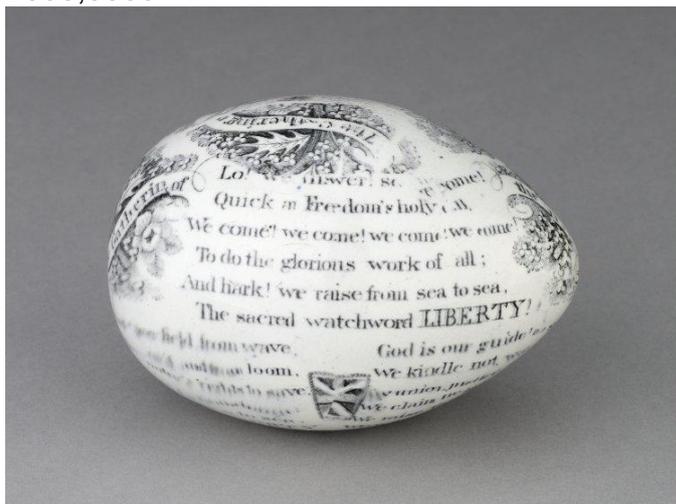


lecture 10: The Great Reform Acts

Structure of the lecture:

- narrative of events 1830-32
- weighing up the significance of reform and extra-parliamentary pressure
- historians' debates

Object of the week: Egg, made in Whitehaven, c.1832. British Museum, 2006,0905.1.



Extra-parliamentary pressure: how significant?

1. riots
2. political unions
3. petitions

Key point: The rage of factions over reform had more to do withthan with
Turner, *Age of Unease*, p. 210.

First reform bill, 1 March 1831:

Redistribution:

- Boroughs with populations below 2000 (=c.60) to be completely disenfranchised.
- 1 seat to be taken from 47 boroughs with populations of 2000-4000.
- England to receive 97 new seats; Scotland 5; Ireland 3; Wales 1.
- 2 seats to be given to Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Leeds and three other large English towns.
- 2 seats to be given to 4 newly defined metropolitan districts in London.
- 1 seat to be given to 20 smaller towns.
- Yorkshire county representation to be increased to 6 seats.
- Isle of Wight to be given 1 seat.

- 26 counties to have their representation doubled.

Franchise:

Borough franchise to be uniform = ownership or occupancy of property worth £20 a year.

County franchise extended to include £10 copyholders and £50 leaseholders for a term of 10 years. [old 40s freeholder franchise remains].

Poll in boroughs and counties limited to two days.

Amendment – vote by ballot and shortening of parliament ruled out in favour of £10 borough franchise.

Number of MPs to fall from 658 to 596, and electorate to be enlarged by just under ½ million.

Third reform bill, introduced 12 December 1831:

Total number of boroughs to be disenfranchised = 56.

30 boroughs to lose 1 seat.

New boroughs with 2 MPs = 22

New boroughs with 1 MP = 20.

Key issue between Grey's ministry and William IV: creation of 50 new peers

Key crisis point = 7-19 May 1832.

- Resignation of Grey's ministry over the issue of peers
- Wellington's inability to form a ministry because of Peel's refusal to serve
- Grey's insistence on creation of new peers
- Huge pressure from political unions – meetings, petitions, call to stop supplies.

Richard Brown: 'The [1832] Reform Act was framed and passed by those who had most to lose, and who believed they were acting wisely and liberally to preserve the existing social order.'¹

1832 Reform Acts

Redistribution:

56 rotten boroughs abolished.

30 boroughs lost 1 MP.

143 seats made available for redistribution.

- 65 seats to the counties.
- 22 large towns, including Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and London, given 2 MPs.
- 21 smaller towns given 1 MP.

Scotland awarded 8 extra seats.

Ireland given 5 extra seats.

¹ Richard Brown, *Church and State in Modern Britain, 1700-1850* (1991), p. 218.

Enfranchisement:

The total electorate out of a population of 24 million was 813,000, or less than 15% of adult males.

Chandos Clause, which enlarged the county electorate by 30% more than the Whigs wanted.

Scotland: Fifteen fold increase in electors to 65,000;

– Still only votes for 1 in 8 men (1 in 5 for England).

Ireland: only 5% of Irish men could vote

Key points:

1. no easy path to reform.....
The final struggle was brought on by events that nobody predicted.....
.....
2. reform struggle came at a time of confusion and realignment among parties.....
3. the meaning of property was at the heart of the debates.....
4. reform was not the only issue.....

Significant dates:

23 February 1830 – Lord John Russell’s redistribution plan.

May 1830 – Daniel O’Connell moves for manhood suffrage, secret ballot and triennial parliaments – received only 13 votes.

28 May 1830 – Russell’s motion for redistribution. Defeated 223 to 117.

26 June 1830 – death of George IV. William IV accedes to the throne. General election.

July 1830 – revolution in France.

2 November 1830 – Wellington made a speech in the Lords against reform.

Ministers defeated in the Commons on a civil list vote and resigned. Grey’s ministry formed.

November 1830 – Manchester Political Union established

December 1830 – Henry Hunt won by-election in Preston.

December 1830 – committee set up to draw up reform bill

Late 1830-early 1831 – ‘Swing Riots’ across southern England

March 1831 – Hunt and O’Connell established Metropolitan Political Union.

1 March 1831 – Lord John Russell introduced first reform bill to the Commons

23 March 1831 – Reform bill passed its second reading by 302 to 301 votes.

20 April 1831 – William IV advised to dissolve parliament by the cabinet.

Late April 1831 – general election gave Grey’s government majority of 140

24 June 1831 – reform bill re-introduced by Russell.

22 September 1831 – Commons passed reform bill by 345 to 236.

8 October 1831 – Lords defeated the bill on its second reading, 199 to 158.

Late 1831 – serious rioting in Nottingham, Derby, and Bristol. Large demonstrations across the country.

12 December 1831 – third reform bill introduced.

18 December 1831 – second reading in Commons passed 324 to 162.

23 March 1832 – third reading in the Commons passed 355 to 239.

14 April 1832 – Reform bill passed second reading in Lords by 184 to 175.

7 May 1832 – ministers defeated on a motion to postpone consideration of disenfranchisement clauses until the rest of the bill had been sanctioned.

7 May 1832 – huge meeting of political unions in Birmingham.

8 May 1832 – Grey asked William IV for the creation of 50 new peers. King refused.

9 May 1832 – ministers resigned. William IV asked Wellington to form government. Massive petitions from across the country calling upon the king to stop supplies.

15 May 1832 – Wellington gave up his commission. William IV forced to recall the Grey ministry.

18 May 1832 – William IV reluctantly gave a pledge to create new peers.

19 May 1832 – Wellington agreed to support Grey.

4 June 1832 – Reform bill passed on third reading in the Lords 106 to 27.

Further Reading:

Phillips, John A.; Wetherell, Charles, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the political modernization of England', *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), 411-36

Wasson, Ellis Archer, 'The great Whigs and parliamentary reform, 1809-30', *Journal of British Studies*, 24 (1985), 434-64.

LoPatin-Lummis, Nancy, 'The 1832 Reform Act Debate: Should the Suffrage Be Based on Property or Taxpaying?', *Journal of British Studies*, 46:2 (2007), 320-45

Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, eds., *Rethinking the age of reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)