ABSTRACT

SUPER III, ROBERT THOMAS. The Changing British State during the Counterrevolution: The Role of the John Reeves’ Association Movement. (Under the direction of Dr. Brent S. Sirota).

The Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers was founded by John Reeves in November of 1792 to police British society from the threat of Jacobinism. In this capacity it was at first wildly successful. The Association’s downfall came when it resorted to mob violence in persecuting suspected British Jacobins. Through an examination of the Reeves Associations we see a powerful example of how the British state was changing at the conclusion of the so-called long eighteenth century, as Prime Minister William Pitt led Great Britain into its new role as the leading counterrevolutionary nation in Europe. The experience of John Reeves serves to illustrate the changes which occurred in British political society in the 1790s, as the state expanded its authority, new methods of policing were explored, and Britain first experienced the challenges of mass politics.
The Changing British State during the Counterrevolution: The Role of the John Reeves’ Association Movement

by
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This work is dedicated to Kristin Bergeron for her love and support throughout this project.
BIOGRAPHY

Robert Super was born in Lansing, Michigan. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Humanities and History from Michigan State University in 2010.
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INTRODUCTION

On the night of July 14, 1791, an event to commemorate the storming of Paris’ Bastille in 1789 was organized by the English Dissenting minister, Dr. Joseph Priestley, and other French Revolution sympathizers. It was held at the Birmingham Hotel.\(^1\) When threats of violence were voiced by a large number of Birmingham’s loyalists leading up to the event, Priestley chose not to attend. He was wise to do so. That night a mob of hundreds formed and pelted the French revolution sympathizers with dirt and stones. The mob then marched on the Unitarian New Meeting house and burned it, before going to Priestley’s home and burning it as well, along with the contents of his large personal library. Priestley narrowly escaped.\(^2\) Rioting continued for days; many private homes were burnt, and the tumult only subsided when soldiers arrived in Birmingham to quell it. These “Church and King” riots, so-called because of the chants of rioters, represented a shocking development in the British polity in response to the French Revolution. Both the Revolution sympathizers and their attackers professed themselves as loyal Britons protecting liberty, and both sought approval by the state.\(^3\)

The events in Birmingham spawned a mass of literature written by Britons across the political spectrum, from all classes and of all backgrounds. The question hung in the air of how the state and British society should respond to such internal political violence.

Responses from political commentators were mixed: true radicals intent on reform

\(^2\) Rose, “The Priestley Riots of 1791,” 73.
condemned the riots; others sympathized with the dissenters, yet remained loyal, patriotic Britons; and some Britons whole-heartedly embraced the onset of loyalist fervor. The debate over the French Revolution in Britain was especially contentious in this brief period between 1789 and the radicalization of the Revolution and the ensuing wars between Britain and revolutionary France. In this intervening period a wide range of ideological and political stances were open for debate, as both government officials and private citizens responded to the maelstrom which the French Revolution became. In this period of intense political contention, the desire for a loyalist organization to counter the spread of Jacobinism was palpable among the leaders of Britain.

One such group of loyalist Britons who enthusiastically took up the counterrevolutionary cause was The Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers. Led by its founder, the English placeman John Reeves, the Association was a private political club in which members were charged with rooting out subversive Jacobins within Britain while at the same time propagating the time honored institutions of Church and King. Reeves and his Association’s members believed that there were a core set of English values which stood in opposition to the anarchy, atheism, and republicanism of the French Revolution. They also believed that these values, while English, were typical of Britain as a whole. Reeves founded his club at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the Strand, in London, on November 20, 1791. Working with the support of high government officials including the Home Office Secretary, Henry Dundas, and the Prime Minister, William Pitt, Reeves had a grand vision for his movement as a powerful
counterbalance to the threat of Jacobinism. In late-eighteenth century England, the state could not turn to a professional police force to preserve its interests and curtail potential political threats to its existence, as the Prussian state or the French state could on the Continent. Guided by a vision for a state with minimal taxation and a fear of invading its subjects’ private lives, as well as the age-old English fear of standing armies, Pitt could, at first, do little to police the political thought of his fellow Britons. In this void, a private association such as Reeves’ was a potential solution. Made up of “middling sorts” ranging from artisans to lawyers, from urban denizens to rural ones, who could be trusted (or so it was thought) to support the Crown and not descend into the anarchy of Continental mass political participation; the Association was one viable force for counterrevolution leading up to the declaration of war with revolutionary France in February of 1792. 

Ironically, Reeves’ movement eventually became violent itself, and as a mass political movement posed a democratic threat to the state. By the middle of 1793 it was largely defunct. Reeves himself went on trial for treason in 1796 over his polemical tract, Thoughts on the English Government, in which he argued that the King could rule Britain without Parliament.

Our task here is to explore how loyalist Britons, specifically the conservatives Edmund Burke, Hannah More, and John Reeves, responded to the imagined threat of Jacobin insurrection within Britain, and what effects their political opinions had upon the suppression of Jacobinism. We can also ask what became defined as acceptable loyalism, what was condemned, and how the state was compelled to draw these lines. Loyalism was a multi-

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4 Dror Wahrman, Imagining the Middle Class: The political representation of class in Britain, c. 1780-1840 (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 16.
faceted political movement, an agglomeration of the nobility, gentry, “middling sorts,” Whigs, Tories, Church and King proponents, and believers in law and order. To be a loyalist in this period was not to be a mindless reactionary, although to be sure there were some Britons of that stamp in their ranks. As such, we must press the issue of what loyalism was, and importantly, how private citizens exercised their political beliefs in the public sphere. An analysis of loyalist tracts in conjunction with a critique of the preeminent loyalist movement, Reeves’ own Crown and Anchor Association, serves to illustrate the complexity of loyalism in Britain in the 1790s. Reeves’ movement was made up by members of the middle-class, “middling sorts,” and encapsulated popular loyalism. This paper argues that Reeves’ loyalist movement, while in agreement with the genteel conservatism of Burke and More on some levels, was utterly incompatible with that conservatism on others.

The Church and King riots serve as a point of embarkation for this story because they were symptomatic of a larger problem which emerged in Great Britain in 1791. The success of the French Revolution had exposed the fissures in European society. The rising bourgeoisie could no longer be controlled by an absolutist monarch, nor by the national Church. In England, these questions had been grappled with for over a hundred years, going back to the English Civil War, and perhaps even further, to the English Reformation. By 1791, however, the kingdoms of Scotland and England were united, and the constitution of Great Britain and the political role of the Hanoverian King George III were questioned by some in the wake of the French Revolution. At the same time, Britain had established itself as the preeminent liberal society of Europe. Dissenting ministers like Dr. Priestley openly
sparred in the British press with members of Parliament like Edmund Burke. Questions of free speech were central to questions of who could comment on the government and yet still be considered loyal. In the wake of the Revolution and the subsequent wars between France and Britain, questions of loyalty became entangled with the debate over what role the state ought to play in society and subsequent demands for reform.

Britain was thus embroiled in a counterrevolution both on the Continent and within the nation, one led largely by private citizens, commonly referred to as “Pitt’s Terror.” The important question to resolve is how popular loyalism figured into patriotism. At the heart of this issue was policing. Loyalists, radicals, and Pittites all offered opinions on the role of constables in British society. Should Britain adopt a professional police force? Or should Britons continue their time honored tradition of policing themselves, with private citizens volunteering as magistrates and constables? Furthermore, without a professional police force, how could Britain prosecute a counterrevolution? Through reading letters written to the Home Office during the tumult of 1792 and 1793, the problems of relying upon private citizens becomes apparent, as numerous anonymous informants sought to implicate fellow citizens in seditious activity. In such a climate, an Association like John Reeves’ at the Crown and Anchor thrived in prosecuting the counterrevolution. Reeves remains an excellent example of a loyalist whose national fervor was so strong that he implicitly encouraged Britons to engage in extralegal activities, especially rioting, to suppress Jacobin radicals and their sympathizers. At the same time, though, we cannot ignore Reeves’ role as a vocal and

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6 NA HO/42/23, accessed via the National Archives, September 18, 2012.
influential proponent for the professionalization of police. Indeed, Reeves’ role as Receiver of the Public Offices and his involvement with the implementation of the 1792 Middlesex Justices Act foreshadowed the coming of Sir Robert Peel’s bobbies in 1829, widely regarded as the first professional police force in Britain. Throughout his career Reeves sought to fill the vacuum created by a lack of professional police in Britain, and one attempt was the Association.

When seen as a form of political police, Reeves’ movement and its ultimate failure to police society can also arguably increase our understanding of modern state formation. John Brewer’s work on the emerging state apparatus in Britain in the eighteenth century supports a long trend towards state empowerment. Brewer argues for a gradual history of state formation throughout English history, first accelerated by the Tudor dynasty and then retarded by England’s relative ability to remain isolated from European Continental conflict. The emphasis on an effective, centralized state persisted, first through the reign of the House of Stuart, and then through the formation of Great Britain in the Act of Union of 1707, joining England and Scotland. In the eighteenth century, though, Britain became embroiled in a series of wars with absolutist France and Spain as it sought to maintain a balance of power on the Continent. The result was the formation of what Brewer calls “the fiscal-

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military state,” a state engaged in the business of collecting taxes, particularly excise taxes, to fund an increasingly global war-machine. However, as Brewer also addresses, the power of the state was uneven. In international affairs, the state was aggressive in dealing with foreign nations, as well as with its colonial subjects: “coercive powers were required where tacit compliance was less assured. Subjects’ rights were not the same on the banks of the Ohio, in Spanish Town or Dublin Castle as they were in London.” However, Brewer is quick to add that this did not mean that Britons at home were unconcerned with the growing power of the state in the domestic sphere; rather, far from it, they were constantly worried about it, and used the English Constitution as a bulwark against state authority. For the purposes of this paper, that defense included restraints on the army’s power to police the civilian population; also, “efforts to use civilian officers as a general ‘police’ rather than tax gatherers were checked.”

Ironically, even as the state grew by leaps and bounds in eighteenth-century Britain, the domestic institutions commonly associated with state power: professional police, infrastructure, bureaucracy, so on, grew only by fits and starts.

Linda Colley offers a parallel explanation of expanding British state power and how it manifested itself in the empire, building on Brewer’s work. Internationally, throughout the eighteenth century the British state had asserted itself as a global power through a government apparatus designed to empower the fiscal-military state under the Whig

10 Brewer, The Sinews of Power, xvii. See also Lawrence Stone, ed. Introduction. An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815. 1-32 (New York: Routledge, 1994). Stone also points out that the high rates of smuggling and production of fraudulent goods untaxed also contradicts Brewer’s claim for Britain’s “efficient… tax-collecting bureaucracy” 17.


13 Stone also notes this contradiction, describing Britain as a “paradoxical state, so decentralized and weak internally, but so strong abroad,” ed. Introduction. An Imperial State at War, 21.
oligarchy. At the outset of the War of American Independence, Parliament’s unchecked power was questioned, and the resultant victory of the colonies recast the role of the state in society. In the new United States of America, the formation of state power was curtailed by a system of governmental checks and balances laid out in a ratified Constitution. The notion of checking state power was nothing new to Britons; however, those in power in Britain recognized that if they did not reassert their authority, the entire global imperial project could be undermined. A reassertion of imperial power occurred, expressed in the India Act of 1784 and the Canada Act of 1791. In the empire the British state had decided to reinforce its power.

As we shall see, this desire to assert state authority also spilled over into domestic politics. As Brewer also argues, some interests within Britain, particularly the “landed interest,” had recognized that the expanding powers of the state were actually beneficial to their own goals. In conjunction with the ever-widening public sphere of Britain in the eighteenth century, this recognition elicited greater political involvement by a wider range of Britons. The John Reeves’ Associations were one manifestation of this widening range of political involvement. They also were typical of popular British political movements throughout the eighteenth century: they were voluntary, they were reactionary, and they were

15 Colley, Britons, 138-139.
16 Colley, Britons, 147.
17 Brewer, The Sinews of Power, xxi.
In counterrevolutionary Britain such locally autonomous movements were almost certainly going to come into conflict with a centralizing state asserting itself. In 1795 the passage of the Two Acts restricting freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, while aimed at radicals, also had consequences for the conservative Reeves’ Associations, as Prime Minister William Pitt solidified the state’s power over voluntary associations. In doing so he reinforced an outlet for loyalist patriotism circumscribed by the state: the Volunteer militias.

Seen through this lens, Reeves’ story is not only one concerning the rise of a reactionary form of British nationalism, but also the rise of the modern state and with it the demand for a centralized, professional police force.

Broadly speaking, the counterrevolution in Britain is a well studied period because it poses a number of questions for the historian to resolve, including identifying complications with national identity, exploring counterrevolution, and addressing modern state formation. Deciphering the nuanced shifts in political discourse is a problem the historian must also overcome. Until recently, the historiography of counterrevolutionary Britain was dominated largely by the New Left tradition, led by E.P. Thompson and his classic work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson argues that Jacobinism primarily spurred popular disturbances following the initial Church and King riots, and that the “Establishment,” in the person of Prime Minister William Pitt, drove Jacobin sympathizers underground.

Additionally, Thompson ascribes “a new democratic consciousness” to the members of the
radical reform movement following their experience with Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man.* As part of his narrative, the work of the London Corresponding Society in organizing reform movements is central, and rightly so. Thompson reads the events of the 1790s as a manifestation of class conflict as opposed to an episode of contested state formation. Thompson’s fellow Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm, concurs, describing the twin revolutions of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution as symbiotic moments in which class conflict came to the fore. Post-1789 all conflicts are dominated by class dialectics in Hobsbawm’s reading. While a tremendous debt is owed to these two historians, more work remains.

The debate has widened since Thompson’s work. Linda Colley argues that most historical literature is spent on the dissenting opinions against involvement in the revolutionary wars, as opposed to the loyalist movements. Her important work, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, highlights the complexities of nationalism in Britain, without necessarily questioning what role the state played in that development. Her conclusion is that patriotism was a solely positive force in uniting Britons and expanding notions of citizenship. I find this untenable in the light of historical evidence. An examination of the Reeves’ Association movement challenges both of these authors’ conclusions. Unlike Thompson’s thesis, the Reeves’ Associations, though popular, were also loyalist organs. At the same time, their very existence negates Colley’s thesis that Britons by and large were

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staunch loyalists, since the Associations persecuted many dissenting clubs, Jacobin clubs, and reformists throughout the country. The conflict between popular loyalism, radicalism, and the state can be fully explored through further investigation of a movement like the Reeves’ Association.

Multiple explanations exist for how Britons responded to radicalism. This much wider debate in the British political discourse of the counterrevolution is explored by James Sack in his work, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, in which he explores the role the government played in supporting conservative reaction, and how “the role which unalloyed hatred played in defining ideology” was important. Gregory Claeys explores shifts in the conservative discourse of this period in his work, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics*. Don Herzog’s *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* is a critical appraisal of the role conservatism played in Britain following the French Revolution from the perspective of a self pronounced “unreconstructed liberal.” The effect conservative literature had upon the working classes is essential to our understanding of Reeves, and Herzog’s work offers guidance. Herzog writes that “we should treat loyalism with gingerly care,” a warning that, as he points out, it is not something as simple as the historian rejecting the “unruly mob.” As he eloquently states:

> I don’t know if the Birmingham rioters [of 1791] had reason to believe that the authorities would wink at their arson, let alone if they had official

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25 Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), Preface, ix. Herzog also points out that he is writing to combat a “balkanization, a world in which conservatives write on conservatism for conservative readers, liberals on liberalism for liberals, Marxists on Marxism for Marxists, and so on” (Preface, ix).
26 Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds*, 44.
marching orders. Even if they did, though, we should beware invoking such categories as marionettes and pawns, of thinking that the obliging mob was putty in the hands of the villainous elite. For this again is to dodge some pressing questions about agency: as if the mob were so pliable that they would do whatever the authorities wanted; as if there were no genuine resentment of Priestley, of Unitarianism, of affection for the French Revolution; as if leaders weren’t routinely constrained by their putative followers. 

Such a statement is an excellent debarkation point for any appraisal of popular conservatism during the counterrevolution. The so-called mob was not simply a drunken rabble following instructions. Members of the working class were part of it, alongside members of what we might term in our modern discourse as the petty-bourgeoisie. Recognizing the agency of these mobs, both loyalist and radical, is essential to any treatment of this period. Ian Christie offers an anti-Marxist interpretation of Britain during the 1790s, in which he argues that revolution was not possible due to a combination of factors: chiefly, the “clubbability” of Englishmen, (as evidenced by the Reeves’ Associations), the effects of the Poor Law, a comprehensive, albeit flawed system of aid, and the influence of the Church as a counterweight to French revolutionary atheism. Christie also argues that Britain must be viewed as a situation wholly unique, and one in which the historian should have “the object of discovering what circumstances provided a bonding which kept society together and counteracted the strains which undoubtedly existed.” Given that revolution did not occur, and given that many Britons did respond with staunch support for the counterrevolution,

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27 Herzog, Poisoning the Minds, 43.
Christie’s argument bears some merit. At the same time, though, further exploration of the bonds which held society together and where they frayed offers a much more revealing glimpse into the politics of this period.

Boyd Hilton identifies a “popular loyalism” at work in the counterrevolutionary period which is worth further exploration.\(^{30}\) To be a loyalist was not necessarily to be a noble. Hilton even offers the notion that “radicalism and loyalism enjoyed something of a symbiotic relationship throughout the Hanoverian period, in that when one was strong the other was too.”\(^{31}\) Popular political discourse was thus most pronounced in periods of high stress and vigorous contestation. Speaking to this sense of popular loyalism are Basil Willey’s arguments for a “cosmic Toryism” in which “whatever is, is right,” and they cannot be discounted in approaching Reeves.\(^{32}\) When Reeves waxed poetic about free-born Englishmen and their good qualities in *Thoughts on the English Government*, he clearly reflected Willey’s notion of “cosmic Toryism”. Englishmen, for Reeves, were and always had been an embodiment of what was good and right in the world, and the specter of French Jacobinism threatened that order. The importance of grasping these arguments is paramount to understanding Reeves and the Association movement, as well as the rise of popular conservatism.

Reeves’ Associations are given short shrift in many monographs on the history of the counterrevolutionary movement in eighteenth-century Britain. However, Eugene Charlton


\(^{31}\) Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, 70.

Black’s *The Association: British Parliamentary Political Organization 1769-1793*, views Reeves and his movement as the culmination, and in some ways the spur, to a new age of private political association.  

Black’s appraisal of Reeves the man, as well as of his Association, is decidedly negative. Inspired by fear of the mob, Reeves sought to create an organ for social order which would counteract the perceived threat. In this capacity Reeves was, for Black, a consummate bully. Black perceives Reeves and his movement as the culmination of a century of private clubs or associations as solutions to social problems. He believes that Reeves’ movement was not the conclusion of associations, but rather the beginning of a shift in political associations towards “helping to make modern Britain.”

Black’s work, while profoundly negative in his assessments, is essential in understanding Reeves.

Austin Mitchell explores the role John Reeves and his Associations played in creating a “party of order” in Britain in 1792 in his article, “The Association Movement of 1792-93.” Mitchell argues that Reeves’ contributions in 1792 have gone largely unnoticed. Mitchell goes on to note that riots against suspected Jacobins and radicals occurred in places like Birmingham and Manchester, but he does not question what effect these riots had upon the failure of the movement. Mitchell is mainly interested in the makeup of the Associations and to what extent they were widespread. He concludes that the Associations

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were widespread, and that many of them chose a committee style of leadership, often choosing lawyers and clergy to head the committees. However, Mitchell also points out that members of the “lower orders” were highly sought after recruits since they were more likely to join the other side. Oddly, Mitchell claims that “the fact that the associations came into existence at a time when large numbers of prosecutions were being initiated against radicals was largely coincidental,” arguing that the Associations were more interested in propaganda and employing fear to accomplish their goals. Mitchell also offers no conclusions on why the Association movement vanished in mid-1793, simply stating that the movement was a “triumph” that succeeded in creating a “national front” and in doing so made itself redundant since no radicals remained for it to combat.

Mark Philp’s article “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-93,” is an examination of the conservative reaction through the person of John Reeves. Philp’s article is also important because it takes very seriously the class relationships at work in the radical and loyalist movements of the era. Philp argues that the French Revolution debate should not be read in as stark a dichotomy as it has been. His argument is that the broadening of political participation was really an extension of the conflict between the upper classes, those oligarchs who held power, and the burgeoning lower orders working to attain political power. Thus, in his mind, “the vulgar conservatives who have been identified in 1792-3 may be the rioters of 1795-6 and 1799-1801. Those who smash the king’s coach on its return from the

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opening of Parliament in October 1795, may weep at his death in 1820 and may thereafter take up the cause of Queen Caroline.” Philp also cites the example of a radical becoming a loyalist in Henry Redhead Yorke, or the vice versa occurring, as in the case of William Cobbett. At the same time, to accept Philp’s analysis is to ascribe a fickle nature to the incipient working class radicalism or, on the other side, loyalism of the period. This analysis risks resorting to treating popular movements as something like the “mob” of ancient Rome. Philp argues that his analysis explores the complexities of a mutating conservatism over the 1790s. Undoubtedly, conservatism, and for that matter, radicalism, changed over the course of the period, and opinions shifted further once Napoleon Bonaparte became a dictator resembling a Bourbon monarch. However, to suggest that popular loyalism was a shifting, fickle “vulgar conservatism,” as Philp does, sells the movement and its impact short. Britons were responding to the pressures of the French Revolution in differing ways, however, not all of them switched shirts halfway through the game. Reeves remained of the conservative stripe throughout, and there were many more Britons like him.

Michael Duffy argues that Reeves began his movement without government sponsorship, but almost immediately attracted the interest of state ministers, chiefly Henry Dundas and William Pitt. What direction the state should take with regard to Reeves’ Associations was an open question, however. Duffy goes on to point out that Reeves’ proposal was one among many different proposals for a counterrevolutionary or loyalist

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44 Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-93,” 68.
45 Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-93,” 68.
movement, and that his was chosen because he published an advertisement for it, because he was a low-level official, and because government officials like Pitt and Grenville could put enough distance between themselves and the Association to make it appear that they were not directing it.\textsuperscript{47} Duffy also points out that the government was eager to maintain control over any and all Associations, and not create another populist political organ in their desire to stamp out Jacobinism.\textsuperscript{48} Duffy then inexplicably leaves the Association at that, content with looking at Pitt’s role in the early days of the Association, but reluctant to explain why the movement ultimately failed.\textsuperscript{49}

A.V. Beedell’s “John Reeves’s Prosecution for a Seditious Libel, 1795-6: A Study in Political Cynicism,” explores the ultimate rejection of Reeves by Pitt and his government. His argument for the irony of Parliament prosecuting Reeves while at the same time voting for “repressive legislation” in the form of the Two Acts bears directly on this paper’s argument of state intervention.\textsuperscript{50} At the same time, Beedell also points out that “the King, within Reeves’s schema, as the embodiment of those laws [of the English Government], was the nation and the state.”\textsuperscript{51} In Beedell’s analysis, Reeves also went on to criticize Whig theory of resistance, even going so far as questioning John Locke and entering into the territory of Dr. Henry Sacheverell.\textsuperscript{52} Beedell points out that Francis Plowden quickly recognized Reeves’ near-treasonous rhetoric in \textit{Thoughts on the English Government}, and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[51] Beedell, “John Reeves’s Prosecution for a Seditious Libel, 1795-6,” 805.
\item[52] Beedell, “John Reeves’s Prosecution for a Seditious Libel, 1795-6,” 806.
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called him on it. However, Beedell describes Plowden as “a conservative theorist,” who, was critical of Reeves because of his dislike for “rule by clubs.”

Beedell’s conclusion is that the House of Commons, while distrustful of Reeves, took a progressive stance “in the direction of the democratic future.”

One basic problem with the current scholarship on Reeves is that it comes in two chronological bursts: the work of Black in 1963 and Mitchell in 1961, and then in the mid-1990s with Philp, Duffy, and Beedell. As such, it has been shaped by the political climate of the respective times in which it was written, and has not been a sustained debate. Black and Mitchell are writing at the turn towards New Left historiography. Philp, Duffy, and Beedell are interested primarily in snippets of the Reeves’ story. Another historiographical problem is that these authors are largely interested in the origins of the movement and not necessarily in why it failed. Black concludes that the movement was wildly successful and carried on in some shape or form into the nineteenth-century. Mitchell is successful in explaining what the movement was but not how it came to its end. Had Mitchell followed up on the riots in Birmingham and Manchester and the state’s response to them, he perhaps would have seen that the Associations themselves became a dangerous, unstable entity which Pitt was forced to subsume under the state. Duffy is interested primarily in the origins of the movement and how William Pitt was involved with it at its inception. My work follows the Association through to its demise, and seeks explanations for why that occurred. Philp is the only historian who gives serious thought to the class dynamics at work in the movement and how

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54 Beedell, “John Reeves’s Prosecution for a Seditious Libel, 1795-6,” 824.
it could potentially become a democratic movement threatening to the state and social order. Beedell is more concerned with Reeves’ demise in 1796 and how the government was seeking an accommodation with an increasingly democratic future. I would argue that the government was indeed expanding its authority, but in the direction of less compromise with democracy. I disagree with Beedell in his argument that Britain in 1792 was firmly counterrevolutionary, and that Reeves’ prosecution and the ultimate condemnation of his Association movement should be viewed in that light. Work needs to be done which explores what relationship the state had with the private, voluntary movement, and how it employed private citizens as a form of political police. An exploration of the successes and failures of that experiment offer a rounded picture of the changes which were occurring in the British state at the conclusion of the eighteenth century when it was transitioning into the champion of counterrevolutionary Europe.

When examining the John Reeves’s Association movement, it is nearly inescapable to notice the emerging class dynamics at work in it. The movement was made up largely of men in the eighteenth century referred to as “middling sorts,” of the “middle ranks,” or of a “middle station.”55 The term “middle class” is fraught with controversy and is problematic when referring to this period. When used in this work, “middle class” does not refer to the modern definition that Dror Wahrman cites as problematic: “the latter [middle class definition], we have been told, was already part of a putative vision of a modern class society characterized by class struggle and social flux rather than by deference and immutability.”56

55 Wahrman, Imagining the Middle Class, 14.
56 Wahrman, Imagining the Middle Class, 14-15.
Rather, this work continues in the same vein as Wahrman’s in that it attempts to understand the complexities and “vagueness” of the emerging “middle class” in the late eighteenth century. The men (and occasional woman, as evidenced by Hannah More), who took part in the counterrevolutionary Reeves’ movement were by and large from the middle strata of society, but also included artisans and members of what would later be identified as the working class. These individuals represented a wide range of careers such as lawyers, shopkeepers, public servants, clergy and tradesmen, and their self-awareness as middling Britons is a key component of their identity in this movement. As such, this movement illustrates the complexities of class in England which Gareth Stedman Jones has identified. This work argues that the Reeves’ Association movement did have a class character which was contested, and which made it unacceptable to the state. In the post-French Revolution climate, attempts at mass political participation by subjects of a state were restricted, whether they be radical or conservative. The Reeves’ Association, though conservative, was such an attempt to achieve a sort of agency in the governance of Briton, and was ultimately rejected in favor of more controllable outlets for political participation, particularly the Volunteer militias. This work, then, seeks to examine the attempt by Reeves’ and his fellow Association members to achieve a level of political activity which precedes the later efforts of the nineteenth century by middle class Britons to achieve wider political participation.

57 Wahrman, Imagining the Middle Class, 16.
58 Gareth Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2. “In fact, in England more than in any other country, the word ‘class’ has acted as a congested point of intersection between many competing, overlapping or simply differing forms of discourse – political, economic, religious and cultural – right across the political spectrum.”
My purpose here is to explore counterrevolutionary conservatism through the writings of several authors, including Edmund Burke and Hannah More, with a special focus on John Reeves and the Association movement he spawned. A taxonomy of conservatism emerges in which Burke represents a strain of “higher” thought, appealing to the gentry, upper middle classes, and the aristocracy. John Reeves, however, embodies something much more populist, felt by a multitude of lower middle class and working class Britons who came together to combat the perceived threat of radicalism. Reeves attempted to bridge the gap between the ideology of a conservative like Burke or More, and the perceived need for real action in 1792 to combat Jacobinism. However, his movement was dominated by the middle classes, the working classes, and what Philp refers to as the “lower orders,” thus making problematic his mission to combat the expansion of popular political agency in the 1790s.59

Reeves’ interest in the expanding power of the constabulary is a historical development worth noting, and one often ignored.60 Oddly, historians do not view Reeves and his movement as what I would identify as a “political police.” By no means was England a “police state,” as Marc Raeff identifies. Raeff points out that though England did indeed have the “conceptions” for a police state, it did not implement them in the same way that Prussia and Russia did, relying, rather, upon local policing options.61 This work will not

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59 Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-93,” 45. Wahrman also identifies the variety of members in Reeves’ Association, explicitly stating that “a considerable number originated in the middle strata.” *Imagining the Middle Class*, 99.


argue that England was a police state in the 1790s. However, the Reeves’ Associations were indeed an experimental form of political police in that their mission was to stamp out seditious Jacobin thought and other notions of republicanism. John Reeves was in a unique position to also advocate for the expansion of the police in his role as Receiver of Public Offices. Elaine Reynolds’ work, *Before the Bobbies*, offers some clues to the links between John Reeves, his Association movement, and the efforts at the close of the eighteenth century and turn of the nineteenth century to professionalize the police.

This work is organized into four chapters. The first chapter lays out a brief history of rioting in eighteenth-century Britain, focusing on the memory of the destructive Gordon Riots of 1780. The impact that rioting had upon mass political movements in Britain was profoundly negative and shaped responses to political associations. In the second chapter the measured, genteel conservatism of Edmund Burke and Hannah More is set up as a contrast to the more robust actions of populist loyalism. The third chapter focuses on the John Reeves’ Associations, describing their inception, their early successes, and their ultimate rejection by the ruling establishment. The fourth chapter examines Reeves himself, analyzing his political ideology and how it was in conflict with the emerging liberal, secular state as it focused its efforts on maintaining an increasingly industrial England and a worldwide Empire. Through Reeves we witness the tension between a growing demand for popular political discourse and the expanding role of the modern state. His Association was a failed attempt to bridge this gap, but nevertheless one of those forgotten paths which scholars must explore.

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CHAPTER 1: THE IMPACT OF RIOTS

“An English mob is never dangerous, till it has glanced the light of a bonfire.” – An Impartial History of the Late Riots at Bristol, 1793.\(^{62}\)

Riots sparked by sometimes dangerous mobs were endemic in medieval and early modern British history. However, as historical scholarship has shown, the mob cannot be discounted simply as a reckless, violent crowd.\(^{63}\) And, while the mob inspired fear, it also was an important outlet for expression in a political system which featured limited suffrage. E.P. Thompson argued that eighteenth-century mobs in England rioting against the Corn Laws employed a “moral economy,” that is, they employed legitimating factors such as seeking out magistrates to condone their actions because they felt that traditional, paternalistic models of government were necessary to protect their right to affordable bread and grain.\(^{64}\) Two such occurrences of widespread riot in response to the Corn Laws occurred in 1795 and 1801, during the Wars with France.\(^{65}\) The riot was an important political act for the working classes of eighteenth-century Britain, denied as they were a direct voice. However, as important as the riot could be for the working classes, it was just as terrifying an


\(^{63}\) Stevenson’s work, Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1832, offers an excellent and insightful appraisal of the English mob in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as a brief history of the role of the mob and the riot in English politics up to 1700. Lawrence Stone discusses the endemic nature of riots in eighteenth-century Britain, in his Introduction to An Imperial State at War, 12. Don Herzog touches upon riots in Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders. George Rudé also examines the topic in his classic work, The crowd in history; a study of popular disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848. (New York: Wiley, 1964).


\(^{65}\) Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd,” 79.
act for the ruling establishment, that is, Prime Minister William Pitt, King George III, and Parliament.

The riot was further complicated because it could become a repressive, persecuting force for counterrevolution. It did not necessarily have to be a mass of peasants or working-class individuals agitating for social justice or political representation. The historian Charles Tilly complicates social movements, and rightly so. As he points out, factors of “war, parliamentarization, capitalization, and proletarianization” could come together to produce a variety of results. As the public sphere widened, gaining more members and more demands for political agency, a series of shifting alignments could come together to agitate for change. Tilly reads the eighteenth century in Britain as a series of social movements beginning with the riot of radical supporters of John Wilkes in 1768, the Gordon riots of 1780, continuing through the 1790s’ French Revolution movements, both for and against, and on into the struggle for abolition. Importantly for this work, Tilly points out that in the early years of the French Revolution in Britain both elite agitators for parliamentary reform and working-class radicals arguing for French democratization in England came together to push for their interests, and were met by rivals who responded with their own “specialized associations.” In this climate of increasing pressure upon the state to maintain order, options to do so were explored. The lack of a centralized, professional police force hampered

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67 Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, “Joint actions of dissident aristocrats, radical bourgeois, indignant petit bourgeois, and workers thus created precedents and legal spaces for social movement actions, even when current campaigns and alliances ended,” 27.  
efforts to curb mob violence. A pervasive fear of riot persisted in Britain throughout the eighteenth century, and the state remained uncertain as how best to address it.

A particular episode which resonated with British politicians during the counterrevolution crisis was the Gordon Riots of 1780. These riots resulted in the deaths of 285 people in the city of London and the hanging of 25 others, as well as massive damage: £70,000 of damage compensated to private individuals and £30,000 of damage to public buildings. The mob was inspired by Lord George Gordon’s aggressive resistance to the Catholic Relief Bill. Gordon spoke to 60,000 Protestant Association supporters on June 2, 1780, in St. George’s Fields, London, after which he introduced a petition in Parliament with 120,000 signatures condemning the Relief Bill. The situation in Parliament spiraled rapidly into chaos, when a mob formed outside attacking supporters of the Bill, while Gordon kept exiting the chambers to keep the crowd abreast of the situation. Finally, a Colonel Holroyd threatened to kill Gordon if he admitted the mob into Parliament, and Henry Herbert followed him around with a sword threatening death if the mob entered. The following anti-Catholic riots did not subside until June 9, after troops had put down musket wielding rioters and Gordon himself had been placed in the Tower. To understand the fear Britons had for mobs, the riot, and displays of militant, reactionary nationalism, it is essential to recognize the Gordon Riots of 1780. Indeed, William Pitt the Younger had helped to put down the mob as a Lincoln’s Inn volunteer, and in 1792, when Reeves formed his loyal Association, Pitt

70 Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 102. 
71 Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 96-97. 
72 Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 97. 
73 Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 102.
immediately recalled the discord of 1780. Both radicals and loyalists undoubtedly remembered the event in the contentious years of the counterrevolution.

It is not a stretch to state that the Gordon Riots became a bogey in the political landscape of Britain. The chaos of the riots and the ineptitude with which the government put them down were vivid memories in the minds of Britons during the counterrevolution crisis. In 1792, in the midst of French invasion hysteria, riots reemerged as a mode of persecution employed by reactionary mobs. In a letter written by the Secretary of State, Henry Dundas, to Lord Hawkesbury (the future Earl of Liverpool and Prime Minister) dated December 10, 1792, Dundas described the strain which recent riots in Birmingham had placed on the local military regiments there, the Blues. Dundas wrote as well that “I understand from the Secretary of War, that it will be extremely inconvenient to make any addition to the force in the present moment.” Britain was bracing for an invasion by the French Revolutionary government, and the nation’s military resources were viewed as perilously thin. Without a professional police force the state, while fearful of the threat which such police could pose, was ironically obliged to rely upon the seemingly more coercive option of employing soldiers to maintain order against riots.

Alongside this form of mass persecution by the mob was the widespread phenomenon of informing on potentially subversive individuals by private Britons. The Home Office folios are chock full of letters written by private citizens informing on all manner of conspiracies and plots. Dundas was flooded with requests for aid as well as tips from

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75 Henry Dundas, National Archives Home Office/42/23, f. 288-289.
76 Dundas, NA HO/42/23, f. 289.
informants across the country describing alleged Jacobin activities. One such letter, also from December 10, 1792, came from Captain Greg Langton of the 24\textsuperscript{th} Regiment and included a list of “the Toasts of the Reforming Society in the Borrough-at their last meeting which held last week [sic],” beginning with “1 The Rights of Man” and ending with “16 The Virtue of Revolutions; and may Revolution generate Revolution till Despotism is extinct.”\textsuperscript{77}

The list of potential Jacobin revolutionaries from within continued, with potentially traitorous soldiers included in their ranks. One letter, dated December 8, 1792, signed simply by “a Patriot” begins:

I have by accident gained intelligence which my duty obliges me to lay before your Lordship. My information is, that the Guards are dissatisfied; that they consider the intended increase to their pay to one shilling a day, as effect of his Majesty’s apprehensions, & not of his benevolence; that they complain that they have not received their arrears, or their former increase of pay; (I know not which;) that they ascribe this to Mr. Pitt & threaten to tear him in pieces; and that if any tumults should happen they will not oppose the mob, but will join them.\textsuperscript{78}

The “Patriot” went on to speculate that the opinions he described may have been held by a few, or, contradictorily, a majority of the troops. He concluded with his earnest wish “that the wisdom of his Majesty’s ministers may avert the impending dangers, I preserve the Constitution are [sic] the ardent wishes of My Lord your Lordships.”\textsuperscript{79} In a final Post Script, A Patriot made sure to assure Dundas “that the Duke of York does not possess the soldiers’ affections.”\textsuperscript{80} Whether or not the author of this letter sought to curry favor with either the

\textsuperscript{77} Greg Langton, NA HO/42/23, f.290.
\textsuperscript{78} A Patriot, NA HO/42/23, f. 255-256, f.255.
\textsuperscript{79} A Patriot, NA HO/42/23, f. 256.
\textsuperscript{80} A Patriot, NA HO/42/23, f. 256.
Duke of York or Dundas is unclear. However, such a foreboding letter written by an anonymous Briton could only have heightened confusion in a nation wrought with invasion hysteria.

Suspicious continued to abound, with claims of stockpiled weapons found in preparation for an insurrection. Another anonymous informant, “A Friend to the Constitution,” wrote the Home Office reporting “that a case containing muskets to the weight of nearly one Ton passed through here [Huntingdon] in a Sheffield Waggan [sic] directly to Geo. Howard Esq. of Norwich last week.” The informant went on to clarify his concern, stating, “I only mention this because matters are so very disagreeably situated.” In another letter dated December 14, 1792 and addressed directly to William Pitt, another informant, P. Haselwood, described the dire situation in Sheffield and Bradford, writing: “this town swarms with Jacobins and our Society is forbid to meet because we are afraid that we should be numerous and riot.” Haselwood’s society was a “Party of Loyal true Blues,” who were beaten out of the Church in which they were meeting by Jacobins. Haselwood also warned of stockpiled weapons in the town: 3,000 barrels of powder and muskets “4 feet 6 inches long in the barrel.” The source of this information was “Mr. Pomeroy the Bookseller’s wife who heard Garrison say he was sist [sic] That the English were going to war with France She wished if they were, that every English ship might sink & every Man perish before they

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81 A Friend to the Constitution, NA HO/42/23, f. 328.
82 A Friend to the Constitution, NA HO/42/23, f. 328.
83 P. Haselwood, NA HO/42/23, f. 329-331, 331.
84 Haselwood, NA HO/42/23, f. 331.
could get upon the French Coast.” Haselwood’s letter illustrates exactly the policy of reporting seditious opinions to the magistracy which the Reeves’ Associations espoused. Indeed, given his politics Haselwood himself may have subscribed to the Association’s pamphlets and taken up Reeves’ call to root out sedition.

With the Home Office flooded by such letters full of hearsay, rumor, and anonymous accusations, it is nearly impossible to discern what was true. We can ascertain, though, that most accounts were surely wildly speculative, since evidence for popular risings such as those which were described in the previous accounts does not exist. We can also assume that retribution was carried out and that informants were eager to ingratiate themselves with the powers that be. At the same time, such documents implore historians to question how the ministers responded. In a society that was fearful of riot, and which did experience violent riots during this period, any threat must have been taken seriously. How to respond, though, was a dilemma posed to Prime Minister Pitt, Secretary of State Dundas, and other members of the British ruling establishment. Boyd Hilton points out that the employment of spies and informers “offended against a long-held belief that English liberties were safe because there were no letters de cachet or knocks on the door at night.” A cornerstone of English national identity juxtaposed against Continental, specifically French, despotism was the lack of a professional police under a “central state organization.” Yet, Britain needed to police society more stringently in 1792. Troops were needed at the ready in case of a French invasion from without. At the same time, though, troops had to respond to potential “fifth-
column” activities from Jacobin societies within the country. And, further exacerbating matters, loyalists were more than eager to violently seek out Jacobin groups and expose them to Justices of the Peace. In a nation like Britain, with a limited constabulary based on parish organizations, the question remained as to how should the state respond? An examination of the writings of conservative polemicists is helpful, but now, as then, words can only go so far. When more forceful action was required in stamping out Jacobinism, Reeves’ Associations were welcomed. However, before discussing Reeves it is necessary to examine the more benign conservative designs.
CHAPTER 2: STRAINS OF CONSERVATISM

“Tom. No, first I’ll stay to burn my book, and then I’ll go make a bonfire and—Jack. Hold, Tom. There is but one thing worse than a bitter enemy, and that is an imprudent friend. If thou would’st show thy love to thy King and country, let’s have no drinking, no riot, no bonfires, but put in practice this text, which our parson preached on last Sunday, ‘Study to be quiet, work with your own hands, and mind your own business.’” – Hannah More, Village Politics, 1792.89

The conservative reaction to the French Revolution in Britain was expansive, varied, and cut across class lines. It would be a mistake to assume that the reaction sprung solely from the landed aristocracy. An array of Britons ranging across the socio-economic scale united to confront the threat of Jacobinism. Two striking examples of the emerging British conservatism of this period are Edmund Burke and Hannah More. Burke is widely recognized today as the godfather of modern conservatism. A member of the gentry, Burke wrote Reflections on the Revolution in France as a vindication of British institutions in the face of the radical republicanism that had succeeded in France. His prescient work anticipated the Terror and the eventual conflict that would engulf the Continent. While his work became the touchstone, then, for the conservative reaction to the French Revolution, it would be a mistake to assume that Burke was a lone voice in condemning Jacobinism. Men of all classes also took part, with artisans forming clubs against sedition, yeomen rooting out Jacobin societies, and farmers volunteering for the militia. Women also joined the counterrevolution, most famously Hannah More, the conservative polemicist.

Once Britons chose to join the counterrevolutionary cause their roles in that cause required definition. What purpose would the counterrevolution serve if it also turned into a violent upending of social order? Hence, More wrote in her handbook of what constituted appropriate working-class conservatism, *Village Politics*, that there would be “no drinking, no riot, no bonfires…” Social order and stability mattered more than fervor. For the purposes of this work, it is essential to recognize that there existed both a genteel conservatism, in the form of Burke, and a populist, though restrained conservatism, in the form of More. Both were palatable to the growing interests of the state. In the Reeves’ Associations, as we shall see, however, the loyalist cause could turn violent and uncontrollable, forcing the state to step in. In order to fully understand the phenomenon of popular conservatism, it is thus necessary to first briefly examine the thought of Burke and More, and then explore the more tangible activities of the Reeves’ Associations.

Edmund Burke, a member of Parliament, an Anglo-Irishman, and a former Whig, was the first Briton who took up the standard for the counterrevolutionary cause. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was the initial conservative critique of the revolution in written form, and centered upon a tradition of Britain’s superior institutions protecting both liberty and private property. Burke concluded that the very nature of Britain’s “old establishments” proved a bulwark against chaotic change and the gamble of political theory. The strength of tradition, enshrined in the English constitutional settlement, was the cornerstone upon which Burke built his vision of social order. At the same time that Burke offered a defense of

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Britain’s political system, he also recognized the international spirit which characterized Jacobinism. The French Revolution, with its rhetoric of liberty, fraternity, and egalité, was a movement whose principles, if accepted by the masses outside of France, could become a grave threat to monarchs across Europe.\footnote{Gregory Claeys, \textit{The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics} (Houndmills, Basingstroke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 22-23, 29.} In Burke’s writings he vocalized his fears of revolution spreading across the Channel:

> These writings and sermons [of revolutionaries] have filled the populace [of Paris] with a black and savage atrocity of mind, which supersedes in them the common feelings of nature, as well as all sentiments of morality and religion….The spirit of proselytism attends this spirit of fanaticism. They have societies to cabal and correspond at home and abroad for the propagation of their tenets.\footnote{Burke, \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}, 154.}

Burke went on to cite all the places throughout Europe where revolutionary societies had been heard to exist, pointing out that in England there were a number of people reaching out in turn to the revolution.\footnote{Burke, \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}, 154.} Burke was terrified that the French Revolution, with its “spirit of proselytism,” would engulf not only Continental Europe but Britain as well, and worse, through the actions of Britons themselves.

Burke famously argued against the expansion of political participation to the masses. For Burke mass political participation would not only threaten the stability of the state but also the stability of the entire social order. His social order was centered upon two social classes which had upheld the basic tenets of civilization:

> Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in the European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were
indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the
spirit of religion. The nobility and clergy, the one by profession, the other by
patronage, kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and
confusions, and whilst governments were rather in their causes than formed.95

In Burke’s mind a natural order existed in which social betters protected knowledge and
through doing so, society. The real threat came from the masses: “along with its natural
protectors and guardians, learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the
hoofs of a swinish multitude.”96 The democratization of knowledge and political participation
carried broad implications for Burke. The commercial enterprises upon which England had
constructed its global empire would be forfeit. Ultimately, Burke saw only chaos and
ignorance as the result of mass political participation:

Where trade and manufactures are wanting to a people, and the spirit of
nobility and religion remains, sentiment supplies, and not always ill supplies
their place; but if commerce and the arts should be lost in an experiment to try
how well a state may stand without these old fundamental principles, what
sort of a thing must be a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and at the same
time, poor and sordid barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride,
possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter?97

Without a nobility and clergy guiding the rest of society, all civilization was forfeit. Burke’s
disgust with the masses was thus well-known. The phrase “swinish multitude” resonated
throughout England, as the epithet became an indignant rallying cry for radicals like Tom
Paine and the members of the London Corresponding Society.

95 Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, 78-79.
96 Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, 79.
97 Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, 79.
Writing in 1790, Burke anticipated the violence that the Revolution would engage in once it radicalized, and expressed his fears that England would succumb to a similar revolution. The importance of Burke as one of the first counterrevolutionaries in Britain must be stressed. Without him it is difficult to imagine that a John Reeves would have formed his Association and that his movement would have expanded as rapidly as it did. The nearly hysterical fear of revolution is palpable in Burke’s writing. Without this emotion, an emotion a number of Britons apparently internalized, it is hard to believe that the counterrevolution could have been as successful as it was. At the same time Burke emphasized complete distrust of any and all mass political movements. Burke’s counterrevolution would come from above, led by the social betters who had always protected civilization.

However, if Burke’s was the voice of impending doom aimed at the upper rungs of society, Hannah More was the voice of countering hope, and one which the masses could more easily digest. More’s initial salvo on behalf of the ruling establishment came in the form of Village Politics, a dialogue between a radical mason, Tom Hod, and his loyalist friend, the blacksmith Jack Anvil. Presented in pamphlet form, the dialogue is a quick and simple read easily digested by potentially busy readers such as artisans and yeomen. Jack initially dismissed Tom’s dismay over the state of the British government as a simple illness, to which Tom replied, “I’m not sick; I want Liberty and Equality, and the Rights of Man.”

Jack then proceeded to tear apart Tom’s argument in proto-nationalist terms: “What, Tom, we imitate them? We follow the French! Why they only begun all this mischief at first, in

98 More, Village politics, 3.
99 More, Village politics, 4.
order to be just what we are already. Why I’d sooner go to the Negers to get learning, or to the Turks to get religion, than to the French for freedom and happiness.”

Importantly, Jack argued that the British already possessed “freedom and happiness.” And further, Jack implied that the British were already on their path to global hegemony, if they had not already achieved it, when Jack dismissed other races, “Negers” and “Turks,” as inferiors alongside the French. A British national identity, predicated on superior knowledge and social order, was explicit in More’s dialogue.

In order to argue this further, More critiqued the French Revolution’s assault on acceptable British norms of social order. Jack dismissed the French notion of freedom in their republic:

Free, Tom! Aye, free with a witness. They are all so free, that there’s nobody safe. They make free to rob whom they will, and kill whom they will. If they don’t like a man’s looks, they make free to hang him without judge or jury, and the next lamp-post does for the gallows; so then they call themselves free, because you see they have no king to take them up and hang them for it.

The message More imparted was that the French were in a state of anarchy, in which private citizens took the law into their own hands and no one was made safe by the state. Without a stable, law-executing government, society descended into chaos. And when society descended into chaos in Britain’s experience, the dangers were mob rule and all the violence which that entailed. As Herzog points out in his appraisal of More, her goal was to reinforce time-tested conservative values, with order and “hierarchy… in everyone’s interests.”

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100 More, Village politics, 5.
101 More, Village politics, 5.
102 Herzog, Poisoning the Minds, 131.
British social order was most conducive to protecting personal liberties from More’s point of view. To understand Reeves it is necessary to understand More and her appeal, both to the working classes of Britain and the ruling establishment. A writer like More offered an example of a Briton who was both patriotic and loyal, as well as a law-abiding citizen. More also emphasized the danger of mob rule. When law was in the hands of the people, More argued, chaos ensued. However, Britain at this time relied upon private, volunteer magistrates, constables, and beadles to police society. Simmering beneath her critique was a desire for state-sponsored order, whether it was through the Crown or through a jury. In this climate, with its fear of mob rule, the vigilantism which the Reeves’ Associations engaged in was not palatable with the interests of the modern state, nor those of the nation.

More’s writings also extended to songs more accessible to the working classes than even Village Politics. Her song, “The good militia man,” published much later in 1796, is valuable as an example of the didactic literature that Hannah More produced for consumption by the working classes. During the Revolutionary Wars, Britain enlisted hundreds of thousands of men in volunteer militias billeted on British soil. This was a strange development for a nation that traditionally did not have large, standing armies on its own shores. Also, these volunteer militias were tasked with policing society, particularly in their role as riot police. Within the ruling establishment there was also a widespread fear of arming civilians, though. As such, Britons were compelled to define what roles these

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newly armed people should have in society. The state was compelled to redefine acceptable patriotism through conservative organs, specifically written propaganda.

More was commissioned by the Bishop of London to write the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, a series of conservative tracts which sold several million copies. \(^{105}\) “The good militia man,” as well as *Village Politics*, appeared in the tracts. More wrote this poem as an instruction for how a proper British soldier should behave, one who “at my country’s call… turned militia man.” \(^{106}\) She described society’s acceptance of this new citizen-soldier in the fourth stanza: “Of maidens not few, sir,/Come crowding around the green,/And so do parents too, sir,/The children push between.” \(^{107}\) Civilians figured prominently in More’s description of the militia as it trained. Being brave, of course, the British soldiers impetuously wished that the French would attack. \(^{108}\) More’s mission was to offer advice to potentially confused or ill-disciplined volunteer soldiers through her hero, Dan the Ploughman turned militiaman: “First then, be sound at heart, sir,/Be loyal, says my song;/And nobly act your part, sir,/To right your country’s wrong.” \(^{109}\) More called on the nation’s militia men to set right the wrongs that the French had inflicted upon Britain. Further advice for potentially wayward volunteers included: “be stout/And blunt, and brave, and bold” (10\(^{th}\) stanza), courteous to maidens (12\(^{th}\) stanza), and never drunk (13\(^{th}\) stanza). \(^{110}\) A prohibition against swearing was

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stated, with King George III as an example of probity (14th stanza). Most tellingly, the “[soldier] says with honest Dan, / The soldier can’t be good, sir, / While wicked is the man’. This song illustrates how Britons were seeking to define a patriotic citizen-soldier. Considering that Britain was a nation at this time which did not have a tradition of large standing armies in contact with civilians, this poem is important as an example of how the encroaching power of the state affected the everyday lives of Britons. Importantly, a militiaman was sober, respectful, and followed orders; as opposed to a rioter, who was often drunk, irreverent, and acted on his or her own volition. The potential rioter was circumscribed in this narrowly defined social space, the militiaman, in which loyalty could be properly expressed.

More’s poem highlights the shift which had occurred in Britain between the founding of the John Reeves’ Association at the Crown and Anchor in 1792 and Reeves’ trial for treason in 1796. More was writing to working-class Britons; her work was even disseminated by the John Reeves’ Associations. However, unlike the message of Reeves, More was describing a patriotic, loyalist Briton whose actions were circumscribed by the state. Indeed, the government explicitly dictated acceptable patriotic association when it subsumed private associations into the Volunteers in 1793. However, the intervening experience with the Reeves’ Associations must be analyzed before the arrival of More’s “good militia man.” The rejection of Reeves and the acceptance of More and Burke offers an intriguing window into

113 Herzog, Poisoning the Minds, 131.
114 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 86-87.
the nature of the changing British state during the French Revolutionary period. The power of the state was solidified by William Pitt, and right-wing reactionaries like Reeves found themselves, ironically, on the outside looking in.
CHAPTER 3: THE ASSOCIATION’S INCEPTION

“It appears from History and Observation, that the inequality of rank and fortune in this happy Country, is more the result of every man’s own exertions, than of any controlling institution of the State…. By this happy Inequality, and dependence of one man on another, employment is found for all, in their several vocations to which they have been called by design or accident. This Inequality and dependence is so infinitely diversified in this country, that there is no place upon where there are so many ways, in which a man by his talents and industry may raise himself above his equals.” – *The Association Papers*, John Reeves, Esq. in the Chair, J. Moore, secretary, November 20, 1792.115

The Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers first met on November 20, 1792, in response to fears that radical supporters of the French Revolution were plotting a similar insurrection in Great Britain. John Reeves was the chair for the Association’s first meeting, as well as its most passionate organizer. Born into a middle-class family in Westminster, Reeves attended Eton, as did many up and coming men of his generation.116 Attending Merton College at Oxford in 1771, Reeves took the bar in 1779.117 Not only a lawyer by trade, Reeves was also a passionate advocate of legal reform. In 1792 he returned from his appointment as chief justice of Newfoundland to London, where he quickly engaged in the loyalist cause.118 Appointed Receiver of the Public Offices and charged with executing the Middlesex Justices Act, Reeves was in a position to both

comment on the law enforcement system and advocate for its expansion.\textsuperscript{119} By all accounts a solid loyalist and staunch defender of law and order, Reeves eventually became such an absolutist that he was brought up on trial for his assertion that the British monarch could operate effectively without both houses of Parliament in 1795.\textsuperscript{120} Eugene Charlton Black describes Reeves as a “parsimonious bachelor,” who antagonized his superiors as much as his opponents with his “cupidity” as well as his ultra-conservatism.\textsuperscript{121}

Reeves is an interesting character worth exploring, albeit with some difficulty. Unlike the Edmund Burkes or Hannah Mores of the conservative reaction to the French Revolution, Reeves was neither lionized in his time nor ours. Prime Minister William Pitt initially seized upon the Association as a useful example to the working classes of loyalist agitation; however, once Reeves had performed his task he was largely discredited.\textsuperscript{122} The fascinating paradox of Reeves is how he was at once both a patriotic, perhaps even rabidly loyalist Briton, who was ironically brought up on trial for charges of seditious libel. Oddly, his Association is commonly referenced in works studying this period, but rarely explored in depth, while John Reeves the man is generally glossed over or outright ignored.\textsuperscript{123}

Furthermore, Reeves’ role in the long, slow process leading to the professionalization of the

\textsuperscript{119} Black, \textit{The Association}, 233.
\textsuperscript{120} Herzog, \textit{Poisoning the Minds}, 128.
\textsuperscript{121} Black, \textit{The Association}, 235.
\textsuperscript{123} Ironically, Colley completely excludes John Reeves and, indeed, any reference to the Crown and Anchor Association from her work, \textit{Britons}. Oddly, in the chapter entitled “Manpower,” pp. 286-325, the most logical place to address this large movement, Colley jumps past the period of its inception and dominance to the outbreak of war in 1793, and, even further ahead, to the Supplementary Militia Act of 1796, pp. 294. Furthermore, Colley places heavy emphasis upon the volunteer militia as active citizen-patriots, even though their precedent could be found in the Association movement: see James J. Sack, \textit{From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832}, 104. Colley, \textit{Britons}, 286-325, 294.
constabulary is often excluded from works on the period. An examination of the published Association Papers, Reeves’ own work, *Thoughts on the English Government*, and multiple responses to the Association, will help to illuminate the Association’s successes and failures and its ultimate condemnation by the state.

The Association’s ringing declaration of November 20, 1792, called for action against sedition. Meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London, the solitary pair of Reeves and the Association’s secretary, J. Moore, laid out its mission

> Considering the danger to which the Public Peace and Order are exposed by the circulating of mischievous Opinions, founded upon plausible but false reasoning; and that this circulation is principally carried on by the industry of Clubs and Societies of various denominations in many parts of the Kingdom: It appears to us, That is now become the duty of all Persons, who wish well to their Native Country, to endeavour, in their several neighborhoods, to prevent the sad effects of such mischievous industry; and that it would greatly tend to promote these good endeavours, if Societies were formed in different parts of the Kingdom, whose object should be to support the Laws, to suppress seditious Publications, and to defend our Persons and Property against the innovations and depredations that seem to be threatened by those who maintain the mischievous opinions before alluded to.\(^{124}\)

In this statement the fear of impending revolution in Britain was palpable. The state was in peril, “mischievous Opinions” circulated, “Clubs and Societies of various denominations in many parts of the Kingdom” abounded, sedition was fomenting, an almost hysterical fear of Jacobinism resonated.\(^{125}\) Shockingly, the Association called for private citizens “to support

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the Laws, to suppress seditious Publications, and to defend our Persons and Property.”

With the hindsight granted by the grim experiences of the twentieth-century, with its brown shirts in Germany, Falangists in Spain, and black shirts in Italy, the problems of non state-sponsored coercive forces are easily recognized. Importantly for the historian, though, is to examine how the Association’s message was received in its own time. As David Philips points out, Hanoverian England was dominated by voluntary associations, almost all exclusively male. The precedent for such associations went back to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners of the seventeenth century, and continued on through the prosecution associations, and commercial and mutual insurance agencies.

Law enforcement itself had also undergone a period of reform and experimentation throughout the eighteenth century. Under the parish-organized system of volunteer policing, male citizens were expected to serve in law enforcement roles. The first professional constables were not in effect in London until 1792, and until 1829 there was no Metropolitan Police Force. Up until that point “ad hoc arrangements” were both largely effective and agreeable to Parliament, trying to keep taxes at a minimum. Constables were notoriously unreliable however, and by the 1790s their general impression was one of ineptitude. Watchmen were lampooned as drunkards who slept on the job, while constables were noted as unprofessional authorities, subject to corruption through bribery and the leveling of false

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128 Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 328.
129 Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 328.
charges as well as shirking of duties.\textsuperscript{130} Laws were carried out by Justices of the Peace, JP’s, local magistrates supported by volunteer, often inept yeomen operating at the parish level and, if necessary, troops.\textsuperscript{131} The fundamental limitation of this legal system was that it could only function after the crime had been committed. Law enforcement in the eighteenth century in Britain was not preventative, unlike the use of ordinances in the Prussian police-state.\textsuperscript{132} Experimentation with preventative policing had occurred with semi-professional police, first with the Fielding brothers’ Bow Street Runners in 1750, then with Sir John Fielding’s failed argument for a Light Horse regiment to patrol London’s highways, and finally with the 1774 act to reform the Westminster Night Watch.\textsuperscript{133} Reeves’ movement was entirely typical of law enforcement in Hanoverian England up to the 1790s. At its outset, Reeves’ Associations were operating within the legal framework. However, complications arose once Reeves’ Associations overstepped the prescribed bounds of British law.

Before examining the complications with the Associations themselves, Reeves’ own role in law enforcement before November 1792 should be explored. Reeves also attempted to enforce anti-sedition through the legal framework in his capacity as Receiver of Public Offices. Charged with enforcing the 1792 Middlesex Justices Act, Reeves was in a unique position of power. The Act, put forward by Nicholas Conant, a Middlesex justice of the peace, called for salaried, and thus professional magistrates, to enforce the law.\textsuperscript{134} Resistance

\textsuperscript{130} Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 62-67.
\textsuperscript{131} Stevenson, Popular Disturbances, 329.
\textsuperscript{132} Raeff, The Well-Ordered Police State, 176.
\textsuperscript{133} Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 46-56.
was to be expected, and the gadfly of the emerging Pittite war bloc, Charles James Fox, presciently condemned the law for its propensity to create patronage.\textsuperscript{135} The patronage and cost of enforcing the Act is seen in Reeves’ own correspondence. In a letter written to his friend, the Home Office Undersecretary Evan Nepean, Reeves outlined demands for a larger constabulary to keep order in London.\textsuperscript{136} Dated December 8, 1792, Reeves’ letter relayed to Nepean a meeting he had the previous night with several Justices.\textsuperscript{137} At this meeting Reeves argued for an increase in the constabulary. The proposed plan called for a number of persons to be held on a retainer, who would exercise once a week and stand by as an extra force in the event of public disorder.\textsuperscript{138} Each man would be paid only 5 shillings a week, for a total cost of £10. The number of constables was divided across seven different London neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{139} Taking into account extra costs, and “small incidental expenses,” though, the cost would be closer to £25.\textsuperscript{140} Reeves anticipated a required budget of over half of his initial estimates, an eyebrow-raising remark, indeed. While rewards for successful prosecutions were nothing new in the eighteenth century, they were becoming increasingly unseemly, and yet Reeves anticipated reaping many of them, as his budget indicated. Reeves also pointed out that the Attorney General had been present, and approved it.\textsuperscript{141} The details of Reeves’ plan are important considering that the Metropolitan Police of Robert Peel would

\textsuperscript{135} Paley, “The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792,” 228.
\textsuperscript{136} John Reeves, NA HO/42/23, f. 361-363.
\textsuperscript{137} Reeves, NA HO/42/23, f. 361.
\textsuperscript{138} Reeves, NA HO/42/23, f. 361.
\textsuperscript{139} Reeves, NA HO/42/23, f. 362.
\textsuperscript{140} Reeves, NA HO/42/23, f. 362.
\textsuperscript{141} Reeves, NA HO/42/23, f. 362.
not form for over another twenty-five years. Conant, the ruling establishment, and Reeves had designs for such a preventative police force as early as December of 1792.

As the author of a failed Police Bill in 1785, Reeves clearly had been working towards the professionalization of law enforcement for some time. The 1785 bill called for three Commissioners of Police in the Metropolitan District of London, who would be appointed by the government and who held veto powers over local magistrates. As Reynolds describes the proposal of 1785, “this bill embodied the ultimate logic of eighteenth-century preventative policing: the surveillance of persons and places, strict punishment of relatively minor crimes, and keeping records on suspected as well as known offenders by a government-controlled, metropolitan authority.” The bill overreached in the breadth of powers it granted, and was voted down with ease by Parliament. Ruth Paley caustically ascribes the failure of the bill to Reeves’ “renowned… tactlessness,” as well. Reeves demanded too much power for the police, too quickly, at a time when fears of Continental policing continued to trump demands for greater security in Britain. Britons by and large were unwilling to adopt a police-state on the Prussian model, nor a centralized police force on the French model. The logic of the failed bill was seen again in the Associations started by the bill’s author, Reeves. Surveillance was at the crux of his “policing” movement, as was the keeping of records of known Jacobins and their sympathizers. At the same time, a crime as minor as owning Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man* was to be reported by an Association member

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142 Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies*, 73-75.
143 Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies*, 74.
144 Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies*, 74.
to his JP, who was then expected to prosecute the owner for sedition. Reeves, in the absence of state action to police society, and furthermore, political thought, took it upon himself to create a mechanism to do so.

At its inception, the Association was successful, to an extent. The first meeting was likely between John Reeves and Moore alone, and according to the reformist Thomas Hardy, Moore may have been a pseudonym for a nonexistent secretary. However, in spite of this humble beginning, the Association did grow, with chapters springing up around the country, even one in Birmingham. In the Association papers Reeves explicitly stated that one of the central missions of the movement was to spread it throughout Britain: “one of the duties this Society has imposed on itself is to encourage persons to form similar Societies in different parts of the town [Reeves’ initial hope was to expand in London].” Reeves was more successful than he had anticipated. Eventually there were nearly two thousand loyalist societies across the nation, led by Reeves’ own Association in London. In the Association minutes for November 30, 1792, a mere ten days after its founding, requests for subscriptions had been received from places as near as Charing Cross and Pall Mall in London to as far as Gloucester, Salisbury, Bath, and even Edinburgh. Mark Philp argues repeatedly that the vast bulk of the members came from the “lower orders” or “middle ranks.” Examining the membership rosters of Associations supports this demographic, as Association members

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146 Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-93,” 47.
147 Rose, “The Priestley Riots of 1791,” 84.
149 Claeys, The French Revolution Debate in Britain, 79.
were not from the nobility by and large. The movement was thus dominated by a new class of political activists outside of the traditional oligarchy which had led Britain in the long century since the Glorious Revolution.

Early on, Reeves offered a blueprint for subsequent societies to follow. First and foremost, order was key: each Association chapter was to be led by a Committee, “and that the Committee should be small, as better adapted for the dispatch of business; for it should be remembered that these are not open Societies for talk and debate, but for private consultation and real business.” At its outset the movement was decidedly exclusive. These Associations were also restricted in their political scope: debate was not encouraged, rather the focus was on accomplishing “real business.” Reeves further stated that meetings should be conducted only once or twice a month, and even then mostly for the purpose “of auditing the accounts.” Money was thus central to the Association mission. After these initial goals, four missions were outlined for each Association. The foremost being:

*The object of such Societies should be to check the circulation of seditious publications of all kinds, whether newspapers or pamphlets, or the invitations to club-meetings, by discovering and bringing to justice not only the authors and printers of them, but those who keep them in shops, or hawk them in the streets for sale; or, what is much worse, are employed in circulating them from house to house in any manner whatever.*

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Secondly, the Association was tasked with “circulating cheap books and papers… to undeceive those poor people who had been misled by the infusion of opinions dangerous to their own welfare and that of the State.”\textsuperscript{155} The movement sought to censor political thought initially. It rapidly shifted, though, from rooting out subversives to publishing counterrevolutionary tracts, many of which were printed in the Association Papers.\textsuperscript{156} Control of political thought was a central goal that the Association hoped to achieve. The movement also gained the patronage of the government as it proved to be more successful, with Pitt recognizing its value in swaying public opinion.\textsuperscript{157} The written word was an important tool for the Association, and an acceptable one, from the perspective of the state. As long as propaganda was the Association’s main weapon, Pitt found the organization useful.

The third mission for Association members was to “hold themselves in readiness to prevent or suppress tumults or riots, if necessary.”\textsuperscript{158} However, in this role the autonomy of the Association was circumscribed to some extent: “LASTLY, it should be a part of the original compact of every such Society, that in what they mean to do, they shall always act in subordination to the Magistrate and the Executive Government, and in their aid and support, and not otherwise.”\textsuperscript{159} Reeves’ Association, in theory, fulfilled an important role in both civil

\textsuperscript{155} Association for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers (London, 1793). 
\textit{Association papers. Part I. Number I}. November 24, 1792, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{156} Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-93,” 47-48. Including the works of Hannah More.
\textsuperscript{158} Association for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers (London, 1793). 
\textit{Association papers. Part I. Number I}. November 24, 1792, 8.
\textsuperscript{159} Association for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers (London, 1793). 
\textit{Association papers. Part I. Number I}. November 24, 1792, 8.
society and the government apparatus leading Britain in 1792. In the absence of a modern, organized police force, an absence which Reeves had already noted and argued against, his private Associations could act as a proxy for state police. Under this logic, Reeves had nearly returned to a Lockean State of Nature in which the responsibility of the enforcing the law was shared by all, or at least those true Britons who were members of the Reeves’ Associations. At the same time, though, a tension remained in that the actions of the Association were bound by law. Members were obliged to notify Justices of the Peace to enforce the laws. Following the tradition of amateur, volunteer policing, they could assist a JP or like magistrate, but they were not intended to carry out the execution of law.

A letter published in the London newspaper, The Oracle, offers a glimpse into how the Association spread its mission. A copy of the Association’s declaration with John Reeves as the chairman was published above the local declaration that, on November 28, 1792, “At a NUMEROUS AND FRIENDLY MEETING OF GENTLEMEN, (INHABITANTS OF PECKHAM) at FISHER’S TAVERN, NUN GREEN, in the COUNTY of SURREY, in the said Parish, a Motion was made, That an ASSOCIATION similar to that of the CROWN and ANCHOR TAVERN in London, should be formed.” The proposed resolutions of the Nun Green Association mirrored those of the Crown and Anchor Association in London: protect private property, root out seditious tracts, remain peaceful and orderly in their endeavors, recruit new members, communicate with London and with other members of the movement.

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and, importantly, “act with Unanimity, and co-operate with the Associations held at the
Crown and Anchor Tavern in London (for preserving Liberty and Property against
Republicans and Levellers) so long as they act according to the Laws of the Land.”162 This
published article is one example of how Associations were founded, how they proclaimed
their existence to Reeves in London and to the community in which they operated, and how
they established their role in maintaining the rule of Church and King against Jacobins. This.example highlights the breadth with which the Association movement occupied Britain as
well as how these private chapters were to correspond with the parent chapter started by John
Reeves. As organizations autonomous from the state, the Associations were expected to
operate within the legal framework, as the men at Nun Green stipulated. This emphasis on
the legality of the Association allowed for Prime Minister Pitt, Secretary of State Dundas,
and the rest of the establishment to let such a body exist.

For Pitt, the Association was an important counterbalance to what he perceived as a
severe threat from Jacobin societies operating within Britain. In his speech to Parliament in
February of 1793 announcing the commencement of war with revolutionary France, Pitt
directly cited the existence of Jacobin societies across Europe, and the support for them by
the French, as causes for going to war. Pitt stated that the French declaration, “by express
resolutions for the destruction of the existing government of all invaded Countries—by the
means of Jacobin Societies promoting the same measures” violated both international treaties

162 Clayton and Gretton, “At a NUMEROUS AND FRIENDLY MEETING OF GENTLEMEN…,” 2.
and national sovereignty and necessitated action.\footnote{William Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail of the Speech of the Right Hon. William Pitt, Chancellor of His Majesty’s Court of Exchequer, Delivered in the House of Commons, on Tuesday the 12\textsuperscript{th} Instant, Feb. 1793, Preparatory to his Motion for an Address on his Majesty’s Message, Relative to the War with France. To Which is Added, The Decree of the 19\textsuperscript{th} of November, 1792. By The Editor of the Diary.} (London, 1793). North Carolina State University. Gale Cengage Learning. \textit{Eighteenth Century Collections Online}, 5.} In the list of grievances against France, Pitt also turned to the nature of Jacobin societies in Britain itself. A charge leveled by the French against the British was their “‘persecution of at the same time all those who maintained French Revolution principles in England.’”\footnote{Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 26.} Pitt’s response to this accusation was one which John Reeves would have heartily agreed with:

That we persecuted such people, can only mean, that we prosecuted them: we have ventured to prosecute no doubt the libelers of our own Constitution; we have brought them to justice by an appeal to British Juries, proceeding herein according to the acknowledged laws of Great Britain, in a manner congenial to the National Character, necessary to our interests and resulting from our duty.\footnote{Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 26.}

This passage affirms British national identity, and the belief in national law as opposed to French Jacobin transnational constructs. Law was not universal; it was a matter for each nation to decide. At the same time, questions of sovereignty were addressed; how dare the French pretend to claim authority in a British legal matter, Pitt asked. Furthermore, Pitt argued “I have observed from many symptoms that the National Convention themselves rather despair of seeing French principles make any great progress in England; they acknowledged the unpopularity of these principles, at the very time when they complain of our not encouraging them in this country…”\footnote{Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 26.} Rather, the King, Parliament, and the people,
indeed, in Pitt’s words, “the Nation of Great Britain” had largely rejected the principles of the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{167}

Pitt went on to cite as further causes for war the French support for an invasion of Britain to assist Jacobins within the country and, importantly, their Decree of Fraternity. The hysteria of a French invasion supported by a fifth-column of Jacobins within Britain was hammered home by Pitt: “announcing their [the French] intention to land ‘fifty thousand Caps of Liberty on our Coast to assist the British Republicans, and to destroy the tyranny of the British Government.’”\textsuperscript{168} Pitt also stated that the issuance of the Decree of Fraternity only provoked the British to further action.\textsuperscript{169} The Decree itself mattered enough to the editors to include a copy in the postscript of the document. The radicalization of the French Revolution in the autumn of 1792 and the execution of King Louis XVI are rightly recognized as key spurs to the wars which followed. However, in counterrevolutionary Britain, the Decree of Fraternity must have even further alarmed those who shared the sentiments of Reeves and his fear of Jacobin agitation from within. The Decree read:

\begin{quote}
The National Convention declare, in the name of the French Nation, that they will grant FRATERNITY and Assistance to ALL PEOPLE who wish to recover their Liberty: and they charge the Executive Power to send the necessary orders to the Generals, to give assistance to such People, and to defend those Citizens who have suffered, or may suffer, in the cause of Liberty.\textsuperscript{170}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{167} Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 26.
\textsuperscript{168} Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 32.
\textsuperscript{169} Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 32.
\textsuperscript{170} W. Woodfall, for T. Debrett, Piccadilly, and J. Richardson, Cornhill. William Pitt, \textit{A Corrected Detail}, 37.
The Decree was issued November 19, 1792. Reeves’ Association was formed the next day. Reeves likely did not know of the decree until after he had formed his Association, but he would have likely been aware that such a move was imminent. The radicalization of the French Revolution, its extension beyond the boundaries of France, and its support for fellow citizens agitating for liberty and equality in their own countries were all key spurs to the counterrevolution in Britain, manifested most vociferously in the Reeves’ Associations. In the light of hysterical fear of Jacobins operating within Britain, it is unsurprising then that Reeves’ Associations gained so many followers.

It is to the publication of anti-seditious tracts that this work must now turn. The Association was successful in publishing advertisements outlining its cause and influencing political opinion. In one advertisement titled “Number III. Containing A protest against T. Paine’s Rights of Man,” the author argued against a Book Society supporting Thomas Paine, stating that his own Association chapter had held a vote concerning the issue, concluding:

He knows that they held the doctrines and the designs of Mr. Paine in abhorrence; but zealously, and indeed laudably attached to a principle of free discussion, and fearful of even appearing hostile to the exercise of a right to [sic] essential to the existence of social Liberty, they suffered themselves (perhaps incautiously, but with the best intentions) to promote the circulation of a work which endeavours to convert the invaluable privilege of a free Press into an instrument of destruction to the State.¹⁷¹

A statement such as this was useful both to Reeves and Pitt; it communicated disapproval of Paine while ostensibly following liberal discourse. Since a tract like this was distributed broadly for at most a two penny cost, this method of propaganda was cost-effective and

acceptable for reaching a broad base of “middling sorts.” The didactic message was successfully conveyed; in a free state opinions should be explored, only up to the point that they question the validity of the state. As long as the Association published anecdotes like these or distributed writings such as Hannah More’s, they could argue that they were operating within the law as loyal Britons. In another example of reprinting loyalist sentiments, in a published resolution from March 15, 1793, the Association thanked Arthur Young for his famous pamphlet condemning the Revolution, writing the hearty endorsement, “‘The Example of France a Warning to Britain,’” in which he [Young] has successfully opposed the Testimony of Facts and Experience to the hazardous Speculations of Visionary Theorists in Matters of Government.” Publishing tracts denigrating Jacobins and dissenters was both acceptable and useful from the perspective of the state.

However, many Britons noticed the hypocrisy of an organization which allegedly guaranteed liberty while at the same time continued to suppress public opinions. The most scathing critique of the Association came from Francis Plowden, an author and Civil Law Professor in Edinburgh. In his history of Britain from 1792 to 1793, Plowden recognized the hypocrisy of Reeves’ Associations in a liberal society:

Mr. Reeve’s association had set out upon the most false, wicked and dangerous grounds that could be devised. They boast of their being formed into a club for the express purpose of preserving themselves against the horrid attempts of daring and seditious men, who under the specious pretence of reformation wish to subvert the Constitution and Government of their Country. What can be more false, than that all those who wish to bring about a Reform in Parliament wish to subvert the Constitution of their Country....

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What more dangerous to the State than to establish such a system of enmity amongst citizens, and fomenting it by means obviously open to retaliation, and immediately tending to the horrid effects of irritation, revenge and despair?¹⁷⁴

In the anti-Jacobin hysteria Plowden recognized that extralegal means to support the nation had dire consequences. At the same time, Plowden argued that advocates for reform should not be confused with subversive elements. Plowden’s point was that societies such as the Reeves’ Associations were not only a danger to liberty, but also to the state that they sought to protect. Ironically, “establishing… a system of enmity amongst citizens” could, and indeed did create more division between Britons. Plowden was a liberal, and so he went on to point out that by Reeves’ logic, the goal of such societies was to persecute solely those who spoke out for reform on any level.¹⁷⁵ Plowden’s liberal response to the illegality of the Reeves’ Association highlighted the backlash that improper, reactionary loyalism could incite:

So seriously were the most illiberal, scandalous and unconstitutional [sic] motives for holding these associations boasted of and propagated, that Mr. Fox and Mr. Grey thought it necessary to notice them in the House; and now perhaps, if our passions have ceased to instruct our reason, the real import and tendency of them may be considered without bias or prejudice.¹⁷⁶

At some point the Association had clearly overextended its reach. The matter was brought up for debate in Parliament by the MPs, Fox and Grey, because the Association, at its core, had

a violent purpose. Plowden also recognized what the Association’s real purpose was: “the extermination of the Dissenters was their aim.”

Were Dissenters necessarily Jacobins? No, but clearly the Reeves’ Associations did not distinguish between the two schools of thought. Plowden’s history is from 1792 to 1793, and he described the Association as a finished movement in 1793, one which was questioned in the halls of Parliament. How, then, did the Association fall from grace so quickly?

Some answers are found in a pamphlet written by the equally critical Joseph Towers, a Dissenting minister, and thus a potential recipient of Reeves’ ire. In his pamphlet entitled *Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications, of the Association at the Crown and Anchor*, Towers shared Plowden’s fear of an illiberal society punishing opinions and free speech. Towers argued that the Associations which spread throughout Britain moved beyond the initial suppression of seditious press: “they also endeavoured to suppress the freedom of conversation, and forcibly to interrupt the meetings of all clubs or societies, whose object was political discussion.”

The forcible interruption of meetings indicated a rising concern in Britain, as Reeves’ movement began to actively police political thought through coercive force. Furthermore, the Association published resolutions, in which they declared, that they would individually, and collectively, be vigilant in the detection, and zealous in the prosecution, of all such persons as might attempt to alienate the affections of the people from

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the established government, either by the circulation of disaffected publications, or seditious conversation.\textsuperscript{179}

Ostensibly, this was still within the realm of law, as long as Association members informed JP’s of seditious activities so that they could act upon it.

However, Towers questioned whether or not this form of coercion was correct, especially as the Association members began to behave more aggressively. Publicans were threatened with the withdrawal of their licenses if they allowed meetings to be held in their pubs or in their private homes for “seditious clubs.”\textsuperscript{180} Towers described the Association members as “zealous” in their goals, a term often applied to religious fanatics. Towers also was alarmed by the appearance of the Loyalist Associations in the first place, stating that “such associations against the freedom of the press, and the freedom of speech, never appeared before in this country, or in any other, in which the inhabitants had any pretensions to public liberty.”\textsuperscript{181} While this statement may gloss over the historical record of previous episodes of British suppression of free speech, it does indicate that Towers felt that the Reeves’ Associations were a new, dangerous political phenomenon unique to his era. He also pointed out the incompatibility of this phenomenon with the nature of the British people:

“associations of private individuals, invested with no legal authority, but combined together for the purpose of exhibiting informations(sic), or instituting prosecutions, against their fellow citizens, for what they may deem too great freedoms in speaking, or in writing, are certainly very inconsistent with the genius of a free people.”\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{179} Towers, \textit{Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications}, 7.

\textsuperscript{180} Towers, \textit{Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications}, 7.

\textsuperscript{181} Towers, \textit{Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications}, 8.

\textsuperscript{182} Towers, \textit{Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications}, 8-9.
Towers was uncomfortable with restrictions on free speech, but his discomfort was especially exacerbated by his recognition of “the genius of a free people,” the Britons. The line between the individual and the collective was blurred in this statement. On the one hand, Towers argued that individual rights must be protected, and that contradictory opinions must be allowed. However, the rhetoric with which he framed that is in the collective, the “free people” who are the Britons, must allow for political debate to continue not solely because of their government and social institutions, but because free thought is at the very core of what it means to be British. In this world, where did the nation as a people end and the encroaching power of the state begin? And, should the state have the authority to effectively police thought, either directly or through a tacit support of anti-seditious associations?

Towers made a persuasive political and intellectual argument for why the Reeves’ Associations were a negative development in British political discourse. However, even more damming was his exposure of the violence the Reeves’ Associations were capable of, particularly once they were formed outside of London. Towers wrote that, contrary to the Associations’ calls for “the preservation of public tranquility,” the Association members themselves had often turned violent. Towers asserted that “it does not appear, [sic] that any riot has been suppressed by the exertions of the associators [sic]… On the contrary, at some

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183 Towers’ reference to “genius of a free people” calls to mind the rhetoric of Hegel’s identification of the Universal Spirit and the “National Spirit.” While Hegel’s teleological understanding of history can be disputed, it leads into his point that “the configurations of these stages [in the development of Spirit as truth] are the world-historical National Spirits—the determinate shapes of their ethical life, their form of government, their art, religion, and philosophy” pp. 56. G.W.F. Hegel, Introduction to The Philosophy of History. Translated, with Introduction, by Leo Rauch, (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988). Of course, it must be noted that Hegel wrote this work in the early nineteenth century and that it was not published until after his death in 1831 (Rauch, viii).

184 Towers, Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications, 21.
places they seem to have had a strong tendency to produce riots.”

Towers then relayed the story of a riot which occurred in Manchester on the day that the Association there was formed. Strikingly, “besides other acts of violence, the loyal rioters, shouting ‘Church and King,’ made a violent attack on the house of Mr. Walker…. a man of excellent qualities… who had rendered great public services to the town.”

The case of the attack on Walker’s house would have a damning effect on the Association movement, as the news spread across Britain. Any Briton reading Towers’ pamphlet would have remembered the disorders in Birmingham and even, perhaps, the Gordon Riots. At that moment in time, when fear of mob rule and public disorder was at its highest, such events as described by Towers led to more than just a black eye for the Associations. Reeves had lost control of the movement he had begun, and what is more, early on after its inception.

Towers’ account is corroborated by evidence in newspapers from December of 1792. In the *Morning Herald* edition of Tuesday, December 18, 1792, an article described a debate which had taken place the previous day in the House of Commons over the Manchester riot which had destroyed Mr. Walker’s house. Titled, “Equal Protection of All His Majesty’s Subjects,” the article relayed that Mr. Grey had put forward a motion questioning the intent and actions of the Crown and Anchor Associations of Reeves. Grey’s motion argued that “the false alarm sounded by Ministers, was likely to create insurrections all over the country; and the slowness with which the Birmingham Rioters had been punished, was an

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186 Towers, *Remarks on the conduct, principles, and publications*, 22.
encouragement to all those who wished to manifest their loyalty in the same manner.”

Grey further argued that riots had occurred at Yarmouth, Salisbury, and Manchester in which Dissenters’ lives and property had been jeopardized. Furthermore, a Presbyterian Meeting House had been burnt in Cambridge and a man had been dragged out of bed and forced to sing “God Save the King.” Most damning, Grey cited a letter circulated by the Crown and Anchor Association in Cambridge, titled, “a Pennyworth of Caution,” which contained such seditious language that he would move an Address to his Majesty, to direct his Attorney-General to prosecute the Authors and Publishers of it. Besides, a great deal of nonsense about anointed Kings, and unanointed Republics, there were in it words to the following effect—‘the Dissenters at Birmingham have said, that Kings are expensive things, and that the nation groans under very heavy taxes in consequence of the American War.”

Grey perceived the loyalist critiques of Dissenters as not only an attack against them, but also against the government as well, as the language turned towards ultra-Toryism. In a final blow, Grey cited a letter which, while “speaking of the Manchester riots, asserted, that the triumph of loyalty had been complete, for Walker’s house was soon expected to be demolished.” If the Manchester Association’s goal truly was the destruction of a private citizen’s home, then their mission had breached the law and order which the state supported, and indeed the public at large.

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188 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
189 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
190 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
191 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
192 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
The debate is even more intriguing in that Mr. Peel rose to speak for the Manchester Association as a member at the time. Peel defended his fellow Association members, stating that:

he had not then imagined that any ill could arise from the words ‘God Save the King.’ He abhorred the idea of a mob in every case; he imagined from the good and loyal despostion [sic] of the people of Manchester, that excesses would very soon cease. It had been generally supposed, that he had received an express from that town, with an account of the burning of Mr. Walker’s house. No such thing was the fact. As far as he could learn, all was quiet.  

Peel went on to argue that the inhabitants ought not to be persecuted for their loyalty, however fervent. It was not a fault of theirs that “they preferred good old English roast beef to French frogs.” Finally, he argued that the assailants of the Association should search for a “higher authority” than a newspaper article before making such specious accusations. Violence had broken out in Manchester, as the records indicate, and the Reeves Association scrambled to deflect criticism.

Charles James Fox also entered the fray, stating that he was himself worried that his home might come under attack from a loyalist Association. Fox spoke pathetically of the sufferings of Dr. Priestley and Mr. Walker, on whose moral character he passed a high eulogium. Perhaps he himself, in a few days, might be in as disagreeable a situation as either of those Gentlemen; for he had understood, by a hand-bill, that there was shortly to be a loyal Meeting at Staines, within a few miles of which he had a small house; and what alarmed him was, that at the bottom of the bill was written, ‘Down with Fox and his Jacobine [sic] banditti.’

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193 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
194 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
195 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
196 Morning Herald, 1792, 2.
Fear of riot was clearly on the mind of the MPs debating the Reeves’ Associations that day, and furthermore the fear that their own homes would be singled out for destruction. Fox supported the notion that some time should be spent to consider what to do about the Associations, but he thought that they were definitely a subject for further debate.\footnote{Morning Herald, 1792, 2.} Fear of riots cut both ways. On the one hand, British loyalists were terrified of a French invasion supported by a fifth-column of Jacobins within Britain. On the other hand, Britons whose loyalties were questioned were coming under attack, and their lives and property were forfeit. Going back to 1690 and John Locke, the right to life and property were the two rights which government, above all else, was put in place to protect. If the British government could not protect the rights of all its subjects, as Grey argued, then what was its purpose?
CHAPTER 4: REEVES’ FALL

“But, above all things, an Englishman loves Quiet—Give us peace in our time—is the language of his prayers, and the silent wish of his heart.” – John Reeves, Thoughts on the English Government, 1795.

What was the political philosophy of John Reeves? He is an interesting political actor to examine from this period because he was such a rabid advocate of the King as well as a proto-nationalist, and paradoxically a legal official at the head of movement inclined towards vigilantism. His Association movement was short-lived; in the Preface to the Association Papers, written in 1793, Reeves himself referred to the movement as finished, having served its purpose. By 1795 he had exposed himself as such an extreme figure that efforts to revive the Association movement were greeted with silence by Reeves’ former supporter, William Pitt. Reeves also did not receive any public support from George III, despite his stand as a resolute absolutist. Reeves was incredibly successful at alienating support from both the Crown and Parliament, indeed so perturbing the latter that in 1796 he was brought up on charges of seditious libel for his work, Thoughts on the English Government.

Ironically, he was put on trial even as his movement to police Jacobin thought triumphed

200 Sack, From Jacobite to Conservative, 104.
201 Sack, From Jacobite to Conservative, 123-124.
with the passage of the Treason and Sedition Acts in 1795. Despite fellow conservative Edmund Burke’s support, Reeves was tried, and, in the historian A.V. Beedell’s opinion, even “set up” as the fall man by Pitt, as part of the Prime Minister’s repudiation of “‘ultra’ Tory ideology”. Beedell argues that Reeves was too much of a monarchist for Pitt’s taste, and, furthermore, that Pitt was at the cutting edge of the new, increasingly liberal political ideology of the empire. This argument highlights the change that Britain had undergone in the time between Reeves founding the Crown and Anchor Association in 1792 and the passage of the Two Acts in 1795. Neither the Church nor the King, but rather the state, through the cabinet government, had emerged as the principal political organ guiding Britain. Thus, the role of Parliament had emerged supreme, and Reeves’ assertion that the King could rule without the both the Lords and Commons was untenable.

Reeves was not only swept aside in his role as the leader of the Association movement. He was also a poor public official. Ruth Paley’s work also offers a damning indictment of Reeves in his capacity as Receiver. From the outset Reeves expected a salary of “£700 [per annum] (plus, of course, the incidental benefits of holding large sums in his hands).” Indeed, in Paley’s estimation, Reeves held the office of Receiver simply because it was a “lucrative sinecure.” Furthermore, Reeves, ironically considering his position as head of the Association movement, was quite bad at balancing the books. Personally, Reeves

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203 Beedell, “John Reeves’s Prosecution for a Seditious Libel, 1795-6,” 802.
205 Beedell describes Pitt as “an entirely appropriate leader of an expanding ‘secular’ empire with thrusting materialist ambitions” 823.
206 Reeves, Thoughts on the English government, 12-13.
was confident that he would receive a large amount of money in his position as Receiver through a 5% poundage he would take from fees and penalties enforced.\(^{209}\) Such an expectation was not entirely unfounded. The freelance thief taker of the eighteenth-century could expect to be paid on average £3 to £5, or as much as £12.\(^{210}\) That said, individuals who profited from law enforcement, like thief-takers, were not well liked nor were they viewed as trustworthy. Reward money was not the only problem with the Middlesex Justices Act, however.

At the same time that Reeves expected to profit from his role as Receiver, the entire Middlesex Justices Act plan was floundering since expenditures far outstripped money coming in; all while an apprehensive government was reluctant to commit financially to the cause.\(^{211}\) Making matters more awkward, if that were possible, the noted police reformer Patrick Colquhon wrote that in the winter of 1793/94 “some very disagreeable altercation has taken place between Mr. Reeves and several very respectable men in the magistracy.”\(^{212}\) Reeves’ uncanny ability at making personal foes seems to have extended to his role as Receiver. Finally, and most embarrassingly, Reeves, and indeed the entire Home Office, apparently forgot that the 1792 Act was temporary, and in 1796 did not ask for an amendment before Parliament which might have repaired the crippled financial state of affairs.\(^{213}\) When the Act was reviewed in 1802 the finances were in complete disarray,
despite the public support the Act had by then received.\textsuperscript{214} By this time Reeves was on to other things, active in the formation of William Wilberforce’s Vice Society.\textsuperscript{215} Officially, he would remain employed by the government as the King’s Printer from 1800 on.\textsuperscript{216} In his later years Reeves continued to be an active figure in private associations, as a member of the Royal Society, the Society of the Antiquaries, and treasurer of the Literary Fund.\textsuperscript{217} Reeves died at the age of 77 in 1829, before the passage of the Reform Bill.\textsuperscript{218} A stalwart conservative throughout his life, in the end Reeves was recognized as a key contributor to the anti-Jacobin cause.

Reeves’ failures as an administrator aside, he did genuinely believe his conservative rhetoric. Reeves ascribed to the British people a definitive character which illustrates the complexities of national identity. Reeves argued that British society possessed a system of “Ranks,” which was quite different from that of the French “Orders,” for instance: “we [Britons] possess this convenient modification of Society in a manner that is seen in no other country; for the distinction of ranks with us makes no difference of persons; we have no privileged Orders; and yet there are none of us who do not yield proper deference to distinguished rank.”\textsuperscript{219} In the British nation, the state did not codify social orders, as it did in France. Rather, nationally a sense of rank was observed. That this emphasis on rank comes from a Briton is not surprising; eighteenth-century Britain was a class-sensitive society, and

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\textsuperscript{214} Paley, “The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792,” 249.
\textsuperscript{215} Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 88.
\textsuperscript{216} Black, The Association, 236.
\textsuperscript{218} De Montluzin, The Anti-Jacobins, 138.
\textsuperscript{219} Black, The Association, 6.
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Reeves was himself a social climber. As part of this emphasis on a lack of legal “Orders,” all Britons shared a universal desire for “peace and quiet…. from the very highest to the very lowest in the nation.”²²⁰ Reeves was no democrat, nor a leveler or radical, but he did believe that Britons shared a distinct national character which set them apart from their French rivals and other citizens of the world. As part of that national character an implicit social hierarchy existed, but one which an individual could rise above their initial social status, to an extent.

Reeves puzzlingly ignored the United States, which gave out no titles of nobility, unlike the British, and which did not contain a legally codified aristocracy. Perhaps a clue for this oversight is found in Reeves’ own provincial identity:

I am not a Citizen of the World, so as to divide my affection with strangers—I am an Englishman—and I thank God for having placed me among a People who, I think, possess more goodness of heart and more GOOD SENSE than any other in the world, and who are the happiest, because they make the best use of both.²²¹

These passages confirm the difficulty of exploring the notion of a British nation-state in this period. Reeves’ chauvinistic sense of national identity and his disdain for worldliness speaks to an emerging British sense of national superiority which would largely shape the world throughout the Revolutionary Wars and beyond, for better or ill. These sentiments were contested within Britain, though, and not universal. Reeves was clearly a patriotic Briton, perhaps even to the point of bigotry, espousing a unique vision for what British society should look like. That vision was not acceptable to the state, however, which turned on

²²⁰ Reeves, Thoughts on the English government, 7-8.
²²¹ Reeves, Thoughts on the English government, 2.
Reeves and prosecuted him once he argued that Britons need no representative assembly, but rather solely a King.

King George III, Pitt, and Parliament reacted to the counterrevolutionary riots and the Reeves’ Associations in a haphazard fashion. A May 21, 1792 Royal Proclamation condemning riots and encouraging magistrates to prosecute seditious libels illuminates the continual fear of riot which gripped the ruling establishment.222 Tellingly, in the days after Reeves’ initial printed advertisement for the Association, Pitt contacted Reeves concerning his objectives and brought up the negative memories of the Gordon Riots.223 Once Pitt was certain that the movement could benefit the counterrevolutionary cause, he backed Reeves, however, with the understanding that it would not be a centralized movement with Reeves at its head.224 Pitt wanted, rather, an example of a counterrevolutionary society on a local level, and the Reeves’ Associations offered such a one.225 The evidence suggests that the government supported Reeves from the start.

The Reeves’ Associations came at a critical time when the government was cracking down on radical support in Britain. In the absence of a centralized, state-sponsored police force the Associations were a cost-effective and familiar response to Jacobinism which the Pitt government could support. The state would eventually attempt to police political thought outright, first with the unsuccessful treason trials of the leaders of the London Corresponding Society in 1794, and second with the Two Acts restricting free speech and assemblies in

By 1796 Reeves was no longer useful and would himself go on trial for treason. From this narrative it is apparent that the state was expanding its authority. Clearly Reeves served a purpose, and his anti-Jacobin agenda coincided nicely with what Pitt and the government were hoping to achieve. Importantly, the Pitt government could in effect pass off the costly and unpopular responsibility of policing political sentiment to the Reeves’ Associations. Eventually, though, the government ruthlessly suppressed all popular assemblies or sentiments. Was the government simply responding to whichever option was most convenient at the time? This conclusion seems untenable. At some point the state decided that it would assert its authority over traditionally private, voluntary associations, and Reeves found himself a victim of this newly heightened state power. Ironically, Reeves’ declaration that “an Englishman loves Quiet,” proved erroneous, once his Association movement became violent, and once his own ringing declarations of absolutism led to his own trial.

Now, returning to the Association Papers we can recognize that even as early as 1793 Reeves had fallen out of favor with the state. In the Preface to the published papers, Reeves went to great efforts to point out that the movement began without the Ministry’s knowledge, that it received no funds, and that its leaders were not appointed by the King. Reeves went on to emphasize that “the Minister,” William Pitt, had no hand in the formation of the two

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thousand plus Associations nationwide. This fiction was doubtless a part of the government’s backpedaling away from the riotous Associations. Pitt and the government were complicit from the start, and only after the riots in Manchester and elsewhere did they seek to put ground between themselves and the Reeves’ Associations. Nevertheless, the *Association Papers* maintained that the goal of the movement was to protect the King and the Constitution, which were synonymous with the Ministry. Crucially important, “when the Nation had thus plainly declared its apprehension for our Laws and Liberty, the Government could not do otherwise than concert measures for their preservation.” Thus, Reeves wrote, the militia was formed, Parliament was called, and proceedings against sedition occurred.

In this narrative, the Association played a crucial and expected role. Importantly for Reeves in his defense of his actions, “all these measures have been called for or approved by the Nation, as necessary for its safety, both public and private.” In these statements it is hard to tell where society ends and government begins. They have been blended into the *Nation*. The Nation is not readily defined by Reeves, including an agglomeration of interests: loyalists, patriots, the government, the King, Britons in general. In hindsight, the nation is not necessarily the state, though. As Lawrence Stone eloquently defines it, “a viable state is not 

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228 Association for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers (London, 1793). 
229 Eugene Charlton Black writes: “The government had been contemplating a campaign of repression, and was more than delighted to move together with an extraparliamentary organization,” and immediately offered support, 237-239. Elaine Reynolds goes further: “Funded and fostered by the Home Office, the first Loyal Association met in London in November 1792,” 86. Michael Duffy also cites Pitt’s direct involvement: “The associations were one of the major expedients that Pitt employed to defuse the domestic crisis of late 1792, though there were also others and perhaps this fact, as well as the personal effort that Pitt himself put into encouraging associations, explains the premier’s subsequent neglect of Reeves…” 960.
230 Association for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers (London, 1793). 
231 Association for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers (London, 1793).
necessarily coincidental with a nation, the latter being defined by a sense of community in a common culture and patriotic feeling shared by both rulers and ruled.” Only once Reeves’ Associations proved that they could not be trusted by the state, only after they had turned into reactionary riots, did Pitt decide to pull his support from them. By that point their purpose had been served; they had eliminated a threat to the state, and, since they could not be trusted, they were subsumed by the state. This is the state assuming its authority of “monopoly over violence” in private associations, and this is the modern state as we understand it today.

What of the Association members themselves? They did not simply disperse in March of 1793 and go home to wait out the results of the war with France. Volunteer militias were formed to police Britain from within, as well as to serve as an emergency force should an invasion occur. Hannah More’s aforementioned pamphlet, “The good militia man,” describes this function. Many of the Association members joined the newly formed Volunteer Corps in 1794, with some Associations simply changing their name to Volunteers. Reynolds points out, intriguingly, that “the Volunteers acted as auxiliary riot police, freeing the army and militia from this duty.” However, Volunteers were unsurprisingly disorganized and reluctant to serve as an effective police force, as evidenced by their poor showing during riots in London in August of 1794 during militia balloting.

232 Lawrence Stone, ed. Introduction. An Imperial State at War, 4.
234 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 86. See also Mitchell, “The Association Movement of 1792-93,” 74-75.
235 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 86.
236 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 87.
other troops ended up putting down the riot. The problem of policing remained, as did the issue of riots, compelling the government to shoulder the inescapable burden of dealing with social disturbances.

Another outlet for former Association members to continue their loyalist activities was through “the Society for the Suppression of Vice, founded in 1802.” Another conservative society with the goal of propagating traditional values, John Reeves joined the Vice Society early on. This society’s goals shifted from the political to the moral. Its primary functions were suppression of “profanation of the Lord’s Day and profane swearing; publication of blasphemous, licentious and obscene books and prints; selling by false weights and measures; keeping of disorderly public houses, brothels and gaming houses; procuring; illegal lotteries; [and] cruelty to animals.” The impulse towards religiously grounded rejection of the French Revolution and its principles in this fashion is unsurprising, given the rise of evangelicalism in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century. Despite its religious language, though, the mission of the Vice Society was similar to that of the Associations: suppression of literature, prescription of approved behavior, exclusive membership, etc. The movement enjoyed a longer existence though, persisting until 1812, in spite of occasional vigilantism. Christianity had become linked with political reaction. The suppression of

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237 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 87.
238 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 87.
239 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 88.
240 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 88.
242 Reynolds, Before the Bobbies, 88-89.
vice was tantamount to rejecting Jacobinism. The persistence of such associations into the
nineteenth century confirms that even though they were largely discouraged from a law
enforcement function, their usefulness to the ruling establishment as an organ for social order
persisted. While Reeves’ own Association may have failed, the spirit of association lived on,
and continued to remain a shaping force in British society.

CONCLUSION

Examine the French Revolution debate in Britain is a complicated task. The plurality of opinions in Britain at this time, and their close physical proximity, speaks to this difficulty. In July of 1793 the Crown and Anchor tavern hosted two meetings: upstairs, the radical London Corresponding Society met. Downstairs, the Reeves’ Association met.244 Herzog quips “there’s no evidence that they all sat down together and politely tried to thrash out their differences.”245 Joking aside, there’s merit to his observation. The debate which took place in Britain in the 1790’s was one marked by violent opposition, not just rhetorical barbs exchanged between Edmund Burke and Tom Paine. In such a bitter, vitriolic world it is nearly impossible to imagine a radical such as Thomas Hardy actually engaging in a dialogue with John Reeves. Rather, Reeves sought to use an old solution, the private, voluntary association, to solve a new problem: popular political agitation. His goal was to police the thought of his fellow Britons, eradicate Jacobinism and republicanism, and replace it with what Reeves perceived to be a self-evident truth: that the English constitutional government was the best government possible, that the Church of England was an important bulwark against the socially-destabilizing threats of Deism and atheism, and that the King, at the pinnacle of a hierarchical social order, could provide the leadership which republican France lacked.

The era of the French Revolution was one in which members of the “lower orders” or working classes across the political spectrum were agitating for political change and a louder

244 Herzog, Poisoning the Minds, 107.
245 Herzog, Poisoning the Minds, 107.
voice in their governments. The political debates at the end of the eighteenth century were bound up in questions of agency and who had a voice in the political process. It is hardly surprising that in Britain the debates over the French Revolution were so vociferous, considering that in the entire long eighteenth century the people of Britain were constantly agitating for political agency and a stronger, more dynamic Parliament. It makes perfect sense that the leader of the Association movement, Reeves, was from a middle-class background and had worked his way into positions of authority as a placeman. It is even less surprising that his chief supporters and allies in Parliament, Pitt, Dundas, and Burke, were all members of the ruling establishment who had earned their way into it in one form or another. Ironically, for all his Church and King talk, Reeves’ Association movement was actually dominated by “middling sorts” eager to put into effect their political agency.\textsuperscript{246} Black concludes that the rise of political association was an extension of the revolution of the party system in Britain, and was an important phenomenon in the modernization of Britain.\textsuperscript{247}

Read this way, the Reeves’ Association movement was a confluence of class agitation and tacitly, political reform.

An examination of the counterrevolution in Britain from 1791 to 1796 thus raises pertinent questions for us today. It is difficult to not project modern understandings of nationalism, jingoism, and bigotry back onto British society and political thought from this time period. However, the seeds of the aggressive nationalism which would come to

\textsuperscript{246} Wahrman, \textit{Imaging the Middle Class}, 101-103. Wahrman does argue, though, that there was a distinct shift away from the term ‘middle class.’ For example: “By 1797, when Young appealed at length to the patriotic sense of the yeomanry, by which he undoubtedly meant his very same landed ‘middle class’ of the previous years, he refrained throughout from using this by-now loaded term.” 102.

\textsuperscript{247} Black, \textit{The Association}, 282.
dominate Europe for the next two centuries were clearly sown. The debate turned on what it meant to be British. Loyalty to the Church and King was juxtaposed against loyalty to the state. While the King was part of the state, Parliament had clearly become the senior partner, and Prime Minister William Pitt was no longer a mere servant of the Crown. Thus, these two factions were not necessarily the same, as the experience of John Reeves indicates to us.

Reeves’ Association movement, whether he knew it or not, was in reality a middle-class response to the limitations of the constitutional settlement in Britain at the time. Reeves was only able to argue that the King should rule alone because of the expanding power of the state, power which allowed Reeves, a middle-class outsider, to achieve political agency. Ironically, his ultra-Tory ideology was not compatible with the emerging prowess of the state, especially with the active Prime Minister William Pitt at its head. In the final analysis Reeves thus remains something of a paradox.

I do not think that we should at all confuse the British state at this time with the fiercely nationalist states of the twentieth century, such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. It is curious, though, and almost chilling, to encounter the counterrevolutionary debate and discover how quickly free speech was suppressed, associations of private citizens were formed of their own accord to terrorize their fellow citizens, and a calculating, powerful leader, William Pitt, interceded in such a forceful way. The importance in analyzing the Reeves’ Associations movement is that we see the beginning of state supremacy dominating society. Furthermore, we see how the state experimented with the repression and control of political thought. We also see that the definitions of acceptable violence were carefully
circumscribed, as policing by private citizenry failed. Clearly, the counterrevolution was an important moment in British history as well as in the history of Western political discourse. In Britain, it was the final consummation of a century long process to hammer out the relationship between the Crown, Parliament, and the rising middle classes, eager to enlarge their role in the political process. As a middle-class Tory, appointed to his position by an Act of Parliament, John Reeves serves as a valuable touchstone through which to analyze this contentious period.
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