not, the fear certainly persuaded many:

‘the level of unrest reinforced the case for immediate reform now, rather than later: it was quite simply too dangerous to delay any longer. Just as Wellington and Peel had granted emancipation to avoid a rising in

¹ William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Nottinghamshire, and the[...] town of Nottingham [...]*, 1832 (Sheffield: Robert Leader, 1832), p.109

² Mark O’Neil and Ged Martin, ‘A Backbencher on Parliamentary Reform, 1831-1832’, *The Historical Journal*, 23.3 (1980), p.554.

Ireland, so the Whigs and the ‘waverers’ on the tory benches should grant reform as the lesser of two evils.’³

As in Ireland, acquiescence could help ease immediate threats. Lang argues that this, combined with the radicals’ campaigns and disturbances, proved that the unreformed system was unsatisfactory for the majority of the population and was untenable.⁴ Stephen Jones argues that the riots furthered the impression that the rapidly growing cities of the industrial north were growing out of control under the guidance of spreading radicalism, and a fear that ‘at any time they might break out in political revolt’.⁵ The majority wanted change and it became felt that the government could not stand in the way any longer. The fear of spreading violence and connections between urban centres has been touched on, as has the fear in Westminster that this could lead to a general revolt.

It can also be argued that the riots impact was limited. Robert Poole argues that in the early nineteenth century ‘petitioning and rebellion were mutually dependent strategies for obtaining parliamentary reform’ where ‘petitioning depended upon the threat of rebellion for its effectiveness, while rebellion depended upon petitioning for its legitimacy’ and both drew on constitutional precedents.⁶ With both strategies involved in the Nottingham reform agitation, and the frequency of public disorder as collective action, the riots can be seen part of standard political practice rather than a forceful moment. Lang admits that riots suddenly breaking out and dying down again were ‘virtually a feature of urban life in the period’.⁷ This portrays the riots as nothing unusual, even just another act of violence in developing urban areas. How can something so common have any meaningful impact?

Despite being ‘serious disturbances’, Lang questions whether reform agitation ‘constituted a threat to the constitution’.⁸ Stevenson too finds it ‘difficult to assess the extent’ of the

³ Sean Lang, *Parliamentary Reform 1785-1928* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.29.

⁴ Lang, p.30.

⁵ Stephen Jones, *Criminology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; repr 2013), pp.90.

⁶ Robert Poole, ‘The Transformation of Petitioning’, *Social Science History*, 43 (2019), 553-579.

⁷ Lang, p.153.

⁸ Lang, p.33.

riots' influence, arguing that the 'ease' with which the riots were suppressed showed the government that they could contain any general popular action.⁹ Locally though initially overwhelmed, the authorities were able to bring in enough numbers to suppress the disorder. Although serious riots were experienced elsewhere, the lack of a wider uprising suggests the situation was never seriously out of hand. Clearly this is an area of debate, but even if the riots themselves were not enough to force through change, they reinforced a broader narrative of revolution that made some concession seem necessary.

The Act itself had limited impact. The original Bill promised to increase the electorate by around half a million, tackle the issue of under-representation in growing industrial centres, and address the corruption of pocket boroughs.¹⁰ When it did pass, the Act was far less radical. It did abolish 143 seats, many in pocket boroughs, and create sixty-seven new constituencies, but in expanding the franchise to owners of land valued above £10, it only expanded the electorate by around 250,000, half the original proposal.¹¹ Although an improvement, it did little for the people of Nottingham which gained no new representatives and having:

'3,000 £10 houses, the borough was rightly expected to have an electorate of much the same size under the reformed franchise at about 5,000, with the estimated 1,000 to 1,500 non-residents being replaced by a similar number of qualified householders.'¹²

The riots clearly were not enough to persuade opponents to concede to all demands. If anything, for the people of Nottingham, the Reform Act did little but pay lip service to their demands. Philip Salmon argues the First Reform Act provided only 'meagre consequences' as pocket boroughs and corruption remained, whilst the 'working-class

⁹ John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1832* (London: Longman, 1979; repr. 1992), pp.293-295.

¹⁰ Nathan Bend, *The Home Office and Public Disturbance, c.1800-1832* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2018), p.220.

¹¹ Bend, p.231.

¹² Simon Harrat and Stephen Farrel, 'Nottingham', *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1820-1832*, ed. By D.R. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

share of the electorate probably decreased'.¹³ The Act did nothing for the enfranchisement of the rioters, and Beckett questions 'the point of all the troubles over the Reform Bill...if so little had changed?'.¹⁴ Further legislation and popular movements were needed to get meaningful reform. Stevenson views the First Reform Act as 'only the beginning' to greater reform, much like Newcastle feared.¹⁵ The later Reform Acts are beyond the confines of this study, but James Owen notes the greater impact of the Second Reform Act, expanding the electorate from around 6,300 to over 14,000 in Nottingham.¹⁶ Although the riot and resulting Act had limited immediate political impact on the town, their failures impacted later movements and reform.

Political Impacts

Dorothy Thompson is more enthusiastic about the impact of the reform agitation, seeing it as producing 'a great political awakening among all classes', which the unenfranchised had established the 'power of popular opinion'.¹⁷ Archer views the reform riots as part of a period of change in political protest; from the Gordon Riots of 1780 which lacked cohesion, to the organisation of Chartism into 'the first major independent working-class movement'.¹⁸ The 'most worrying' aspect, Thompson believes, is that reform showed the interest in politics of non-political crowds, and Archer argues that political aims became more ambitious and 'ultimately more threatening', worrying authorities and possessing 'the language and the potential to be revolutionary'.¹⁹ The burning of Nottingham Castle can be plotted against this thesis of growing cohesion and collective consciousness, whilst the failures surrounding reform helped perpetuate the threat of revolution.

¹³ Robert Saunders, 'God and the Great Reform Act: Preaching against Reform, 1831–32', *The Journal of British Studies*, 53.2 (2014), p.378.

¹⁴ John Beckett, 'The Nottingham Reform Bill Riots of 1831', *Parliamentary History*, 24.1 (2005), p.219.

¹⁵ Stevenson, p.298.

¹⁶ James Owen, 'An inexplicable constituency?' Organised Liberalism in Nottingham, 1868-1880', *Midland History*, 35.1(2010), p.111.

¹⁷ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* ([n.p.]: Temple Smith, 1984; repr. London: Breviary Stuff, 2013), p.12.

¹⁸ John E. Archer, *Social unrest and popular protest in England, 1780-1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.57.

¹⁹ Thompson, p.10; Archer, p.57.

Beckett also believes that the reform agitation did ‘eventually make a difference’ after the ‘disillusionment’ of the Act helped breed the Chartist movements, support for which was ‘as powerful in Nottingham as anywhere else in the country’.²⁰ Thompson agrees, pointing to Nottingham as ‘one of the strongest Chartist areas in the country’.²¹ Here, the reform riots lent themselves to the language of violence again. A meeting of Chartists at Burnley in 1842 made an express link that the people may have to take similar recourse as ‘Nottingham Castle being on fire gave notice of the people’s discontent, and it was by these means, and these means alone, that the Reform Bill was carried’.²² As mentioned, Chartist riots occurred in Nottingham as the town continued to violently champion the cause of reform.²³ The lessons of failures surrounding the reform riots found further influence in the Chartist movement.

This rhetoric of revolution was only furthered by the failure of the Reform Act to deliver meaningful reform for the working classes, leading to a sense of betrayal by the middle-class allies that had also campaigned for reform. Bend argues that it became clear that ‘for government the Act was not the first step toward universal suffrage, but a necessary compromise to prevent it’.²⁴ Lang is equally cynical, arguing that it was passed as a means to avoid riots without expanding suffrage or representation to the working classes, whilst simultaneously separating the middle class allies in order to preserve something closer to the status quo.²⁵ Michael Smith highlights the changing views of the Reform Act, from a ‘timely concession’ to ‘popular pressure’, to the 1960s when the likes of D. C. Moore argued that the Reform Act was ‘designed to revive electoral deference’, giving more power to the landed elites in the counties.²⁶ Smith acknowledges that debate still exists, as

²⁰ Beckett, p.219.

²¹ Thompson, p.186.

²² *The Times*, June 15, 1842.

²³ Thompson, p.154; *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, Aug 26, 1842.

²⁴ Bend, p.232

²⁵ Lang, p.34

²⁶ Christopher Williams, ‘1842: The Dynamics Of Urban Disorder, Using a Model of Disorder to Examine Leicester in 1842’ (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Leicester, 1992), p.136

N. McCord does not view the government as having the ‘time, knowledge or expertise’ to deliberately use the Act in such a way, as part of some ‘mater plan’.²⁷

Cynicism of the Act is not limited to the hindsight of historians. Though arguing for the success of the reform agitation, Thompson concedes that ‘[d]illusion with the results of reform set in almost as soon as the Act as passed’.²⁸ Disappointed contemporaries were quick to excoriate the Act for lack of true reform. The first national Chartist petition in 1839 lamented that ‘The Reform Act has effected a transfer of power from one dominating faction to another and left the people helpless as before’.²⁹ The failure of the Act to enfranchise the working classes led Joseph Shepherd, speaking at a rally in Liverpool, to call on the middle classes to repay their ‘debt’ by supporting the Second Reform Act.³⁰ The First Reform Act failed to increase working class agency, and the feeling that the working classes had been spurned would influence even more radical politics.

Friedrich Engels, supporter of the Chartist movement and influential in Marxist philosophy, shared the sense of betrayal of those most likely found amongst the rioters. Engels viewed it as ‘treachery’ as the ‘bourgeois Radicals’ made use of the popular support to enfranchise themselves, whilst the property qualification ensured the working classes did not.³¹ Thompson also views the Reform Act as a ‘victory’ for the middle classes, furthering middle class interests at the expense of the working classes.³² The burning of Nottingham Castle arose from the same frustrations about political representation that drove the Chartist and Marxist movements.

The small gains of the reform riots only demonstrated the need for more organised movements, whilst the revolutionary tone present in all came to fruition in the Marxist

²⁷ Williams, p.136

²⁸ Thompson, p.13

²⁹ ‘The first national chartist petition, July 1839’, *Revolution, from 1789 to 1906*, ed. by R.W. Postage (New York: Harper Touchbooks, 1962), pp.127-9.

³⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 09 Apr 1866.

³¹ Engels, p.17.

³² Thompson, p.180

movements of the early twentieth century. The reformers and rioters' attitudes are present in subsequent movements. In the later movement for women's suffrage, Sylvia Pankhurst recalls a moment in which she was asked by her sister Christabel before a by-election speech in Nottingham if she would burn down Nottingham Castle.³³ She responded that she was against the act but was prepared to fling a torch at the Castle in a symbolic way, showing a solidarity with the suffrage fight of the reformers.³⁴ Although Sylvia found the idea of actual incendiarism 'repugnant', Christabel's initial enquiry suggests others still saw targeted destruction as a legitimate tool for the disenfranchised and the burning of Nottingham Castle as retaining some symbolism.

The burning of Nottingham Castle continued to permeate political discourse in other ways. Thompson sees the reform riots as impacting on the conduct of politics in the nineteenth century: dispelling 'the image of the jolly drunken crowd...at election celebrations', marking a 'new dimension' in politics where crowds now demonstrated for issues rather than candidates, and leading the word 'politician' to mean those involved in radicalism.³⁵ The burning of Nottingham Castle remained a brush with which to tar future political agitation. The Anti-Corn Law League were accused of wishing 'to encourage similar violence' as the fires of Bristol and Nottingham Castle.³⁶ The threat of violence continued to be part of popular political rhetoric with non-electors wishing to exert pressure in the 1841 election alluding to 'when Nottingham Castle fell'.³⁷ More anecdotally, the burning of Nottingham Castle seems to have found an unlikely status as precedent for 'mob' destruction, with it being cited that it should fall on the local authorities to be held liable.³⁸ Discussions over the Union Relief Aid Bill cited 'a precedent with regard to borrowing was furnished by the destruction of Nottingham Castle' which should be considered in the

³³ Lang, p.153

³⁴ Lang, p.153

³⁵ Thompson, p.9.

³⁶ *The Times*, August 12, 1842.

³⁷ *The Times*, Apr 21, 1841.

³⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd series, volume 111, 17 June 1850, cols. 1292-1404.

writing of the Bill.³⁹ The burning of Nottingham Castle had a political legacy. These are only small examples in the available evidence, but it shows that it was an event that influenced politics, set precedents, and symbolised the fear of popular disorder.

Policing Popular Disorder

Outside reform, the riots impacted the management of disorder. Bend argues that reform agitation drove change in the government's attitudes to popular agitation when compared to previous decades, where the rhetoric of reform was defended as a representation of popular opinion.⁴⁰ Bend argues that 'magistrates were clearly alarmed and were intent on disrupting the designs of reformers when possible'.⁴¹ With rumours of arming and a possible rising, the Home Secretary, Viscount Melbourne, gave more powers to the magistrates and reinforced populated centres with regular forces, including the sending of a hundred stands of arms to Nottingham.⁴² The onus was 'placed on the local authorities and inhabitants' to suppress the revolts, but central government now began providing more tools.⁴³ There was an awareness of the dangers of violence, but it took serious rioting for the government to better prepare local authorities.

Historians such as Rawlings and Bohstedt highlight the 1830 Swing Riots as key influences on professionalising police forces to help in crowd control.⁴⁴ The burning of Nottingham Castle just a year later reinforced these calls, further exposing the 'frailty of provincial forces of law and order'.⁴⁵ The inefficacy of local enforcement was similarly exposed during the earlier Luddite disturbances, in which the Home Office came to realise that 'division of authority between town and county...crippled early efforts at

³⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, volume 168, 28 July 1862, cols. 906-973.

⁴⁰ Bend, p.224.

⁴¹ Bend, p.180.

⁴² Bend, p.225.

⁴³ Bend, p.225.

⁴⁴ Marsh, Ian, et al., *Crime and Criminal Justice*, (London: Routledge, 2011), p.369; John Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, C. 1550-1850* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.222.

⁴⁵ Bend, p.224.

containment'.⁴⁶ As has been discussed, there were a number of criticisms of the authorities response and ability to handle the disorder, in which the same conflicts of jurisdiction and delays in calling out the military led to calls for a more efficient system.⁴⁷ Francis Berkeley, MP for Bristol, argued in parliament that the riots in both Nottingham and Bristol 'were caused by the inefficiency and want of judgment of the magistracy', whilst more recently Ian Heron levels the same accusations against the magistrates and inefficiency of the policing systems for causing the riots in Bristol.⁴⁸ In considering enforcement of law, the Poor Law Commission concluded that 'an improvement in the police system is recommended by every witness', for the burning of Nottingham Castle might in the first place have been prevented by a better organized police'.⁴⁹ Justification for the cost of setting up police forces is offset against the cost of damages relating to Nottingham Castle that fell on local government.⁵⁰ The heightened tensions and costly destruction during the reform agitation only served to reinforce the need for an improved system of crowd control.

Marsh argues that the new police system was an 'element in a broader strategy of control ... a means of controlling and disciplining the growing urban, industrial working classes.'⁵¹ Contemporaries certainly were concerned by this rapid urbanisation and massing of the impoverished. G. C. Holland, writing in 1843, believed that 'crime and immorality' were driven by 'the crowding together of the working class in narrow streets, filthy lanes, alleys and yards... which has hitherto increased in all manufacturing towns'.⁵² As set out in the context, Nottingham fits these concerns as a town of rapid growth in population but not in geographic area, producing cramped, squalid conditions.

Contemporaries connected disorder as inherent of the rapid urbanisation manifest in towns

⁴⁶ Bend, p.149.

⁴⁷ Wylly, p.99.

⁴⁸ Ian Heron, *Riot!: Civil Insurrection from Peterloo to the Present Day* (London: Ann Arbor, 2006), p.67.

⁴⁹ PP. 1834-44 (87.a, 1320), *Report [...] into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws*.

⁵⁰ PP. 1834-44 (87.a, 1320), *Report [...] into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws*.

⁵¹ Marsh, p.368.

⁵² Jones, pp.90-91.

like Nottingham. Bohstedt, in assessing this new policing, argues that ‘Physical superiority and firepower did not necessarily deter rioters from direct action, but they could shorten riots, sharply reduce rioters’ freedom of action and their success, and give magistrates a better bargaining hand. In sum they changed the prospects and efficacy of riots.’⁵³

Bohstedt goes on to argue that whilst the new police forces were more effective at preventing riots, they could not ‘prevent spasms of riot’ and that ‘riots and peacekeeping remained political’.⁵⁴ Certainly, later incidents show that the Nottingham crowd remained undeterred from acts of rioting.⁵⁵ Clearly the reform riots played into concerns of the current ability to control the growing urban areas, exploiting weaknesses in the current system.

Individual Impacts

It is easy to consider only the broader impacts, those that effect the national consciousness and narrative but there are a multitude of individuals impacted in many ways, whose personal experiences are consigned to the void of unrecorded histories. However, there are snippets of various sources, almost anecdotal in some cases, that can help illuminate more personal impacts. The most obvious impact is to the Duke of Newcastle, who suffered the destruction of one property and having others put at risk, as well as threats to his own well-being. As discussed, this served to further entrench Newcastle in opposition to reform, but he was also left displeased with the compensation amount and distrusting of the local officials.⁵⁶ The fact that he left the ruins as a deliberate rebuke to the town shows his lasting contempt for the people.⁵⁷

⁵³ Bohstedt, p.222.

⁵⁴ Bohstedt, p.222.

⁵⁵ *The Bristol Mercury*, February 19, 1842; *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, August 26, 1842.

⁵⁶ Richard Gaunt (a), ‘The Fourth Duke of Newcastle, the ‘Mob’ and Election Contests in Nottinghamshire, 1818–1832’, *Midland History*, 33.2 (2008), p.197. p.200; Valentine Yarnspinner, *Nottingham Rising: [...]the 1831 Reform Riots*, (Nottingham: Loaf on a Stick Press, 2014), pp.109-11.

⁵⁷ White, p.115.

Not present in the available sources are other targets, though it stands to reason that a number would feel a similar way. William Musters was struck, as was the Mayor, and Mrs Musters and companions were forced to hide for the night.⁵⁸ Those that worked for targets too were put under threat, such as Dr Manson's servant.⁵⁹ Servants and tenants were put to defence of Clumber Park. Although danger did not come, the carpenter Joseph Bains was killed when a pistol accidentally went off.⁶⁰ Riots were a dangerous place and had the most severe impact for some. For those executed, the personal impact is obvious enough.⁶¹ Their deaths would impact on their families too. Of those hanged for the destruction of Lowe's mill, George Hearson left a wife and mother, whilst John Armstrong left his fiancée, parents and five siblings.⁶² Although details of how their families were impacted are unavailable, evidence is not needed for psychological understandings of the impact that capital punishment has on families, such as the trauma, alienation and ostracization they might have felt.⁶³ Conversely, the last-minute reprieves for Thomas Shelton and Charles Berkins were met with indescribable 'gratitude and thankfulness'.⁶⁴ Again, sources are not available for how this impacted their later life, but it can be assured that the prospect of facing their own mortality would have had a profound impact.⁶⁵

Others, like Valentine Marshall at Colwick Hall, were transported for their part, and though he was later granted pardon, he never returned to England.⁶⁶ He did publish a broadsheet in Nottingham protesting his innocence but appears to otherwise have forged a decent life on the other side of the world for himself.⁶⁷ Whilst dramatically changing their lives, the riots did not inhibit ability for success, although it would have been prominent in

⁵⁸ *The Times*, January 13, 1832; UoN, Ne C 5003.

⁵⁹ UoN, Ne C 4998

⁶⁰ UoN, Ne C 5010

⁶¹ *The Times*, January 16, 1832; Carolyn Hoyle and Roger Hood *The Death Penalty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.155-186

⁶² UoN, EMSC o/s Not 1.H64 ALB

⁶³ King, R., 'The impact of capital punishment on families of defendants and murder victims' family members', *Judicature*, 89.5 (2006), p.292.p. 292.

⁶⁴ UoN, EMSC o/s Not 1.H64 ALB

⁶⁵ Hoyle and Hood, p.177.

⁶⁶ *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 11, 1844; Beckett, p.134.

⁶⁷ Beckett, p.131.

personal history. Others faced shorter periods of hardship. Whilst in prison, Thomas Smith left his wife and four children in ‘great distress’, whilst William Kitchen, indicted for Lowe’s mill, saw his five orphaned children left to the parish.⁶⁸ Lesser still, those tried for their part in Wollaton each received a condition of no evidence being presented in lieu of recognizances of £50.⁶⁹ Others were simply released to return to their old lives.⁷⁰ If there was no loss of life in the acts of vandalism, the riots did have a human cost and this should lend itself to its own explanation of the impact of those involved and their families. Elsewhere, the riots would have been a significant life event. Thomas Auckland, ‘respected tailor’ and war hero, having been severely wounded at the battle of Waterloo, found himself wounded by a bullet, this time from His Majesty’s forces in their attempts to disperse the crowds.⁷¹ There are some testimonies that can be found. John Needham’s house was attacked, mistaken for anti-reformer John Wright’s house, Lenton Hall.⁷² His wife and two of their daughters were home and having already witnessed the firing of Lowe’s Mill found themselves ‘surrounded by thousands’ as food, beer and silverware were taken, furniture broken, and family articles destroyed. Beckett shows that the experience had left scars:

the family were still taking it in turns to sit up through the night. Every sound from the direction of Beeston had them on edge: ‘our hearts and legs trembled [...] I slept upon spoons and forks and we all had our clothes and things ready to put on at a moment’s warning, stockings ready’.⁷³

It would be useful when sources become available again to explore further the impact that such events would have on nineteenth century lives.

⁶⁸ *The Times*, January 14, 1832.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, January 14, 1832.

⁷⁰ Beckett, p.134.

⁷¹ Beckett, p.129.

⁷² Beckett, p.127.

⁷³ Beckett, p.128.

The financial impact was significant, most notably for the businesses and private property that suffered, as previously discussed, while the fines and thefts show the widespread economic impacts. The heaviest economic impact was suffered by the hundred of Broxtowe held liable for of compensation to the Duke, rather than Nottingham town, to the tune of £21,000.⁷⁴ Damages at Colwick Hall were estimated at near £3,000, whilst the destruction of Lowe's Mill was estimated at £15,000.⁷⁵ This impacted the workers, too. George Turton, overseer at the mill, beseeched the crowd 'not to take bread out of the mouths of the many families dependent on the mill'.⁷⁶ George's brother, William, worked at the mill too, as did their father, the engineer, who lived on site, and whose house was also destroyed with the mill.⁷⁷ Repeat this across the near two-hundred persons that had employment there, and it becomes clear how many suffered because of the riots.⁷⁸ Although a lack of sources have prohibited a more in depth study of individual impacts, it shows that there is a possibility to understand the impact of disorder in personal terms, whether an economic or human cost.

Legacy

The last question must be: what lasting impact did the reform riots produce? In the immediacy, it was understood that this would remain a significant event in Nottingham's history. White created perhaps the first history to detail the riots, calling them a 'stain cast by the hand of violence upon the page of our local history, I know cannot be effaced, but unfortunately will endure when the present generation has ceased to exist'.⁷⁹ Even the courtroom during the trials was reported as being held in 'a degree of awe which will not be forgotten by those who witnessed it'.⁸⁰ The events stayed with witnesses, perhaps best

⁷⁴ Yarnspinner, pp.114-115; *The Times*, January 16, 1832.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, January 16, 1832.

⁷⁶ *The Times*, January 09, 1832.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *The Times*, January 16, 1832.

⁷⁹ White, p.114.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, January 16, 1832.

summed by William Howitt in his stylised account: ‘The scene was magnificent, though saddened by regret’.⁸¹ As in the discussion of personal impact, those who lived through the burning of Nottingham Castle were unlikely to forget. George Bentinck, MP for Norfolk Western, was one of those who had felt it necessary to defend his home so was mindful to warn the House, then debating another measure of reform, that whenever a matter of reform was discussed, to remember that Nottingham Castle was burned.⁸² As discussed before, the burning of Nottingham Castle helped frame future reform.

There is a sense that the impact was quick to fade. In an electoral disturbance in 1865 it was reported that ‘Never in the annals of political agitation has Nottingham been the scene of such disturbances.’⁸³ This seems rather at odds with the scenes that led to the burnt-out ruins that still stood visible from the marketplace. Even by 1850, the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* simply commented that ‘It is nineteen years ago to-day...that Nottingham Castle was fired by a riotous rabble’.⁸⁴ It seems that the events were soon forgotten for those without a direct link. However, the *Nottingham Daily Guardian* of 1 January 1901, in recapping the previous century, stated that ‘among the many local memorable events which have taken place during the century, the most striking is undoubtedly the destruction of the Nottingham Castle by fire’.⁸⁵ Perhaps there was a sense to play down the events in the following decades with political agitation still rife. Further study would be useful to

⁸¹ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, October 12, 1889.

⁸² *Hansard*, 3rd series, volume 158, 30 April 1860, cols. 333-423.

⁸³ *Derby Mercury*, June 28, 1865.

⁸⁴ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, October 10 1850.

⁸⁵ Beckett, p.126.

assess the reasons for these contrasting senses of legacy, although it clearly remained one of the most pertinent events in local history.

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Figure 2 - View from the Nottingham Castle Terrace Looking East, John Rawson Walker (1796-1873), c.1845, oil on canvas, 55.9x76.8cm, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, NCM 1904-435

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

The physical legacy also changed significantly over the next decades. Initially the Castle was left a blackened ruin as a deliberate rebuke to

Figure 3 - View of the East Front of Nottingham Castle 1879, 1879, Charles McArthur, 47.6x73.6cm, watercolour on paper, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery

‘mob rule’, ‘a sable monument of the evil effects of popular frenzy’.⁸⁶ Far from being admonished, the Castle then became an

attraction site, a public space that was then enjoyed by many, accessing for the first time the views from the terrace. As Figure 2 showed, immediate depictions of the ruined Castle were of immediate interest and the continued allure of the ruins is reflected in several

⁸⁶; White, p.115.

artworks that were produced between its destruction and museum opening. Figures 3 and 4 also show the townspeople interacting with the site, showing that far from being the eye sore it was intended to be, it became an attractive place both in art and leisure.

This new legacy as a leisure attraction was cemented when it opened as the first municipal museum and art gallery in England in 1878.⁸⁷ This was well received, with a yearly average of over a quarter of a million visitors by 1894.⁸⁸ The riots became the subject of new interactive interpretation in 2013.⁸⁹ Today, the Nottingham Castle Museum is being redeveloped, with the reform riots of Nottingham forming a new gallery, alongside the Luddites.⁹⁰ This will frame them amongst the notable aspects of local history, including the beginnings of the Civil War and the legendary Robin Hood. Riot and reform have perhaps now found their greatest impact, forming a core interpretation of local history, and cementing Nottingham's continued association with radical traditions as a 'Rebel City'.⁹¹

Summary

Whether likely, the fear of revolution was real. Although accusations of incitement were used against them, supporters viewed violence actions as acceptable so long as it furthered their agenda, and for some it was the only reason the Bill was passed. Stoked by radicals, the fear helped persuade some to pass the Bill, fearing that some concessions had to be made to avoid revolution. The unreformed system lacked popular support and was simply unsustainable. The burning of Nottingham Castle was a symbolic challenge to power in the context of pre-existing fears of revolution. However, frequent urban rioting and the lack of

⁸⁷ Christopher Drage, *Nottingham Castle: A Place Full Royal*, (Nottingham: Technical Print Service., 1999), p.21.

⁸⁸ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, July 07, 1894.

⁸⁹ Riot 1831, <<http://www.riot1831.org/>>; Elizabeth FitzGerald, Claire Taylor and Michael Craven, 'To the Castle! A comparison of two audio guides to enable public discovery of historical events', *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 17(4) (2013), pp. 749–760.

⁹⁰ 'Rebellion', *Nottingham Castle Project* <<https://www.nottinghamcastle.org.uk/projects/rebellion/>> [accessed 04 January 2019].

⁹¹ 'Rebel City', *The Castle*, <https://www.nottinghamcastle.org.uk/the-castle/rebel-city/> [Accessed 15 December 2020]

a wider uprising have been used to argue that the reform riots themselves offered no serious threat to the local or national government. The riots were unable to force meaningful concessions, with the Act itself having little impact. Locally, there was almost no change, as Nottingham retained the same number of electors and representatives. Nationally, it delivered much less than the supporters hoped, failing to tackle key issues, and even disenfranchising more of the working classes. Commentators have been cynical of the Act, viewing it as a means maintaining control without meaningful reform.

However, the disappointments and failures of reform, and the feeling that the working classes had been deliberately spurned, helped influence more radical movements and changed the way that people participated in politics and protest. The Chartist movement was notably driven by people associated with earlier reform, particularly in Nottingham, where the framework knitters were once again influential. The anger only served to fuel the rhetoric of revolution and the Castle became a symbol of the destructive potential of popular unrest. This helped spur a change in the government's response to disorder. Highlighting frailties of the old system and furthering concerns of crime in growing urban areas, the riots reinforced calls for the expansion of the new police, whilst the government gave magistrates new tools with which to maintain control.

The chapter aimed to understand the riots impact at an individual level, but this was limited due to archival restrictions. Clearly those that suffered loss of life would be most impacted, whether the executed or their families. Other were transported for life, whilst more still faced periods in prison other hardships. Fear and anger were the overriding emotions; Newcastle's lasting contempt was tangible in the ruins that remained for many years. Economic impacts were easier to detail, although only in the short term. Economically, Newcastle perhaps suffered the most, whilst substantial loss was suffered in three key incidents. Business owners and private residents lost goods and money in the immediate term, whilst the workers at Lowe's mill who were put out of work perhaps suffered for a

longer period. The lasting impacts on individuals is an area for further study. The longest impact discussed was the site's transformation to the present museum in which the riots are to form a key part of interpretation.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Summary

This study set out to explore the attitudes surrounding reform and rioting in the nineteenth century by examining the riots in Nottingham after to the rejection of the Reform Bill in 1831. It also sought to understand the impact of these riots. Attitudes towards and impact of the reform riots in Nottingham depend on a range of factors, such as active participation, support of reform, and socio-economic backgrounds. The subject must be considered in the context of political crises, economic cycles, radical activism, and revolutionary fears.

When the Reform Bill was rejected, having been touted as a solution to many of society's sufferings, these divisions and hardships manifested in serious public disorder.

Chapter two established that there was a broad divide in the country between the elites that enjoyed power and influence and those who were demanding it. The ideas of class and collective identity were a common theme in the arguments. Divisions were exploited by reformers at a time when class identities were developing, helping to galvanize the working classes into collective action. It was also established that Nottingham had been, and continued to be, receptive of radical ideas. The crowds have been subject to some study, showing that they were predominantly law-abiding workers, including the ever-present frame-work knitters, taking part in what they saw a legitimate means of protest and a source of political agency.¹ Outside the rioters, it was shown that there was vast support from the population, sympathetic to the rioters. The seemingly social nature of the events further suggests that there would have been little popular condemnation; the evidence

¹ Valentine Yarnspinner, *Nottingham Rising: [...] the 1831 Reform Riots*, (Nottingham: Loaf on a Stick Press, 2014), p.135.

suggesting that many considered the executions unjust, and popular disorder a legitimate political tool. A sense of shared identity connected these attitudes.

The Duke of Newcastle was portrayed as the epitome of parliamentary opposition. He appeared oblivious to the experiences of the working class, and, having already seen his influence in the area being challenged, he became more entrenched in his opposition to reform. Political opponents, some with connections to Newcastle, were targeted, and in relaying their fears reinforced fears of revolution. The reactions of many of the prominent people in town having to arm and defend their homes, as well as the potential for personal injury, demonstrate how real the possibility of a general uprising must have felt for some. It was less clear whether the town would have supported revolution, but it was clear that some of the rioter alluded to this understanding, and the debates around revolution were discussed.

The riots came at a time of broader fears of revolution; a fear that is clear in the rhetoric of the 1830s, both in in Westminster and provincial towns. This was further discussed in Chapter three, where it was established that the broader narrative of revolution, rather than the reform riots as an isolated incident, helped pass the Reform Bill. Although the burning of Nottingham Castle was a particular spectacle, and remained a symbol of violent disorder, urban rioting was quite common in the early nineteenth century.

Chapter three also discussed the Reform Act itself; criticised by both contemporaries and historians as achieving little. Although it addressed some issues, it was far from the original promises of the Bill, and Nottingham was an example of its minimal impact. The disappointment at the impact of the Act, and the impact of the reform riots in generally, were argued to have found greater impact in later movements, such as Chartism, to which Nottingham again greatly receptive. The failures of the Act played into future demands, as well as fuelling more radical politics, such as Marxism, driven by the sense of a 'betrayal' of the working-classes by their middle-class allies. The reform riots were argued to have

played a part in changing the nature of politics in the country, giving rise to the power of popular opinion in which the ‘mob’ was becoming more ambitious, and more threatening. They are present throughout the rhetoric of the next century, showing their continued impact.

Chapter two discussed the attitudes of the authorities, and it was argued that, despite contemporary criticism, the authorities of the town were quick to realise the potential for violence when news of the rejection was received. The debates on the effectiveness of the authorities were highlighted and considered the impact that this had on changing management of public disorder. After these incidents, the Home Office began to address the weaknesses in provincial law and order arrangements. A key response was the expansion of the new police, with the Poor Law Commission citing the burning of Nottingham Castle as showing the need for a more effective system of crowd control, whilst simultaneously justifying the costs through preventative, rather than reactive, policing.

Chapter three discussed the impacts on individual level. The easiest to assess was Newcastle, who became more entrenched in his opposition of reform, and dislike for the officials and people of Nottingham. Other targets of the riots seem to have similar sentiments. There were those that suffered personal injury, or their businesses targeted. Some found their workplaces attacked or destroyed, whilst others were simply innocent bystanders, fearful of the riots. It is unarguable that those tried were most affected individually. Although their personal accounts could not be reconstructed, the executed and the transported underwent life changing events. So too did their friends and family, who are evidenced as often present throughout the riots, trials, and execution. For those reprieved or dismissed, the justice process was still an impactful time for them. The longer-term impacts of the reform riots on those who suffered and those who faced the rioters could not be completed due to issues with accessibility of resources.

Chapter three concluded with commenting on the legacy in the burning of Nottingham Castle. The significance that it would have on local history was evident from the earliest accounts. Local press continued to make references to the events, although to varying degrees. The ruins were left for number of years, a rebuke from the Duke of Newcastle to the town of Nottingham, before becoming a museum to the riots.

Further research

One area that further study would have been useful is in comparing control of public disorder by the old and new police, using later riots to establish whether this was an effective change. An area that would also need more exploration is how the riots impacted those that experienced them longer-term. Together, these would allow an understanding of if the reform riots were thought of as more significant than other riots, and why it has been a symbol of disorder in Nottingham. The ideas surrounding collective identity and class cohesion are worth exploring, looking at how these were understood at the time, what sense of community they offered, and how they were understood across the nation rather than based on locality. As mentioned in Chapter two, why framework knitters were so influential in Nottingham would be an interesting area for further study, particularly as they seem to play a lead role in several instances of collective action.

Conclusions

Nottingham Castle's use has changed significantly over time. It began as the imposition of conquest in 1068, until its demise at the end of the War of the English Civil War.² Fittingly, it found its place as a ducal palace during the Restoration era, an expression of peace, prosperity, and aristocratic power. It may be fitting that, after the upheavals of the industrial revolution, it fell to the people of the town, before finding its current use as a public museum, where it continues to create a sense of collective memory. Its current

² Thomas Hine, *Nottingham, Its Castle, [...]*, (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1876), pp.4-18.

presentation is being developed, but reform and the riots are clearly going to have a prominent position, once again establishing the radical tendencies of Nottingham.

The significance of the burning of Nottingham Castle may have appeared to quickly fizzle out with the reform riots implementing no significant changes immediately, but it is unavoidably seared into the physical fabric of the town. Unsurprisingly, the dominant attitudes related to fear and anger, but the reform riots highlight attitudes that relate to identity and class consciousness that are unavoidable in their discussion. Polarising experiences led to divisive attitudes over reform seem destined to have led to violent action, with Newcastle the embodiment of one side, and the framework knitters the other. Rioting was a legitimate tool for the politically unrepresented and in pursuit of a collective cause.

The authorities' management of the reform riots was criticised, and there is still debate about whether they acted with enough conviction. Clearly the government realised that new systems were needed to keep a populace under control; a populace that was both showing greater unity through a sense of collective identity and had already erupted in numerous acts of collective disorder before the reform riots. With concern for their men being overrun, the decision was made to prioritise more beneficial sites in town than the homes of the local elites. Without ever being able to establish a true situation on the ground, it seems more credence should be given to the accounts of the authorities on their inability to prevent the destruction of Nottingham Castle. This is especially the case, as the chief criticism is derived from the disgruntled townsmen who suffered in the riots, who all congratulate Colonel Thackwell, and it is he who states the justification for not preventing the destruction of Nottingham Castle.³

³ Harold Wylly, *The Military Memoirs of Lieut.-General Sir Joseph Thackwell [...]* (London: Murray, 1908), pp.95-97.

On their own, Nottingham and the riots would change little, but when viewed as part of a national narrative of changing politics, class consciousness and potential revolution, it undoubtedly tipped the balance in favour of popular movements and parliamentary reform. Although perhaps not as prominent as other events, its impact can be found in later political movements. The burning of Nottingham Castle is a symbol for violent collective action, of the potential of unheeded popular opinion. If the First Reform Act was only incipient reform, then the riots and the burning of Nottingham Castle should be viewed as the ignition.

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