

For Reference: Brief chronology of the Acts

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained further in the Glossary, terms <u>underlined</u> have their own articles)

1832 'Great' Reform Act
Passed into law in 1832 by the ***Whig*** government. This ***Act*** changed which parts of the country sent MPs to Parliament. It removed '***rotten boroughs***' and gave new industrial towns ***MPs***. It also gave many middle class men the right to vote.

1867 Second Reform Act
Passed into law in 1867 by the ***Conservative*** government after much debate. This Act gave more people the right to vote, including some working-class men.

1872 Ballot Act
Passed into law in 1872 by the ***Liberal*** government. This ensured that all voting took place in secret, as we do now, so that people would not feel pressured to vote in a particular way (for example, by their landlords or bosses).

1883 Corrupt Practices Act
Passed into law in 1883 by the ***Liberal*** government. This Act helped stop ***corruption*** in elections by placing limits on what ***candidates*** could spend on election campaigning and making sure that they published what they had spent.

1884 Third Reform Act
Passed into law in 1884 by the ***Liberal*** government. This gave more working class people the vote by making the rules to qualify the same if you lived in the town or the country. However, it still depended on whether or not you owned property or how much rent you paid.

1885 Redistribution Act
Passed into law in 1885 by the ***Liberal*** government. This Act changed which communities had ***MPs***, making sure that for the first time ***constituencies*** had roughly the same numbers of voters.



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1776-1785	***American Revolution*** and war with Britain
1789	Outbreak of the ***French Revolution***
1790	Edmund Burke publishes 'Reflections on the Revolution in France'
1791	Thomas Paine publishes 'The Rights of Man' in response
1793	Outbreak of the war with France
1799	Napoleon seizes power in France
1801	Act of Union with Ireland
1815	The Battle of Waterloo ends the ***Napoleonic Wars***
1819	The '***Peterloo***' massacre followed by the 'Six Acts' (see Lancashire)
1829	Catholics get the right to vote
1830	***Earl Grey*** becomes Prime Minister
1831	Bristol and other Reform riots (after the first ***Reform Bill*** is rejected by the House of Lords)
1832	The ***'Great' Reform Act***
1833	Factory Act regulates child labour
1834	The ***New Poor Law*** leads to more workhouses
1837	Victoria becomes queen
1838	The '***People's Charter***' is launched in Glasgow
1839	The first ***Chartist*** petition is rejected by Parliament
	The Newport Uprising fails (see Monmouth)
1848	Last mass ***Chartist*** rally at Kennington, London (see Feargus O'Connor)
1854-6	Crimean War
1866	The 'Hyde Park riot's (see Marylebone, London)
1867	John Stuart Mill asks Parliament to include votes for women – this is rejected
	The ***Second Reform Act*** is passed
1872	The ***Ballot Act*** is passed; first vote in secret at Pontefract, Yorkshire
1883	The ***Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act*** is passed
1884	The ***Third Reform Act*** is passed
1885	The ***Redistribution Act*** is passed
1893	Independent Labour Party (the forerunner to the Labour Party) founded

THE HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT
British Political, Social & Local History



For Reference: Glossary

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained in other sections of the Glossary, terms underlined have their own articles)

Act – another word for a law.

American Revolution – This took place between 1776 and 1785. Colonists in America rejected rule by Britain, largely because they had no say in how their colonies were taxed or governed. After a long war, the colonists won and formed the United States of America. In Britain, the Revolution helped to spread new political ideas, such as the belief that more people should have the right to vote.

Amendment – A change made to a Parliamentary ***Bill***. After a bill (a draft law) had been introduced in Parliament, ***MPs*** would debate it and suggest changes called 'amendments'. MPs would be able to vote on whether or not to include these changes before they voted on the whole bill.

Attorney General – The lawyer who gives legal advice to the government. He usually attends ***cabinet*** meetings.

Autocratic – A system where power is held by just one person (for example, a king or dictator). Laws are often made without consideration of ordinary people.

Cabinet – the term for the leading government ministers, led by the Prime Minister.

Candidates – People standing for election to Parliament, before they become ***MPs***.

Censorship – Government control over what can or cannot be published. This could be used against texts which promoted political reform.

Chartists – A group of campaigners for reform that benefited working class people (including Feargus O'Connor and Thomas Attwood). They became known as Chartists because of the ***People's Charter*** which expressed their demands in 'Six Points'.

Conservative – A new political party that emerged in the mid-19th Century from the old ***Tory*** party. They were more open to reform that the Tories, but wanted it to be moderate and take place slowly. They were not just supported by the very rich, but also by some of the middle and working classes.

Constituency – A constituency is the geographical area that an ***MP*** represents. Before 1832 the constituencies in Britain had often been created many years before, sometimes hundreds of years before and no longer had any bearing on the numbers of people leaving there or the importance of the area.

Corn Laws – A series of laws passed between 1815 and 1846. They imposed taxes on grain coming in from outside Britain. This meant that food prices were high, which was good for the large landowners who grew crops, but meant that basic foods such as bread were very expensive for the poor.

Corruption – Corruption is the practice of taking money in order to do a favour for the person who paid you. For example, before the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act ***candidates*** would pay voters 'bribes' in the form of money or even alcohol so they would vote for them.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) – Conservative party leader who was influential in forming the party and increasing its appeal to the middle and working classes. He was Prime Minister twice, once in 1868 and again in 1874-80. He was influential in the 1865-68 Parliament which passed the ***1867 Reform Act***. He was also famous for his battles with Liberal leader ***William Gladstone***.

French Revolution – A series of popular uprisings in France, beginning in 1789, against the unpopular government of King Louis XVI. The revolutionaries were inspired by ideas about democracy and wanted a say in how they were governed. When the revolution started reforms were quite moderate, but they became more and more extreme, including the 'terror' in 1793-94 when thousands were killed. Louis and his family were executed, a republic was declared and France was soon at war with the rest of Europe, including Britain. The Revolution period ended in 1799 when Napoleon Bonaparte seized power.

Charles, Earl Grey (1764-1845) – A wealthy landowner and leading ***Whig*** politician who was in favour of some political reform. He was Prime Minister between 1830 and 1834 and his government passed the **1832 'Great' Reform Act**, the **New Poor Law** and started the process of ending slavery in the British Empire.

William Gladstone (1808-1898) – A moderate ***Tory*** at the beginning of his career, he became leader of the **Liberal** party. He was Prime Minister four times, 1868-74, 1880-1885, 1886 and 1892-94 and was famous for his reforms, including those of the 1880-1885 Parliament. He famously had a long rivalry with ***Conservative Benjamin Disraeli***.

Home Secretary – The ***cabinet*** minister in charge of internal matters, such as the police.

Hung, drawn and quartered – A gruesome punishment for men convicted of high treason. The traitor was hanged until they were nearly dead, then cut down and disembowelled whilst still alive. Finally, their limbs and head were cut off. It was first used in the 13th century.

Industrial Revolution – A change in the way that goods were made that occurred in Britain between the mid-18th century to the mid-19th century. New technologies, such as steam power, and methods, such as factories, meant that goods could be made in large numbers and much more cheaply. It had major economic and social consequences. People moved from working on the land to working in factories leading to the growth of large new towns. New 'classes' emerged, such as the middle classes who owned or managed factories, and the working classes who worked in them.

Liberal – A new political party that emerged in the mid-19th Century formed of ***Whigs, radicals*** and some. This party was generally more in favour of business and manufacturing, and when in government introduced many different reforms. (In the 1980s, this party joined with another to become the Liberal Democrat party).

Mass-petitioning – A way of peacefully protesting for political reform. A statement of ideas or 'petition' was then signed by many people to show their agreement with it. The belief was that if thousands of people demonstrated to Parliament that they wanted things to change Parliament would have to listen to them. The most famous in this period were the ***Chartists***.

Member of Parliament, MP - An MP is someone who is elected to Parliament and represents a ***constituency***. The constituency is the geographical area that the MP acts on behave of.

Militia – A local military force made up of volunteers. With no real police force during the early part of this period, the government often had to rely on volunteers to police protests or marches. Protests could turn violent (sometimes thanks to the militias as in ***'Peterloo'***!). The militias were often made up of young, rich men who were opposed to reform. They were also often very badly trained and not easy to control.

'Moral force' and 'Physical force' Chartism – A way of describing a split between different types of ***Chartists***. 'Moral force' Chartists supported peaceful methods of protest only. 'Physical force' Chartists argued that the movement should consider using violence to achieve their goals.

Napoleonic Wars – A series of wars between France (led by Napoleon Bonaparte) and other European countries, including Britain, between 1805 and 1815. At the height of Napoleon's power his empire covered most of Western Europe and parts of Poland, but he was eventually defeated at Waterloo in 1815. In Britain, fighting these wars had led to increased government control over the population and laws against those who wanted political reform.

The opposition – The party (or parties) in Parliament that had fewer ***MPs*** than the government party (or parties). Just like today, they often opposed the government's policies and voted against them.

People's Charter/ The 'Six Points' – the document which gave its name to the ***Chartists***. Announced to the public in Glasgow in 1838, it put forward six demands for political reform, known as the 'Six Points'. These were: the right to vote for all men over 21, you no longer had to own property to be an ***MP***, annual elections to Parliament, equal numbers of voters in each constituency, pay for MPs, and vote by ***secret ballot***. These united many working class people with different ideas behind one programme. By 1918 all but one of these demands had been met.

'Peterloo' – The name given to the events in St Peter's Fields, Manchester on 16 August 1819. A peaceful, pro-reform ***rally*** was attended by 60,000-80,000 people, but the authorities panicked and sent the ***militia*** in to the crowds armed with swords. At least 11 people were killed and 400-600 injured. You can find out more in Lancashire.

Poor Law – Also known as the 'New Poor Law'. In the nineteenth century, people who could not work because they were sick or because they could not find any work were cared for by local government. In 1834 ***Earl Grey***'s government (see 1830-32 Parliament(s)) passed measures to try to make this system the same everywhere in the country and less expensive. The law said that the poor could only receive help in workhouses – which were hated by many because of the harsh conditions in them. This law was very unpopular amongst the working classes who had nowhere else to turn if they lost their jobs or could not work because of sickness or injury.

Radical/radicals – People or politicians who wanted major changes to the system of government, often very quickly. The term is used for people who argued for some very different changes, but they all wanted change to the system.

Rallies – A way of peacefully protesting for political reform. People would gather together in a meeting (also called a 'rally' or 'march') to listen to speakers who called for reform. The belief was that if thousands of people demonstrated to Parliament that they wanted things to change Parliament would have to listen to them.

Redistribution of seats – the term for changing where ***MPs represent*** in Parliament. In the early part of this period some towns or areas had few people living in them but still had an MP, whereas other large towns like Manchester or Birmingham had no MP. Seats were 'redistributed' by taking them from the places with few people living in them and given to the areas where more people lived.

Reform Bills/Reform Acts – A 'Reform Bill' is a draft law presented to Parliament for ***MPs*** and Lords to debate and vote on. Once MPs and Lords agreed to pass the bill it became a law, or an 'Act'. The term 'Reform Acts' refers to those laws which changed the political system, such as who could vote.

Represented/representation – The principle that ***MPs*** should look after the interests of those who voted for them. Many in this period felt that because they could not vote or if where they lived had no MP, then there was no one in Parliament who cared about how they lived or made laws to help them.

Repressive measures – Actions taken by governments against a particular group. In this period, these were often used against those who called for reform. They could include banning public meetings or marches, stopping people from printing newspapers or books which argued for reform, and arresting people who broke these rules.

Revolution – the violent overthrow of a governmental system, as in the ***French Revolution***.

Rotten/pocket boroughs – These were towns or areas that had once been important, but no longer had many people living there. Because they used to be important they often had ***MPs***. By the nineteenth century rich landowners could buy land in these areas and decide who became the MP. The most infamous was Old Sarum. Some rich landowners could control many MPs this way. People opposed this system as these MPs did not care about the interests of ordinary people, just the rich landowners who controlled their election.

Secret Ballot – A way of casting your vote in secret. This was to prevent people, such as landlords or bosses, from pressurising people to vote for a certain ***candidate***. This is how we vote now, by marking a cross next to a candidate's name on a ballot paper in a private booth.

Special Constables – Volunteers who are given the powers of policemen for a short period of time. They could be used at times when the government felt extra policemen were needed, such as before big political ***rallies***.

Suffragettes/Suffragists – Campaigners to give women the right to vote. The 'Suffragettes' became the name for those who were happy to use violence to achieve the vote, such as Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union. The 'Suffragists' favoured more peaceful protest, such as Millicent Fawcett's National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. 'Suffrage' is another word for the right to vote.

Tories – At the beginning of this period political parties were not as organised as they are today, instead there were looser groups of ***MPs*** who tended to agree on similar ideas. The Tories were a group who were very protective of the Church of England, interested in the rights of large landowners, and did not generally support reform. The Tories were in power for much of the early part of the 19th century.

Transportation – A form of punishment for criminal activities. Prisoners were sent to colonies in Australia instead of a death sentence. Although they were often only sentenced to a few years in prison, many never returned to Britain.

Ultra-Tories – A group of ***Tories*** (including Sir Richard Vyvyan) who were so opposed to any reform they stopped supporting the ***Duke of Wellington*** over his plans to let Catholics vote (Catholics were not allowed to vote before 1829). In the end this led to ***Earl Grey*** coming to power and passing the ***1832 'Great' Reform Act***!

Welfare state – The term used to describe a government system that looks after the economic and social well-being of its people. Measures such as unemployment insurance or healthcare are paid for by taxes. This means that everyone can receive them, whether they are rich or poor. For example in modern Britain the NHS is paid for by taxes so everyone can use it for free when they need to. In the early nineteenth century this system did not exist.

Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) – A brilliant military commander during the ***Napoleonic Wars***. He led British and Allied armies against Napoleon and won a famous victory at Waterloo in 1815. Wellington was also a ***Tory*** politician who opposed many reforms. He was Prime Minister between 1828-1830 and later in 1834 for a short time.

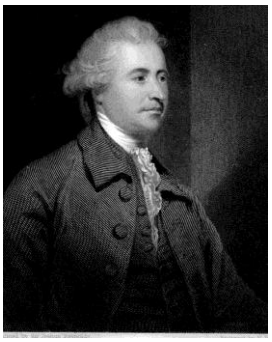
Whigs - At the beginning of this period political parties were not as organised as they are today, instead there were looser groups of ***MPs*** who tended to agree on similar ideas. The Whigs were in favour of moderate reform, believing that slow reforms would prevent a ***revolution*** in Britain. They were also more likely to be involved in the new manufacturing industries. They came to power in 1830 and passed the 1832 Reform Act.



Articles – Lesson 1: The political system before 1832

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained further in the Glossary, terms underlined have their own articles)

Edmund Burke (MP biography)
1729-1797 Dublin, Ireland and Buckinghamshire



Edmund Burke
After original by Joshua Reynolds

Edmund Burke was born in Dublin, but he moved to London as a young man to start a career as a writer or politician. He was soon known for his charm and personality. In 1765 he became an ***MP***.

Burke soon made alliances with leading ***Whig*** politicians, and was attracted to reforming causes. He attacked the British government during the ***American Revolution*** and strongly criticised the administration of India for its ***corruption***.

Yet Burke's career and political views were changed after the ***French Revolution*** in 1789. In France, people rose up against the ***autocratic*** rule of the king, Louis XVI, and demanded more political rights and a say in political decisions. Many people who supported reform in Britain initially welcomed the revolution, including Burke's political allies.

Burke himself was deeply worried by the ***French Revolution***. In 1790 he wrote a famous book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which predicted that the ***revolution*** would soon become violent and chaotic. He criticised the revolutionaries for throwing out everything in the old system and 'mindlessly' starting again from scratch, based on theories, but not practice or history. Burke argued that the British system was much better because reform took place slowly, based on practical considerations and history. Burke's work was also an attack on reformers in Britain who wanted to change the system.

Many of Burke's old allies disagreed with him. The most famous response to his work was from the ***radical*** Thomas Paine. Paine had been involved in the ***American Revolution***, and wrote a book called *The Rights of Man*. He argued that everyone had political rights. The government should guarantee these rights for everyone, and if they did not, ***revolution*** was an acceptable way to get them.

Many people supported Paine and wanted to ***radically*** change the system. However, as the **French Revolution** became more violent, more people came to support Burke's ideas. They were afraid of the chaos a ***revolution*** could bring. In 1793, Britain declared war on France. This made those who supported reform even more dangerous to Parliament. The Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, used **repressive** measures against pro-reform groups: he prevented them from meeting and publishing books and newspapers that put the case for reform. Many were arrested and Paine

himself was forced into exile. Those who had supported moderate reform before the French Revolution were also targeted.

Edmund Burke left Parliament in 1794 and in died in 1797 after a long illness. His writings and ideas remain highly influential to this day.

Did you know?
Burke is often known as the 'father of British conservatism' because of his writings.

Old Sarum (Constituency)
Borough in Wiltshire, Parliamentary constituency since 1295, 2 MPs

Old Sarum was one of the most infamous ***rotten boroughs*** before 1832. A rotten borough was a place that had the right to send ***MPs*** to Parliament because it had been an important town in the past, but very few people still lived there. Often the land (and the rights to vote that went with this land) was bought by rich landowners who then chose their own MP.

Today, Parliament tries to keep the number of voters in each ***constituency*** roughly equal, and every so often revises the boundaries of constituencies to reflect changes in population. Yet in the early nineteenth century, this did not happen. With the growth of new towns thanks to the ***Industrial Revolution***, the places that had ***MPs*** and the places where people lived were now very different. The new towns of Manchester and Birmingham did not elect their own MPs, but there were many ***rotten boroughs*** that did. There was lots of opportunity for rich landowners to have more influence over who was in Parliament.



Old Sarum by John Constable
© Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Old Sarum is on a hill close to Salisbury, Wiltshire. It was the site of a Norman Castle and Salisbury Cathedral was supposed to have been built there. It was because of the Cathedral that the settlement was given the right to send two ***MPs*** to Parliament. However, in 1219 the Cathedral was moved to 'New Sarum' – Salisbury – closer to the River Avon. From then on Old Sarum went in to decline.

By the nineteenth century all that was left was ruins and trees. Although there were two ***MPs***, no-one actually lived there! The people who owned the land also owned the right to vote for the MPs. In 1820 the land was bought by brothers Josiah du Pré and James Alexander, who made their money in India. They both immediately elected themselves to Parliament! Both consistently voted against reform.

Old Sarum was often mentioned in debates over the Reform Act as 'mounds', 'ditches' or 'ruins'. In 1831, the two brothers held their 'election' at 9am to avoid any trouble from protesters.

The constituency was abolished by the ***1832 'Great' Reform Act***, and the Alexander brothers never sat in Parliament again.

Did you know?
After the Old Sarum constituency was abolished, many reformers celebrated with funerals. The *Times* published a 'Lament to Old Sarum'.

Lancashire (Constituency)
County, Parliamentary Constituency since 13th Century, 2 MPs

In the early 19th century there were a number of new, growing towns in Lancashire, thanks to the ***Industrial Revolution*** and the growing cotton industry. However, many of these towns did not have their own ***MP***, and were only represented in Parliament by two county MPs who sat for the whole county. The area now known as Greater Manchester had a population of around one million at this time but still did not have an MP.

Many middle and working class people in Manchester were upset by their lack of ***representation*** in Parliament. After the end of the ***Napoleonic Wars*** many of these people also faced economic problems. Food prices were being kept high by government measures, known as the ***Corn Laws***, that prevented cheap corn from being imported in to Britain. Unemployment was high thanks to a slump in trade after the war and the return of former soldiers.

With no ***welfare state*** to support them, and no ***MP*** to argue for changes to the laws, many working people turned to ***radical*** protest. They formed reform organisations and published their ideas in local newspapers.

One of these societies, the Manchester Political Union, organised a pro-reform rally at St Peter's Fields, Manchester. They invited the famous Henry Hunt as the star speaker, and told those attending to be peaceful: they should not bring weapons or alcohol. Crowds of between 60,000 and 80,000 men, women and children, many dressed in their 'Sunday best', arrived to hear the speakers.

However, the size of the meetings caused the local authorities to panic. Before any speeches had taken place they decided to arrest the speakers and to remove the crowds. ***Militia cavalrymen***, armed with sabres (swords), charged in to the crowds. The figures vary but at least 11 people died and between 400 and 600 were injured. Onlookers were horrified and the violence was widely reported across the country. Hunt and his fellow-speakers were arrested.

The event became known as the '***Peterloo massacre***', named after the 1815 Battle of Waterloo. Privately, even the ***Tory*** government thought the local authorities had acted stupidly. However, the events led to even more legislation against ***radical*** groups. The 'Six Acts' prevented radical groups meeting, imposed taxes on their newspapers and tightened rules on ***censorship***. Peterloo convinced many in the ***Whig opposition*** that Parliamentary reform was needed.

In the 1832 Great Reform Act, Manchester gained its first ***MPs.***

Did you know?
The Free Trade Hall now stands on the site of St Peter's Fields. For many years it was a concert hall, it is now a hotel.

Henry Hunt (MP biography)
1773-1835, Wiltshire

Henry Hunt was one of the most famous early ***radical*** leaders. He was an athletic, handsome man, who later had a reputation for thinking a little too much of himself! Yet, he became a hero to many 19th century reformers because of his abilities as a great speaker and his commitment to non-violent reform.

Hunt was a 'gentleman farmer' from Wiltshire, and in his younger years he supported the government against reformers. However, his political views began to change after he was sent to prison in 1800. Hunt had volunteered for a local ***militia***, yet he got in trouble for challenging his commanding officer to a duel! In prison, his politics became much more ***radical***.

He soon gained a reputation as a fantastic speaker who could inspire and control a crowd. He stood for Parliament in Bristol in 1812. He was called the 'people's candidate', but he lost the election. Moving to London, he regularly spoke at ***rallies*** in the city. He favoured peaceful, ***mass-petitioning*** campaigns and worked against those who wanted to use violence to change the system. At a rally on 21 July 1819 in Smithfield, London, he stopped the crowd from becoming violent when one of the speakers was arrested.

This power over large crowds, despite his peaceful message, scared many in power. This was why the local authorities decided to arrest him at the ***'Peterloo'*** meeting in Manchester, Lancashire. Hunt first faced charges of high treason, but they were reduced. Despite an impressive and well-publicised defence, Hunt lost his case and was imprisoned for two years.

Hunt remained influential and popular. He was elected as ***MP*** for Preston in 1830. Yet despite making over 1000 speeches in Parliament he was much better at addressing crowds than he was as an MP! He had mixed feelings about the ***1832 'Great' Reform Act***, believing that it did not go far enough. He lost his seat in 1832.

Hunt died in 1835, but his tactics of ***mass-petitioning*** and non-violent ***rallies*** were later taken up by many ***Chartists***.

Did you know?
Hunt lived a wilder lifestyle before his political career. He left his wife for his mistress, which was very unusual at the time – and greatly frowned upon!

Additional Materials

MPs Section Introduction

In this section you will learn about the ***MPs*** – the men who sat in Parliament – and how they shaped the different ***Reform Acts***.

At the start of this period, many ***MPs*** were very wealthy landowners. You needed to be wealthy to become an MP – for a start, you were supposed to own a certain amount of property before you could even stand for election. MPs were not paid when they were in Parliament, so people who needed to work for a living could not become an MP.

Then, many elections were expensive. The rules about who could vote were different depending on where you lived. In many constituencies, to win you needed to ***bribe*** voters or offer them 'treats' – like alcohol – so they would vote for you! In some places the right to vote itself was tied to whether you owned land. Wealthy men could simply buy all the land in one of these '***rotten boroughs***' and choose who the ***MP*** was themselves!

The changes that took place in this period not only gave more people the right to vote, but also changed how MPs were elected so there was less ***corruption***. By the end of the nineteenth century, although MPs were not paid until 1911, there was less need to be rich to become an MP.

Many of the ***MPs*** discussed in this section supported reform – although some did not. Others felt that if they didn't offer some changes then there would be a revolution, so it was best to pass some reforms to avoid this. They all had an impact on how the changes took place.

Constituencies Section Introduction

In this section you will learn about events outside Parliament, that took place in the parliamentary ***constituencies*** around the country, that influenced ***MPs***.

Political life before 1832

The ***Industrial Revolution*** had brought major changes to the country. As new industries and new work patterns grew up, new 'middle' and 'working' classes emerged. They also wanted their say in how the country was run. The only way they could get it was to convince the ***MPs*** to let them have a say. They did this through campaigning or protest.



From Rowlandson's 'Sketches of the Lower Orders', London, 1820

At the start of this period, most people in power were wealthy landowners. They passed laws in Parliament that supported their own interests – such as the ***Corn Laws*** that prevented cheap corn from being imported in to Britain. This kept food prices high, so the landowners made lots of profit from their large farms. However, this was bad news for people who needed to buy food like bread to live, like those living in the towns, or those in the countryside who didn't own land. The middle classes who owned factories in the towns were annoyed as they had to pay their workers higher wages so they

could buy expensive bread. It was much more serious for the poor – they struggled to be able to buy enough food!

These articles explain what ordinary people and groups did to try and influence Parliament to change the system. At the start of the period there were laws to stop political movements. Sometimes protest could be very dangerous! This meant that campaigners could be arrested, and in some cases violence was used to stop them. There were often splits between those in the protest movements who wanted to use violence to help make their point, and those who thought that peaceful methods, such as ***mass petitioning*** or ***marching*** would be more convincing.



Articles – Lesson 2: 1832 Reform Act

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained further in the Glossary, terms underlined have their own articles)

1830-1832 Parliament(s)
Whig government, Prime Minister: ***Charles, Earl Grey***

Pressure had been growing for reform since the 1790s as many middle and working class people could not vote, or the places they lived in were not ***represented*** in Parliament. Many working class people also faced economic hardship (see articles on Edmund Burke, Henry Hunt, Old Sarum and Lancashire). The ***Tory*** government had blocked moves for reform.

In 1830 the ***Tory*** government led by the ***Duke of Wellington***, hero of the ***Napoleonic Wars***, won the election. However, just a few months later it lost the support of a group of MPs opposed to any reform at all (known as the ***Ultra-Tories***, such as Sir Richard Vyvyan). This meant that Wellington had to resign, and a new ***Whig*** government, led by ***Earl Grey***, came in to power. From the start this government wanted to reform the system.

Earl Grey was an unlikely reformer. He was himself a wealthy landowner and many of those in his government were related to him. They all believed, however, that the system needed reform otherwise there was a risk that people would turn to violence to get their political rights. More disturbances, like that at '***Peterloo***' in Lancashire might follow.



'Reform jugs', 1831-32 © Philip Salmon

Grey's government introduced a ***Reform Bill*** in 1831, written largely by Lord John Russell. It was first defeated in the House of Commons, so the government held an election to ask for more support. They won the election, and tried to pass the Bill again. This time the House of Lords rejected it. Following riots across the country, such as those in Bristol, Grey asked the king, William IV, for his support to pass the Bill. When he agreed, the House of Lords gave in, and the ***'Great' Reform Act*** became law in June 1832.

Despite the name given to it by its supporters, historians now think that the reforms in the ***'Great' Reform Act*** were quite moderate. It did remove many '***rotten boroughs***' (such as Old Sarum) that had fewer than 2,000 voters but still elected 2 MPs. It gave these parliamentary seats to the growing industrial towns, such as Manchester and Birmingham. The qualification to vote was also standardised in towns across the country – if you were a man and lived in property worth £10, you

could vote. This meant that some people actually lost the right to vote, but overall about one fifth of men could vote after 1832.

These changes meant that the middle classes and those in industrial towns now had a say in Parliament. There were other reforms in the 1830s, such as measures to reform local government, improve conditions in factories and, more controversially, the ***Poor Law*** which established workhouses.

However, working class people did not gain any new political rights, and many hated the ***Poor Law***. Pressure for more reform would continue.

Did you know?
Earl Grey gave his name to 'Earl Grey' tea.

Lord John Russell (MP biography)
1792-1878, London

Lord John Russell was the third son of the duke of Bedford, an important ***Whig*** family. Outside Parliament he was also an author and historian. He was a long-time supporter of reform. His historical studies led him to believe that ***revolutions*** could be avoided if moderate reforms were passed.

He entered Parliament in 1813, and by the 1820s emerged as the leading ***Whig*** spokesman on reform. He condemned the '***Peterloo***' massacre in Lancashire and argued that it would never have happened if Manchester had its own ***MP***. On 25 April 1822 he gave a famous pro-reform speech in Parliament. He argued that the government was 'obliged to enforce, by arms, obedience to acts of this House – which, according to every just theory, are supposed to emanate from the people themselves.'

When ***Earl Grey*** came to power in 1830, Russell was placed on the committee to draft a ***Reform Bill***. His ideas shaped the measure itself: he argued that the population numbers recorded in the 1821 census should be the basis for which constituencies kept or lost their ***MPs***, and which towns should get new MPs. Russell's beliefs were quite moderate, however. He did not believe that everyone should have the right to vote, and argued against introducing the ***secret ballot*** at elections.

Russell was given the job of managing the ***Reform Bill*** in Parliament. In his speech explaining it to the House of Commons, he argued it 'would not advance democracy, but it would make the constitution [political system] harmonize with the present state of the people.' After the election of 1831 Russell became a full ***cabinet*** member. He enjoyed a long cabinet career and was twice Prime Minister, although historians argue that his record as Prime Minister was less successful than his time in cabinet.

Did you know?
Lord Russell was one of the most popular politicians in the country after the Reform Bill. There was a craze for 'Reform memorabilia' commemorating him and other members of the government.

Sir Richard Vyvyan (MP biography)
1800-1879, Cornwall

Sir Richard Vyvyan was born to an old, landowning Cornish family. He became one of the leaders of the '***Ultra-Tories***' – a group who opposed reform.

In the 1820s, no Catholics were able to vote. Yet the ***Duke of Wellington***'s government changed this in 1829. For Vyvyan and the other ***Ultra-Tories***, this should not have happened. They believed that Catholics had a greater loyalty to the Pope in Rome than the British Parliament (a view that many people held in Britain since the seventeenth century).

Vyvyan did believe in a small amount of slow reform, but believed the ***Reform Bill*** introduced by Lord Russell went much too far. It was not 'safe at any time to attempt an entire change' in the system. He believed reform was a 'fearful experiment'. He felt that the unrest in the country was due to economic difficulties, not a desire for political reform, so these would remain.

Vyvyan lost the support of his own constituents at the 1831 election. Luckily he had friends who could use their influence to help get him elected in another seat! He continued to oppose the ***Reform Bill*** right until the end. In June 1832 he wrote that if the bill passed: 'I do not believe that any earthly power can save this country from a social ***revolution***.'

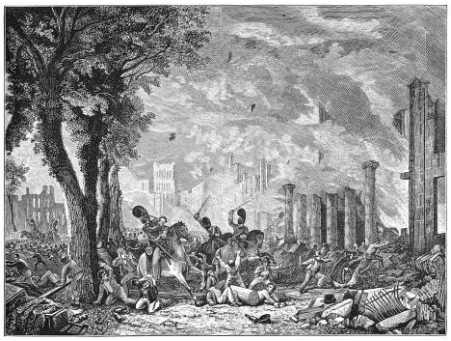
After the ***Great Reform Act*** Vyvyan kept his seat, but he lost many of his political allies who re-joined the ***Tories***. He remained in Parliament until 1851, and died in 1879.

Did you know?
Sir Richard Vyvyan was a philosopher, and a member of the Royal Society.

Bristol (Constituency)
Borough in Gloucestershire, Parliamentary constituency since mid-12th century, 2 MPs

Bristol in 1831 had a population of 59,034, but only 6,385 men could vote. They sent two ***MPs*** to Parliament, but tensions were high. The city faced economic difficulties after it was overtaken by other cities, like Liverpool, as the most important port in England.

In 1831 the House of Lords rejected the ***Reform Bill***. This rejection led to rioting around the country. In Nottingham, the castle (home to the anti-reform Duke of Newcastle) was attacked.


Rioters in Queen's Square, Bristol

In Bristol, the riots lasted for three days at the end of October, and caused a large amount of damage. They began when an anti-reform judge, Sir Charles Wetherell, arrived at a court on 29 October. Wetherall's carriage was pelted by stones and a mob soon cornered him in the city's Mansion House. He was forced to flee from the rooftop.

The violence continued. On the next day the rioters attacked the Mansion House, gaol [prison] and Bishop's palace.

Troops and ***militiamen*** refused to open fire on the rioters. On the third day the army commander in Bristol, Lieutenant-Colonel Brereton, decided it was time to send in the troops. Hundreds were said to have died in the violence.

Many rioters were arrested: 4 were executed, 29 ***transported*** to Australia and 43 imprisoned. The ***militia*** commander, Brereton, was ***court-martialled*** for being too 'cautious and compassionate' to the rioters. Before a judgement was reached Brereton committed suicide.

Over £300,000 worth of damage was caused in Bristol. Events in the city shocked many, and lots of people feared that this violence would spread if the 1830-32 Parliament(s) did not pass the Reform Bill. The riots helped convince the King to back Earl Grey in his plans for reform.

On 18 June 1832 a procession was held by organisations in the city to mark the passing of the Reform Act. The number of people who could vote in 1832 rose to 10,309. However, it was politics as usual in the town: in 1832 election the MPs were a ***Liberal*** and the '***Ultra-Tory***', Sir Richard Vyvyan.

Did you know?
There were plenty of women who rioted in Bristol in 1831. The Spectator reported on 5 November that the 'lower orders of females were particularly vociferous.' Despite this no woman would be able to vote until 1918.

Birmingham (Constituency)
Borough in Warwickshire, Parliamentary constituency since 1832, 2 MPs

Birmingham was one of the growing industrial towns that did not elect an ***MP*** before 1832. The town was an expanding manufacturing centre that produced

> '*every metallic article': keys and locks, pins, hinges and bolts, wire, chains, tubes, buckles, guns, steel pens, files, swords, tea trays, toys, screws, buttons, brassware, watches, cast iron, japanned and plated goods, and many others*.

The town was one of the centres of campaigning for electoral reform. A campaign was launched to take the right to elect ***MPs*** away from the ***rotten borough*** of East Retford and instead let Birmingham elect these two MPs. The plan was rejected in 1827. A local banker and campaigner, Thomas Attwood, decided to build more popular support for the reform campaign.

At a public meeting on 25 January 1830 the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) was formed. The BPU intended to use peaceful methods, such as petitioning and mass meetings, to gather support for parliamentary reform, and once ***Earl Grey*** became Prime Minister it wholeheartedly supported the ***Reform Bill***. Some historians have argued that there were few tensions between the middle and working classes in the city, whereas others have suggested that it was a 'temporary alliance' intended to just promote reform. Either way the BPU was extremely successful in rallying middle and working class support for the Reform Bill. Its peaceful methods were copied throughout the country.

In 1832 Birmingham gained two parliamentary seats – yet the town of 142,251 still only had 4,000 electors. ***Radical*** politics remained popular and Attwood, leader of the BPU, was one of the first ***MPs*** elected for Birmingham. Shortly afterwards the town also gained its first elected local council.

Attwood and others soon became disillusioned with Parliament. In the city, working class people did not see their lives improving. The BPU was restarted in the late 1830s and soon became involved in ***Chartism***, the working class movement that argued for votes for all men and working class involvement in politics. Attwood was chosen to present the first ***Chartist petition*** to Parliament.

However, the middle-class members of the BPU were uneasy with ***Chartism***, not agreeing with all of their aims. That summer, national Chartist meetings were held in the Bull Ring in Birmingham. The middle class leaders, who controlled the town council, were afraid of the movement. They used police from London and ***special constables*** to break up meetings and arrest speakers. In the tension after Parliament rejected the first ***Chartist petition***, this led to the 'Bull Ring riots' in July 1839. Damage costing over £20,000 was caused and many ***Chartists*** were arrested and ***transported*** to Australia.

Birmingham continued to grow, but thanks to the splits between the reformers became less politically ***radical***.

Did you know?
Birmingham was known as the 'toy shop of Europe' thanks to the levels of manufacturing.



Articles – Lesson 3: Chartism

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained further in the Glossary, terms underlined have their own articles)

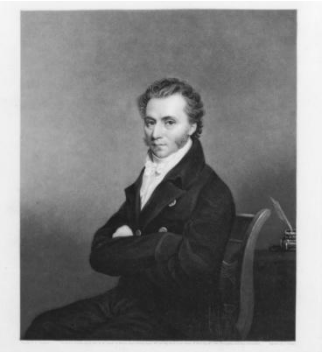
Introduction

Although the ***1832 Reform Act*** seemed ***radical*** to some for many it had not gone far enough. Too many people were still denied direct access to the political process. Those that did become ***MPs*** still did not do enough for ordinary people.

The Birmingham Political Union was restarted in the late 1830s and soon became involved in ***Chartism***, the working class movement that argued for votes for all men and working-class involvement in politics. It was led by the aim of the Six Points, these were: the right to vote for all men over 21, you no longer had to own property to be an ***MP***, annual elections to Parliament, equal numbers of voters in each ***constituency***, pay for MPs, and vote by ***Secret ballot***.

Thomas Attwood (MP biography)

1783-1856, Birmingham



Thomas Attwood,
© Palace of Westminster

Thomas Attwood was born in to a middle class Warwickshire manufacturing family. He joined the family bank and for much of his early years was conservative in his politics.

Attwood had, however, a genuine sympathy for the poor. His answer to their problems was to reform the currency, ideas that were rejected at the time as very strange, but today seem less so. When no-one in government would listen to his plans, he believed that if Parliament was reformed, they might do so!

In 1830 he formed the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) and united middle class and working class reformers in a non-violent campaign to support the ***1832 Reform Act***. He was a good speaker and for a time was considered one of the 'most influential men in England'.

After the *1832 'Great' Reform Act* Attwood was elected to Parliament for Birmingham. He was not very successful in Parliament, however. Without the support of allies or knowledge of how Parliament worked, few ***MPs*** would listen to his ideas about currency. They were soon bored of hearing about them!

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Attwood believed further reform was needed, and turned to the growing ***Chartist*** movement. Their leaders welcomed him because of his experience with the BPU. Although he had some difficulties accepting the ***Charter's Six Points***, in particular the demand for every man to be able to vote, he joined Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor on the platform at Glasgow in August 1838 when the first ***Chartist petition*** was launched.

Attwood was known as a '**moral force' Chartist** – one who opposed violence. Yet he argued:

> 'No blood shall be shed by us; but if our enemies shed blood—if they attack the people—they must take the consequences on their own heads'

Attwood presented the first **Chartist petition**, which had 1,280,958 signatures, to Parliament in June 1839. In July, he suggested that Parliament form a committee to discuss it, but this was rejected by 235 votes to 46. The rejection of the petition led to rioting across the country, also in Birmingham and an armed uprising in Newport, South Wales (see Monmouth).

Attwood retired as an ***MP*** the year after and mostly stood back from political life, disappointed with the failure of his efforts. He died, probably of Parkinson's disease, in 1856.

Did you know?
Attwood was described by future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli as 'a provincial banker labouring under a financial monomania.'

Feargus O'Connor (MP biography)
1796-1855, Ireland and Northern England

Feargus O'Connor was born in Ireland to a wealthy Protestant family. A 'physically imposing' man, 'possessed of enormous energy and gentlemanly bearing', O'Connor first trained as a lawyer before becoming involved in Irish politics. His talents as an 'extraordinary' public speaker were revealed, but he fell out with Irish political leaders and came to England.

Once in England, he soon became involved in working-class political movements, such as Northern anti-***Poor Law*** groups. The 1834 Poor Law tried to make local government support for the unemployed or sick the same across the country, and also tried to keep costs down. The law introduced workhouses around the country and insisted that any support – such as food – could only be given inside them. Many working class people, who could lose their jobs easily if trade conditions were difficult, hated the workhouses because of their harsh conditions. However, there was no other option if you were injured, unwell or simply lost your job.

O'Connor's work with anti-***Poor Law*** groups led him to other working class political movements. He was made a member of the ***London Working Men's Association*** in November 1836, the group formed by ***William Lovett*** that wrote the ***People's Charter***. O'Connor became more involved with ***Chartism***. His newspaper, the *Northern Star*, became the unofficial journal of the movement. He helped create links with Thomas Attwood and the Birmingham Political Union, and supported the first ***Chartist petition*** launched in Glasgow in 1838.

Once Parliament rejected the ***People's Charter***, O'Connor became associated with the '***physical force***' Chartists, who argued that the time had come to use violence to gain political rights. For example, he probably knew about, although wasn't involved in, the Newport Rising (see Monmouth). After this the movement began to split apart.

In the ***repression*** that followed the failed rising, O'Connor was arrested. He was accused of encouraging rebellion in the *Northern Star*. He was imprisoned for 18 months but continued to write from prison. O'Connor remained ***Chartism***'s leading figure in the 1840s, and was elected to Parliament as ***MP*** for Nottingham in July 1847.

During 1848 the Chartists launched the third and final ***Chartist petition***. Over 5 million signatures were said to have been collected, and at a mass meeting in Kennington Common, London on 10 April O'Connor addressed the crowd. However, the government was very nervous about this rally. Over 85,000 ***special constables*** and 8,000 troops were in place to meet between 20,000 and 50,000 ***Chartists***. Fearful of the violence that could occur if the meeting marched to Parliament to present the petition, O'Connor convinced the crowd to let him deliver it instead. On doing so the petition was again rejected by Parliament.



Kennington Common, Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2014

After 1848 ***Chartism*** went into decline. In 1851 O'Connor displayed the first signs of serious mental illness, and had to be admitted to an asylum. He died in 1855 having given up most of his money to the movement. O'Connor is still remembered by historians as one of the major Chartist figures.

Did you know?
Parliament's clerks counted under two million signatures on the third ***Chartist petition***, and many of these were false – Queen Victoria and the ***Duke of Wellington*** had apparently signed it!

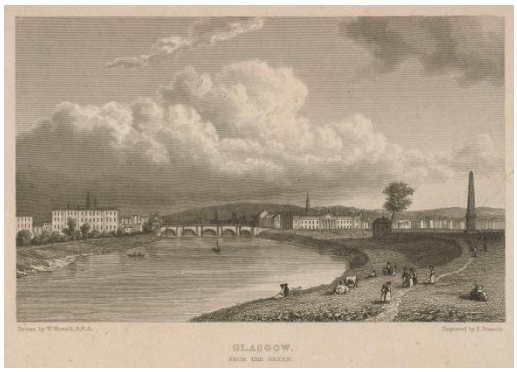
Glasgow (Constituency)
Borough in Lanarkshire, Scotland. Constituency since 1832, 2 MPs

Before 1832 Glasgow was one of the towns **represented** in Parliament in the 'Clyde Burghs' constituency. After 1832 the town itself was given two ***MPs***. The city had been an important port from the 18th century onwards, and in the nineteenth century it rapidly industrialised. By the 1820s its population was bigger than Edinburgh and its industries included shipbuilding, engineering and textiles.

Because of this, Glasgow was an important working class centre. In May 1838 the town's unions organised a mass rally on Glasgow Green. A number of people spoke at the meeting, including Thomas Attwood and Feargus O'Connor, but it was later remembered for the launch of the '***People's Charter***'.

The Charter had been mostly written by ***William Lovett***, a former draper and founder member of the ***London Working Men's Association***. He decided to present working class political demands in a Charter. His 'Six Points' were:

- The right to vote for all men over 21
- ***MPs*** no longer had to own property
- Annual elections to Parliament
- Equal constituency sizes
- MPs should be paid
- Vote by ***secret ballot***



Glasgow from the Green, c19th Century
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2014

At Glasgow Green, the charter was announced to the public for the first time. 150,000 people attended the rally, and the ***Six Points*** soon caught on. The ***Chartists***, as they became known, launched a ***mass petition*** across the country collecting signatures in support. Rallies took place in many of the industrial towns of Britain.

The ***Six Points*** united many people in the working class with different political ideas. Taken together, they were reforms that would allow the working classes to both vote and become MPs – for example by making sure that MPs were paid.

The first Charter collected over 1 million signatures before it was presented to Parliament by Thomas Attwood. After it was rejected, the ***Chartist*** movement began to split over what moves to take next.

Although the ***Six Points*** were not implemented in the 1840s, only one – annual elections – was not in place by 1918.

Did you know?
There were in total three Chartist petitions to Parliament, in 1839, 1842 and 1848.

Monmouth (Constituency)
Borough in Monmouthshire, South Wales from 1660, 1 MP

The ***constituency*** of Monmouth represented the towns of Newport, Monmouth and Usk.

Although the ***MPs*** for Monmouth were Whigs or Conservatives, many people in South East Wales were politically ***radical*** in the first half of the 19th century. The mines and ironworks of the valleys led to increased population growth and hard working conditions. Men could lose their jobs if coal or steel prices fell and there was no ***welfare state*** to support them. Relations between the mine and steelworks owners and the workers were often bad, and there were a number of strikes.

In the 1830s South Wales saw a rise in support for ***Chartism***. The movement's leader in the area was Henry Vincent, who published the newspaper *The Western Vindicator*. Facing economic difficulties and with no political voice, many working-class men and women supported the movement in meetings and petitions.

After the first ***Chartist petition*** was rejected in 1839, many in the movement were split about what to do next. Some argued for a national strike, whereas others wanted a violent uprising to demand working class political rights.

In November, 5000 men marched on Newport under the leadership of John Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones. It is unclear exactly what they had planned. Some historians believe that they hoped to start an uprising, especially as a number of ***Chartists*** were carrying weapons. Others have argued that most men were marching to protest about the arrest of Henry Vincent, who was being held in the city's Westgate Hotel, and the weapons were just to protect themselves.

The marchers arrived outside the Westgate Hotel, unaware that a small force of troops was waiting. At 9.20am a gun battle broke out between the ***Chartists*** and the soldiers, killing 22 and wounding over fifty marchers, and seriously wounding two soldiers. The leaders were arrested and initially sentenced to be ***hung, drawn and quartered*** – the punishment for treason – but this was reduced to ***transportation*** to Australia.

Despite the failure of the rising, there was still a large amount of sympathy for ***Chartism*** in South Wales throughout the 1840s when the movement gradually petered out.

Did you know?
The ***MP*** for Monmouth, Reginald Jones Blewitt, was a well-known critic of ***Chartism*** and his local paper, the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, often said so!

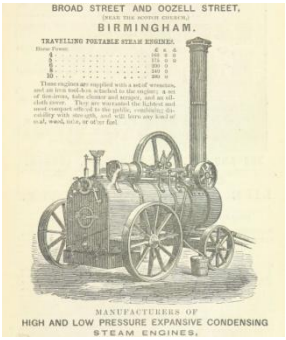
Additional Materials

Political Reform Topic Introduction

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of great change in Britain. This was especially the case for Parliament. At the start of the nineteenth century only a few, very rich people had any say in politics. By the end, many more people – although not everyone – could choose their ***Member of Parliament***.

The changes were driven by the ***Industrial Revolution*** and events abroad, such as the ***American*** and ***French Revolutions***.

In what historians call the '***Industrial Revolution***', new technologies were introduced into manufacturing. This meant that goods could be made in larger numbers and much more cheaply. It led to many major social changes. Many people moved from the countryside to new towns to work in the new factories. New 'classes' of people emerged – the wealthier middle classes, such as those who owned or managed the new factories, and the working classes who mostly worked in them. Generally, the people in these groups could not vote, and many felt that their interests were not ***represented*** in Parliament.



A new Steam Engine, 1857

For many in the working classes, lives were very hard. Some trades that had been well-paid were replaced by machines. The people who had worked in these trades either lost their jobs or had to accept much lower wages. In the countryside, machines replaced many jobs, leading to unemployment and low wages. If trade was bad, many employers cut their workers' jobs or wages. For those in the new towns, conditions were often dirty and overcrowded. Many died from diseases such as cholera, and working conditions could be dangerous.

There was little support for ordinary people if they lost their jobs or were injured: no ***welfare state*** to support them. When working people faced economic problems, pressure for political reform grew. They felt that if they had a say in politics, they would be able to improve their lives.

At around the same time, the ***American*** and ***French Revolutions*** introduced new ***radical*** political ideas. Some people started to think that more people had *the right* to have a say in how they were governed. Why should the landowners speak for everyone?

Glossary: Poor Law

Also known as the 'New Poor Law'. In the nineteenth century, people who could not work because they were sick or because they could not find any work were cared for by local government. In 1834 ***Earl Grey***'s government (see 1830-32 Parliament(s)) passed measures to try to make this system the same everywhere in the country and less expensive. The law said that the poor could only receive help in workhouses – which were hated by many because of the harsh conditions in them. This law was very unpopular amongst the working classes who had nowhere else to turn if they lost their jobs or could not work because of sickness or injury.

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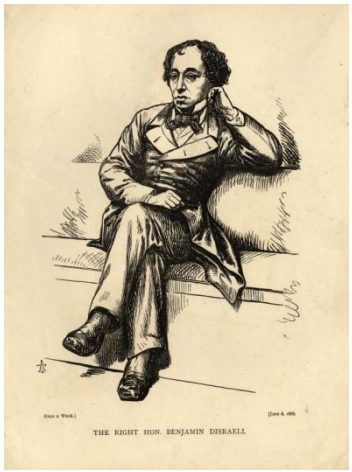
Articles - Lesson 4: 1867 Reform Act and 1872 Ballot Act

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained further in the Glossary, terms underlined have their own articles)

1865-1868 Parliament
Liberal (1865-66) and ***Conservative*** (1866-68) governments, Prime Ministers: Earl Russell (Liberal), Edward, Lord Derby and ***Benjamin Disraeli*** (Conservative)

In the mid-nineteenth century, after ***Chartism*** had lost support, Parliament grew less afraid of reform. For many years ***MPs*** debated how to continue to reform and give some working class men the vote. Very few wanted to give every man a vote, and only a few, such as John Stuart Mill, wanted votes for women too.

As with most mid-Victorian elections, in 1865 the ***Liberal*** party and their allies won the election. Lord John Russell became Prime Minister. He introduced a moderate ***Reform Bill***, which would have given some working-class men living in towns the vote.



Disraeli by 'A.T.', 1868
© NPG D4426

This was rejected, however. When a group of ***Liberals*** opposed it, Russell resigned, and for the first time since 1859 a ***Conservative*** (the successor to the ***Tory*** party) formed a government. Lord Derby became Prime Minister but the rising star – ***Benjamin Disraeli*** – became Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Disraeli launched the ***Conservatives'*** own ***Reform Bill*** – which ended up being much more radical than the ***Liberal*** version! There was opposition to the bill from some Conservatives. These argued that working class people were 'unfit' to vote – which certainly upset the working class men! Organisations who supported the ***Bill*** arranged marches and petitions around the country to try and influence Parliament. One, called the ***Reform League***, was responsible for the 'Hyde Park railings incident' in Marylebone, London.

With the support of the ***Liberals***, who suggested several ***amendments*** to the ***Bill***, it was passed. It went much further than anyone had expected – Derby said it was 'a leap into the dark.' It gave many more working class men in towns the vote, and made some changes to who could vote in the countryside (depending on what type of house they lived in). The number of men who could vote rose from 1.3 million to 2.45 million. Changes were made to the ***constituencies*** which could elect ***MPs***, although not on the same scale as in ***1832***.

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It would, as in ***1832***, change which towns could elect ***MPs***, based on how many people lived there.

Disraeli, who became ***Conservative*** leader in 1868 after Derby died, hoped that it would lead to working class votes for the Conservatives. In the 1868 election, however, the ***Liberals*** won again. ***William Gladstone*** became Prime Minister, and he reformed many parts of government. In the long-term, however, Disraeli was right, and a 'working-class Conservative' vote grew.

Did you know?
The ***reform bill*** proposed by ***Disraeli*** and Derby was changed so much as it passed through the Commons that one ***Conservative*** duke complained that only the first word, 'Whereas' (which is how all ***Acts*** of Parliament start), was the same in the original bill and the final Act!

John Stuart Mill (MP Biography)
1806-73, London

John Stuart Mill was one of the leading Victorian economists and philosophers. Born in London, he was the son of the Scottish philosopher James Mill. From a child he was raised to follow in his father's footsteps, and despite a nervous breakdown at the age of 20, he did. He believed that people should be free from most government control and wrote books on these issues, such as *On Liberty*.

By the 1860s, Mill had become involved in ***radical*** politics and causes such as women's rights. He was elected to Parliament for Westminster in 1865. He was well-respected in Parliament and played an important role in the reform debates.

He is remembered for being the first ***MP*** to argue that women should also be allowed to vote. On 20 May 1867 he introduced an ***amendment*** to the ***Reform Bill*** which would have replaced the word 'man' with 'person'. This would give women the right to vote on the same terms as men. It was rejected by 194 votes to 73.

Mill lost his seat in 1868 – and he was largely relieved! He continued, with his step-daughter Helen Taylor, to campaign for women's rights. He published *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. This argued that there was no justifiable reason for women to have fewer legal rights than men, but the book was very controversial at the time. Mill remained committed to women's rights and a number of other causes until his death in 1873. It would be many years, however, before the campaigns of the ***suffragists and suffragettes*** helped women get the vote.

Did you know?
Mill wrote that his wife, Harriet Taylor, was responsible for many of his ideas. The two met when Harriet was still married, and spent nearly twenty years as friends before Harriet's first husband died.

John Bright (MP Biography)
1811-1889, Rochdale

John Bright was one of the longest serving Victorian ***radical*** politicians. Born in 1811 to a manufacturing family, his first entrance into politics came in the 1830s in the temperance movement, which argued that alcoholic drinks should be banned. He was soon drawn to radical causes, such as the movement against the ***Corn Laws –*** government measures which kept food prices high.

Bright became an ***MP*** in 1843 (for Durham). He soon gained a reputation in Parliament for his strong attacks on his opponents. In the 1860s his politics became more ***radical***. Always a supporter of parliamentary reform, at this time he thought that at least some working class people should be able to vote. He supported the ***Reform League*** (see Marylebone, London). Bright was an important speaker in the 1865-68 Parliament debates on reform. He added ***amendments*** to the ***Conservative Reform Bill*** to give the vote to more working class men.

Bright also argued for the ***secret ballot***. Before 1872, everyone knew which candidate people had voted for. Bright believed that this meant people were more open to intimidation – especially working class men who could lose their jobs or houses if they voted against their employer's or landlord's wishes. His brother-in-law, Edward Aldam Leatham, introduced in 1870 the bill which eventually led to the introduction of secret ballots.

The ***Secret Ballot Act*** has been seen as one of the most important democratic changes, although ***corruption*** still took place before later reforms in the 1880-1885 Parliament.

Bright became a ***cabinet*** member for the first time in 1868. He was an ***MP*** until his death in 1889. A funeral service was held for him in Westminster Abbey. He is remembered as 'honest' John Bright, and one of the 'most effective' Victorian ***radical*** speakers.

Did you know?
Bright was ***MP*** for several different places, firstly Durham, then Manchester and finally Birmingham.

Marylebone (Constituency)
Borough in London from 1832, 2 MPs

Marylebone was one of the new ***constituencies*** created in London in 1832. It covered the areas of Marylebone, Paddington and St Pancras – a mix of populations in the growing capital city. In the 1860s, its ***MPs*** were ***Liberals***.

Marylebone was the scene of the 'Hyde Park riots' of 1866. As Parliament increasingly debated reform, a number of societies sprang up to demonstrate popular support for the ***bill***. One of the more radical of these was the ***Reform League***, formed in 1865. The League campaigned for votes for every man and the ***secret ballot***. Many skilled working class people joined the league. Over 400 branches were opened around the country.

Many of their largest marches took place in London. In July 1866 the group planned to march from their London headquarters to Hyde Park. Afraid of the number of marchers, the ***Home Secretary***, Spencer Walpole, tried to ban the march. He brought in troops and ***special constables*** to try and stop the crowds entering the park. The ***Reform League*** decided to go ahead anyway. Crowds of 200,000 joined in. At the entrance to the park the police stopped the marchers.

However, there were so many marchers that they broke in to the park, removing all the iron railings that surrounded it. As they were outnumbered, the police and army did not try to stop them. Once inside, the meeting took place as planned. Another rally was organised for the next day, and the ***Home Secretary*** was forced to give his permission.

Did you know?
The ***Home Secretary***, Spencer Walpole, was severely criticised for his handling of the ***Reform League*** protest. He resigned in May 1867.

*** Pontefract (Constituency)**
Borough in Yorkshire, since 1621, 2 MPs

The town of Pontefract sent ***MPs*** to Parliament in 1621. In 1832 the boundaries of the ***constituency*** were extended to include smaller local towns. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century the MPs were from both the ***Liberals*** *a*nd ***Conservatives***.


A 'poll book' from 1708

Pontefract became the first place in Britain that a parliamentary election took place by ***secret ballot*** in 1872. Before then voters turned up at a booth and were asked – in public – who they were voting for. The answer was written down and the lists – 'poll books' – could be bought from local newspapers. They are now great sources for historians! For many Victorians, even reformers like Lord Russell, the idea of voting in private was cowardly or 'un-English'. They believed that people should admit who they voted for.

But this system also meant there was plenty of opportunity for intimidation or bribery. From the eighteenth century onwards sometimes mobs were brought to polls to intimidate the voters. Elections could be like a party – many ***candidates*** 'treated' their voters to large amounts of alcohol!

After the ***1867 Reform Act*** more working class people could vote. This meant that more people were concerned about voting in public. John Bright argued that those who were poorer could face greater intimidation – or be easier to ***bribe*** – by those with more money or power.

The Pontefract 1872 election was watched with 'considerable curiosity' by party officials from all over the country. The town only had a few weeks to prepare, so there were some teething problems. Voters now placed a cross on a ballot paper next to the names of the chosen candidates – very similar to how we do now. They did so in private booths, although in some of the booths the

partitions were loose so people could see inside! There were other things to get used to. If a voter could not read or write the whole room had to be cleared before they could tell the official their choice. Despite these issues, the election went smoothly. It only took four hours to count the votes, and many people commentated the town was much more quiet than a normal election.

Despite the positive reports, party officials felt that ***bribery*** could still be possible. This was not dealt with until the 1880-1885 Parliament.

Did you know?
One of the first ballot box is still in Pontefract museum. It was sealed with the stamp used to make liquorice Pontefract cakes!



Articles – Lesson 5: Later Reforms (1880s)

(Terms in ***bold italics*** are explained further in the Glossary, terms underlined have their own articles)

1880-1885 Parliament
Liberal government, Prime Minister ***William Gladstone***


William Gladstone

William Gladstone and the ***Liberal*** party won the 1880 election after 6 years of ***Conservative*** government. This Parliament passed three major pieces of reform legislation. Although ***MPs*** were still not prepared to give a vote to every man – and certainly not to women – these measures taken together gave more men the vote and helped change Britain's politics.

The ***1883 Corrupt Practices Act*** was guided through Parliament by the ***Attorney General***, Henry James. It placed limits on the amount of money each candidate could spend on elections and defined what was corrupt.

The ***1884 (Third) Reform Act*** (also drafted by James) and the ***1885 Redistribution of Seats Act*** between them increased the number of voters from 3.15 million to 5.7 million. The rules over who could vote were made the same in the towns and the countryside (although who could vote still depended on whether you owned property or how much rent you paid). The redistribution act once again changed which communities had ***MPs***, and for the first time ***constituencies*** were based on a roughly equal number of voters. Most now only had one MP, rather than two.

After these changes parties had to become much more organised, and their central organisations grew. The politicians also had to appeal to a 'mass' audience, rather than a small number of people with special interests. The growing number of newspapers were important to this.

Although the number of voters grew again, you still had to be the 'head of your household', and fairly well-paid, to vote. Of course, it didn't matter how rich you were, if you were a woman, you still could not vote in parliamentary elections.

Did you know?
The ***Corrupt Practices Act*** had a large impact on election spending. In 1885 ***candidates*** spent just over £1 million campaigning, in 1880 some have estimated over £3 million was spent!

Henry James (MP Biography)
1828-1911, Hereford



Henry James
Caricature in 'Vanity Fair', 1874

James was born in Hereford in 1828, a younger son of a surgeon. After school, he convinced his father to let him train as a lawyer. He was very successful at this – and made a large amount of money from it! A charming, attractive man, he had a wide circle of rich and important friends from the political, sporting and artistic worlds.

In 1868 he became a ***Liberal MP*** for Taunton. Although he originally lost the election, his rival ***candidate*** was accused of ***bribery***, and James was declared the winner. There was a long tradition of bribery in British elections, from the early 18th century onwards. Voters at election times expected to be 'treated' to drinks or food by the candidates in order to gain their vote. Large amounts of money could be spent entertaining candidates, and in other cases rich men could simply buy the votes of others. Although much of this changed by the introduction of the ***secret ballot*** (first held in Pontefract), there was no limit on how much candidates, or party officials, could spend at election time.

James briefly entered the ***cabinet*** in 1874 as ***Attorney General***, the main legal advisor to the government. However, the ***Liberals*** lost the election so James had to wait until 1880 before he could take on the role.

This position meant that James played a key role in reform. He drafted the ***1884 Reform Bill*** and helped take the ***1883 Corrupt Practices Act*** through Parliament. The Corrupt Practices Act put a limit on how much money could be spent at election time and these expenses had to be published. The act also laid down clear rules about what was not acceptable during election campaigns. Now it was much harder for rich men to buy votes, although it did not completely get rid of ***corruption***. James was criticised for his 'over-elaborate' speaking in Parliament, but his legal skills were very important in these reforms.

After the 1885 government James left the ***Liberal*** party due to a split over the future of Ireland. In 1895 he was made a lord – Baron James of Hereford – and left the House of Commons. He died in 1911, and is remembered for his loyal support of several party leaders.

Did you know?
James was a keen sportsman. He was President of the Marylebone Cricket Club in 1889.

Additional Materials

Old Sarum (Constituency)

Borough in Wiltshire, Parliamentary constituency since 1295, 2 MPs

Old Sarum was one of the most infamous ***rotten boroughs*** before 1832. A rotten borough was a place that had the right to send ***MPs*** to Parliament because it had been an important town in the past, but very few people still lived there. Often the land (and the rights to vote that went with this land) was bought by rich landowners who then chose their own MP.

Today, Parliament tries to keep the number of voters in each ***constituency*** roughly equal, and every so often revises the boundaries of constituencies to reflect changes in population. Yet in the early nineteenth century, this did not happen. With the growth of new towns thanks to the ***Industrial Revolution***, the places that had ***MPs*** and the places where people lived were now very different. The new towns of Manchester and Birmingham did not elect their own MPs, but there were many ***rotten boroughs*** that did. There was lots of opportunity for rich landowners to have more influence over who was in Parliament.



Old Sarum by John Constable
© Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Old Sarum is on a hill close to Salisbury, Wiltshire. It was the site of a Norman Castle and Salisbury Cathedral was supposed to have been built there. It was because of the Cathedral that the settlement was given the right to send two ***MPs*** to Parliament. However, in 1219 the Cathedral was moved to 'New Sarum' – Salisbury – closer to the River Avon. From then on Old Sarum went in to decline.

By the nineteenth century all that was left was ruins and trees. Although there were two ***MPs***, no-one actually lived there! The people who owned the land also owned the right to vote for the MPs. In 1820 the land was bought by brothers Josiah du Pré and James Alexander, who made their money in India. They both immediately elected themselves to Parliament! Both consistently voted against reform.

Old Sarum was often mentioned in debates over the Reform Act as 'mounds', 'ditches' or 'ruins'. In 1831, the two brothers held their 'election' at 9am to avoid any trouble from protesters.

The constituency was abolished by the ***1832 'Great' Reform Act***, and the Alexander brothers never sat in Parliament again.

Did you know?
After the Old Sarum constituency was abolished, many reformers celebrated with funerals. The *Times* published a 'Lament to Old Sarum'.

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Lesson Plan 6: Overview

Resources

All lesson materials
The chronology, brief chronology of the acts, and the glossary

Key questions:

- Who were the different groups involved with Reform process?
- Who were some of the MPs that made a significant difference to achieving or trying to block Reform?
- What difference did the Reform of Parliament make to the lives of the majority of the male and female population of Britain?

Stage 1

Divide the class into groups to represent the following:

- Ultra Tories
- Tories
- Conservatives
- Whigs
- Radicals
- Chartists
- The Reform League
- The BPU
- Militia leaders
- Marchers in Monmouth
- Marchers in Marylebone

From all the resources that have been explored ask the groups to create biography of each of the key groups explaining what they stood for, what they did at various times and how they affected the process of Reform. After the designated time ask the different groups to present their information to the whole class to keep a collected record (possible digitally) on each of these groups.

Stage 2

Either working alone or in small groups - create a chart of all the MPs that have been mentioned and some of the Prime Ministers (Wellington, Gladstone, Disraeli). List their name, dates as an MP, party, if they were for or against Reform and one key fact about them to do with the Reform process.

Higher abilities can create a more complete biography and add another category that indicates whether their position on Reform was successful and if their position helped or hindered their career.

Stage 3

Discuss and record the following statements:

> The parliamentary process was only reformed so that politicians would have more people to vote for them.

Explore any evidence for this for each of the Reform Bills

> The Reform of Parliament is just part of the way that society was changing during the nineteenth century and would have happened with, or without organisations like the Reform League.

The chronology might help pupils to look at these reforms in the wider context to discuss this statement.

(Stage 4 on following page)

Stage 4

Create one of the following charts for each of the six Reform Acts include changes such as a member of the household can vote even if it is not that person e.g. middle class –woman, her husband could vote.

Person	Status before the bill	Status after the bill	Key change or improvement
Working class man – rural			
Working class women – rural			
Woking class man – industrial town			
Working class woman – industrial town			
Middle class man – rural			
Middle class women – rural			
Middle class man – industrial town			
Middle class women – industrial town			
Landed gentry/ wealth – male			
Landed gentry/ wealth – female			
An MP			

When there is a chart for each of the Reform Acts compare and discuss which of the Acts made the most difference to the lives of the different groups and to the country as a whole.

Extended activities

Write up the whole process of reform for a newspaper article that was a pro-Reform paper and or an anti-reform paper.