The posthumous cult of Charles James Fox: Whig associations in the 1810s

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Introduction

Two political rivals, Charles James Fox, the leader of the opposition Whig party, and the prime minister William Pitt the Younger, died in the same year, 1806. At about this time, the political tension between opposition and government was increasing. Widespread resentment against the government stimulated the reform movement out-of-doors. The latter half of the 1810s, as E. P. Thompson once claimed, can be called the "heroic age of popular radicalism" (660). Immense economic distress after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 intensified political consciousness among the middle and working classes, both of which, even if to a different extent, insisted on the reform of the representative system of the House of Commons to have their voices heard in Parliament. The political strife in the post-war years hit its peak during the period from the "Peterloo Massacre" in August 1819 to the Queen Caroline affair between 1820 and 1821. The Tory government passed a series of repressive measures against popular radicalism, as Pitt's ministry had done in the 1790s, to sustain the British constitution. The Whig party, while opposing radical reform measures such as annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage, vigorously attacked the government and supported various liberal measures. Some of these national Whigs sought to be involved in the extra-parliamentary reform movement with the support of local Whigs, who were the party's provincial followers composed of the landed elite and the wealthy middle classes (O'Gorman, *Emergence of the British Two-Party System* and *The Long Eighteenth Century*; Turner chs. 2 and 3; Thompson ch. 15).

This article seeks to examine the relationship between national and local Whigs in the 1810s, by paying close attention to the posthumous cult of Charles James Fox, which was expressed in the urban communities through the Fox clubs, the Fox dinners often hosted by these clubs, and through other similar Whig associations (Brett, "Political Dinners"; Baer, "Political Dinners"; Epstein; Duthille). In doing so, it will test the claims of Frank O'Gorman and John Phillips, who have maintained that national politics occasionally had a substantial influence on local politics, especially in large constituencies. On the other hand, they have also stressed that parliamentary parties were rarely involved in constituency politics in a direct way and that the national parties and various political groups in the constituencies were only loosely connected on the basis of mutual independence (Phillips, *Electoral Behavior* and *The Great Reform Bill*; O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*). By contrast, Miles Taylor and James Vernon have been more

doubtful of the connection between national and local politics in the late Hanoverian and the Victorian eras. They have claimed that the principle of local independence created a political culture in which national party politics was rarely welcomed in the constituencies (Vernon ch. 2; Taylor). This article, considering this historical debate, seeks to explore the relationship between national and local Whig politics by examining the way the posthumous cult of Fox was developed at the national and especially at the local level. This cult deserves to be examined in some detail because of what it shows about the relationship between national and local politics, particularly in the larger urban constituencies. O'Gorman has commented on the neglect of this topic: "The Fox and Pitt clubs could do with a historian" (O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties* 332 fn.60). Trent Orme is the only one to have given the subject detailed treatment, but only in relation to Scotland. His work, however, helps us to consider the English Whigs and the pan-British dimension of the posthumous cult of Fox (Orme, *The Scottish Whig Party* ch.3 and "Toasting Fox"). This situation contrasts markedly with the cult of Pitt and the Tory clubs and societies in this period (Masaki; Sack, "The Memory of Burke" and *From Jacobite to Conservative* ch. 4).

What work that has been published on the cult of Fox has led to considerable disagreement among historians, primarily over two issues. The first dispute is about the number and geographical spread of the Fox clubs and dinners in Britain. Boyd Hilton has claimed that these Whig associations were organised as widely across Britain as the Pitt clubs and dinners. He refers to the existence of "at least fifty-three local Pitt clubs, and a similar number devoted to the memory of Fox" (Hilton 203). Leslie Mitchell tells us that between 1815 and 1830 the Fox dinners spread "in almost every part of the country" (L. Mitchell, *Holland House* 52),[1] but he has also implied that the cult of Fox and the Fox dinners were more popular out-of-doors than those of Pitt (L. Mitchell, "Charles James Fox" 30). In opposition to Hilton and Mitchell, however, O'Gorman has remarked that: "Perhaps surprisingly, Pitt Clubs were somewhat more widespread and more permanent" than the Fox clubs (O'Gorman, *The Emergence of the British Two-Party System* 100).

The second dispute among historians is about how much of a political impact the cult of Fox had on provincial urban communities, though they have agreed that Fox's political principles helped the Whig party to unite within Parliament. As Hilton has suggested, the period after the death of Fox was marked by the lack of any strong leadership of the opposition Whigs in Parliament, and members of the party confronted the reality that they were not in complete agreement on all policies. The posthumous cult of their former leader gave them an effective way to make up for

[1] A similar comment can be seen in his biography of Fox: "by 1820 such convivial gatherings [Fox Dinners] could be found all over the country" (L. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* 262).

some of the deficiency of their present leaders. It offered a collective ethos within the party and gave it a more effective direction in politics.[2] On the other hand, historians have disagreed on the importance of the cult of Fox outside Parliament. On this point, they can be divided into two groups. First, a majority have claimed that the cult of Fox played a significant role in the constituencies, particularly in the larger urban communities. Leslie Mitchell and Loren Reid belong to this majority group (Reid ch. 32). According to O'Gorman, Fox and Pitt clubs "brought together those individuals and families who did fight them in a common cause devoted to the memory and principles of their cherished leaders. In such ways could political partisanship be maintained" (O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties* 332). Austin Mitchell has also noted that the Fox clubs and other Whig associations "helped to bring together Whigs in parliament and out of it, and to increase contact between groups of like opinion throughout the country" (A. Mitchell 57). Opposing this positive evaluation of the cult of Fox, however, a few historians have emphasised some negative aspects. These historians have carried out a more careful and detailed examination than those in the first group. Although hardly looking at the Fox clubs and dinners, John Dinwiddy investigated the Whig press as well as letters and memoirs written by the Whigs, and reached the important conclusion that "the Whig cult of Fox's memory was not a popular, expansive cult." He has stressed that the cult of Fox contributed to promoting the unity of the party in Parliament, but "the Whigs made little attempt to put across their hero to the public" (Dinwiddy 1, 12-15; Penny 94-5, 105). Peter Brett, examining a few Whig associations in the early nineteenth century, such as the Newcastle Fox dinners and the York Whig Club, has insisted that the political tension between the parliamentary Whigs and the liberal middle classes in the urban communities was heightened when the initial popularity of the cult of Fox was quickly lost after the 1810s (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* chs. 2-3).

This article, investigating the cult of Fox carefully from the perspective of the Whig associations in the 1810s, aims to address these two issues and thereby to offer a more explicit, but more nuanced, picture than any provided in the existing literature. On the first issue, this article's conclusion will be quite close to O'Gorman's, but it will point out the probability that the Fox clubs and dinners were much more limited in number and geographical spread than he has assumed. On the second issue, while admitting that Fox's posthumous popularity generally declined in the 1810s, as shown by the second group of historians, this article will nevertheless insist on the regional diversity in his reputation.

[2] Hilton has also pointed out (195-209) that the political principles of Pitt underpinned the unity of the Tories in Parliament too.

There are two main reasons why this article focuses on the decade of the 1810s. It is in this decade that the Fox clubs and dinners and other Whig associations were especially active within the context of the growth of the reform movement and popular radicalism. It is also in this decade that the Whigs, suffering a significant loss in Fox's death, pondered about how his legacy could be preserved.

This article is composed of three sections. The first section considers the structural features and political role of the London Fox Club, revealing that it was an exclusive and closed one, open only to parliamentary Whigs and their closest friends out-of-doors. But it will also suggest that, in spite of or rather because of this, the club served as an important focal point for the Whigs in the capital. The Fox dinners hosted by the club also played a significant role in uniting various kinds of Whigs. The next section, investigating local Fox clubs and dinners, will maintain that they could not have been established so widely across Britain as historians have argued. Also, it will stress that, although these clubs and dinners could have played an essential role in local politics to some extent, they often created political tension between national Whigs and local Whigs including middle-class reformers. In addition, it will point out that in many regions the cult of Fox had only a limited impact on the reform movement. The third and final section, however, aims to demonstrate that in other regions the cult of Fox was influential and popular among local Whigs. Some local Whig associations, and the Concentric Society of Liverpool in particular, employed that cult to attack Tory politics and engage in the reform movement. It is also noted that the Concentric Society was more willing to support the Mountain Whigs, a group of active reformers within the party, than the mainstream Whigs or the party itself, and that such a good relationship between local and national Whigs was conditional because members of the Concentric Society were also involved in popular radicalism.

The London Fox Club

The cult of Fox was expressed and Fox's political principles commemorated on many occasions by members of the Whig party in and outside Parliament. Even after his death, Fox was still an exceptional hero for the Whigs. In the House of Lords, on 2 May 1817, Earl Grey gave a speech on the Libel Bill and insisted on Fox's engagement in the freedom of the press, stressing that: Fox was "the man, whom, in public life, I most loved and admired" and he "certainly was one of the greatest men this country ever produced" (Grey 47-8). In 1828, Lord John Russell, in the House of Commons, mentioned that Fox had made great efforts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts (Reid 262, 438). In his memoirs, Lord Holland noted that: "I was, no doubt, swayed by my affection for [Fox], as well as convinced by his arguments, to espouse the principles which have

generally guided the popular party in this country called Whigs" (Vassall-Fox, I 3-4). When Henry Brougham sought a parliamentary seat for Liverpool in the 1812 general election, he stated that: "By [Fox's] principles it is my delight to regulate my conduct" (Brougham 39). A major manifestation of the cult of Fox is the project for a Fox monument in Westminster Abbey that leading Whigs promoted (Reid 435; Penny 100).

The cult of Fox was expressed not only through these occasional individual utterances, but also within a political association in the capital: the London Fox Club. This club was a significant focal point for the friends and followers of the dead leader. The political significance of this London club is plausible, because Fox had been not only the leader of the Whig party, but also an MP for Westminster for about fifteen years in total. At the dinners and other meetings held by this club the Whigs commemorated Fox's political principles in various forms, such as by toasts and speeches. One of the standing toasts, "the memory of Charles James Fox," was usually given, and his political principles were often associated with current Whig policies. His principles were also praised as an indispensable guide to the Whigs. For instance, at the anniversary dinner of the club, held on Fox's birthday, 24 Jan. 1817, Earl Grey insisted that "the example of the disinterested exertions of Mr. Fox was indelibly imprinted on [Grey's] heart, and by it should he govern his conduct to the last moment of his life" (*Morning Chronicle*, 25 Jan. 1817).

Except for this kind of commemoration, however, it is not very easy to discover a great deal about the club's activities because of a lack of available primary sources. Writing in 1937, the sixth Earl of Ilchester (1874-1959) pointed out that: "No minute books or lists of members or diners are extant before 1829; and an attempt to elucidate the history of the Club and its proceedings up to that date [made in 1854] was completely unsuccessful" (Ilchester 285). Historians have not even reached agreement on the year when the club was first established. Leslie Mitchell has pointed out that the first members' list of a Fox Club was made in 1790, while he has also stressed that "there is no evidence that this club had a continuous life." On the other hand, he has maintained that the Fox dinners were held by a new Fox Club from 1812 onwards (L. Mitchell, *Holland House* 52). Mitchell later suggested a slightly different explanation: possibly a dinner in Fox's memory at the club in 1808, and "an annual commemoration [...] from 1813 onwards" (L. Mitchell, "Charles James Fox" 29). According to Archibald Foord and Loren Reid, however, it was in 1811 that the Whig Club, which had been established in May 1784, changed its name to the Fox Club (Foord 459; Reid 437). The sixth Earl of Ilchester noted that "the Fox Club must have been in existence since 1813," and inferred that "the decision to form the Club was taken on January 23,

1813" (Ilchester 285-6). What can at least be assumed is that the London Fox Club was established in the early 1810s, although the exact date or year of its establishment cannot be ascertained.

It is also extremely difficult to uncover what kind of activity the London Fox Club conducted and what kind of political goal it attempted to reach. Of course, this club famously hosted the Fox dinners as annual events on or around Fox's birthday. But what else? In a letter written by Lord Holland to Earl Grey in 1821, it was implied that the purpose of the club was to express the Whig party's view of politics through the circulation of propaganda and election campaigns (Ilchester 286-7). Nevertheless, the available primary sources do not inform us of any of these. The club's activity between the 1810s and the early 1830s can be traced only partly in newspapers and letters written by its members.

Even these meagre sources, however, can help us clarify some features and political functions of the London Fox Club. First of all, the fact that newspapers rarely reported this club's activity might have represented its "private" nature. In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, it was common for British clubs and societies to use the printed media to publicise some of their activities (Clark 265). For example, the London Pitt Club, formed in 1808, established a close relationship to several conservative newspapers, such as the *Morning Post*, to inform the public of the proceedings of its dinners and meetings (Powney 20). It also actively published pamphlets to express its political messages (Pitt Club). In contrast, the London Fox Club did little of this kind of publication. Among its members was James Perry, who was the owner and editor of the liberal newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*, but it seems that this did not help the club develop a political campaign through the printed media.

The membership list of the London Fox Club, shown in Appendix A, contains a total of fifty-nine names.[3] Among them, eleven names were crossed out, many of whom had left the club perhaps because they had died, or for other unknown reasons. It is unclear when the list was started, but certainly no earlier than 1807.[4] It is also certain that it was last updated around 1815. The number of members was probably limited to fifty, and a new member was accepted only if there was a vacancy following the death or withdrawal of an existing member.[5] This shows that this club was a closed one, not open to anybody who could afford to pay the subscription fee. Its exclusiveness

[3] In addition to this membership list, the Earl of Albemarle seems to have become a member of the club by May 1816. *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 1 June 1816.
[4] Among the names in the list is "Earl" Grey. It was in 1807 that Charles Grey received his earldom.
[5] Membership of the Fox Club is still limited to fifty today, and this has apparently been so for a long time (Sebag-Montefiore 19).

can also be detected from the fact that a vast majority of the members were MPs and members of the landed classes, whereas middle-class members were few in number.

Despite its closed and exclusive nature, the London Fox Club served as a significant rallying point for the Whig party in the capital. The MPs and aristocrats who belonged to this club were representative of various sections of the party: Earl Grey and Lord Holland, who led the party after Fox died; Earl Fitzwilliam and Lord Spencer, who were elder and conservative members of the party; Lord John Russell and J. G. Lambton, young and active reformers; and Samuel Whitbread from an independent-minded, left-wing group within the party, called the Mountain Whigs. This suggests that the club could have functioned as a hub uniting different types of Whigs. The club could have been a place where the party's policy was discussed and decided, as it met once a month during the parliamentary session. In addition, the Fox dinners hosted by the club probably strengthened the unity of the party. Appendix B identifies those members of both Houses of Parliament, including ex-members, who attended at least once the annual dinners held in 1814, 1816, 1817, 1819, and 1821 (*Morning Chronicle,* 26 Jan. 1814, 25 Jan. 1816, 25 Jan. 1817, 25 Jan. 1819, and 29 Jan. 1821). The list shows nineteen members of the House of Lords and eighty-two MPs, out of whom seventy-four were sitting members. Given that the number of Whig MPs shifted approximately between 150 and 200 during the period from 1812 and 1830, and that the list does not cover all attendants, it is reasonable to claim that many members of the Whig party were present at these dinners. It is also worth noting that, just before the 1819 annual dinner, a newspaper anticipated that "All the Whig Members of both Houses of Parliament will attend" the dinner (*Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle,* 1 Feb. 1819).[6]

Comparing the London Fox Club to the London Pitt Club makes it possible to grasp the essential characteristics of the former in more detail. It was probably more successful in fostering the unity of the party than was the Pitt Club. The Fox dinners sponsored by the Fox Club were attended by many parliamentary Whigs and, likewise, the Pitt dinners hosted by the Pitt Club were joined by many parliamentary Tories. The Pitt Club, however, eventually failed to strengthen the unity of the party by hosting the dinners. For example, from the late 1810s, many leading pro-Catholic Tories, such as George Canning, did not attend the dinners. Canning had been one of the most active organisers of the dinners until the early 1810s. He had written for the club a song called "The Pilot that weathered the Storm," which had soon become one of the songs often sung at the dinners. When the club established "Protestant Ascendancy" as one of the standing toasts,

[6] Charles Sebag-Montefiore, secretary of the present Fox Club, has noted "its membership predominantly from Whig families and members of the Houses of Commons or Lords" (Sebag-Montefiore 11).

however, Canning strongly opposed it, because he considered that this toast sounded anti-Catholic. Believing that Pitt had been pro-Catholic, he claimed that it was not suitable for the dinner where the principles of Pitt were celebrated and commemorated. He then made an effort to persuade the club to drop it from the standing toasts, but he failed, and eventually broke from the club in 1817. From then on, the Pitt dinners gradually became a place for those who had more conservative religious opinions. This demonstrates that the principles of Pitt could be interpreted by the Tories in different ways and could even play a divisive role within the party (Masaki 401).

In a similar fashion, the political principles of Fox were upheld by members of the London Fox Club, while they were interpreted differently by different members of the Whig party. This occasionally caused political tension within the party, but, unlike Pitt's principles for the Tories in the London Pitt Club, it did not seriously hamper the unity of the Whigs. To consider this, it is worth examining an attitude of the Mountain Whigs, and their influential member Henry Brougham in particular, to the Fox dinners.

The Mountain Whigs, led by Samuel Whitbread, were a small group of pro-reform Whig MPs, composed not only of such landed members as Henry Grey Bennet, Thomas William Coke, and Lord Tavistock, the son of the sixth Duke of Bedford, but also those of a middle-class background such as Henry Brougham, Thomas Creevey, and Samuel Romilly. The word "Mountain" sounded reminiscent of French Jacobinism, but the Mountaineers never attempted to provoke rebellion against the king or to overthrow the British constitution. They highly valued the liberal principles of the French Revolution and believed that these principles would serve to build a more liberal political system and expand the people's rights. They strongly opposed the mainstream Whigs who were willing to maintain the coalition formed with a loyalist faction in opposition, the Grenvillites, in early 1804. Both groups were supporters of Catholic Emancipation. The Mountain Whigs, however, felt deeply frustrated with the coalition, because the Grenvillites had long supported the Pitt government in the past and now advocated such conservative measures as support for the war and hostility to parliamentary reform. In order to achieve parliamentary reform, the Mountaineers were willing to associate with such metropolitan radicals as Sir Francis Burdett and Major John Cartwright. They also cooperated with religious Dissenters. More importantly, as a group pursuing reform measures, they were strongly convinced and proud that they were the true successors of Fox (Rapp).

Because of this claim, Brougham and other Mountain Whigs were sometimes irritated by the way in which the mainstream and conservative Whigs employed the image of Fox. In October 1811, Brougham informed Holland of this feeling, but in a relatively modest way. He wrote to Holland

that: “What I most invariably have kept in my view, has been an adherence to the true principles of the Whig party & Mr. Fox […] and if ever I may seem to have differed with the body of the party, it has been owing to the warmth with which I entertain those principles & feelings” (8 Oct. 1811, qtd. in Stewart 70). The Mountain Whigs were aware that it was Fox who had been one of the prime movers for the Grenville-Foxite coalition, but they intentionally underestimated this aspect of Fox and stressed that the “real” Fox had been the ultimate leader of an opposition and reformist party.

Brougham’s irritation and anger peaked in January 1814, when he and some of the Mountain Whigs were excluded, or voluntarily chose to absent themselves from the anniversary Fox dinner held that month by the London Fox Club. He strongly opposed the Whig leaders’ coalition with the Grenvillite faction, and was also frustrated by the leaders’ negative attitude towards parliamentary reform. He privately expressed his feelings to another Mountain Whig, Thomas Creevey: “It is rather good to see the real and best Foxites so treated; us–who stand up for Fox *agt*. Pitt […] We have lived to see the time when Foxite means Pittite–or something very near” (7 Feb. 1814, Creevey Papers, qtd. in Dinwiddy 14). As this demonstrates, he insisted that the Mountain Whigs were “the real and best Foxites,” while other members of the Whig party were not genuine or authentic Foxites, but were too much like the Pittite Tories.

His irritation and anger, however, did not lead to his permanent absence from the Fox dinners. He returned to them in 1816 and from then on attended quite regularly (*Morning Chronicle,* 25 Jan. 1816, 25 Jan. 1819, and 29 Jan. 1821). He did so probably because the Grenvillites’ political influence declined substantially between 1815 and 1816. When Napoleon’s return to power in 1815 renewed the war against France, the Whig party and the Grenvillites were deeply divided on its necessity and, more importantly, a severe schism developed within the latter faction. The Grenvillites were divided broadly between militant individuals supporting the renewed war against Napoleon and pacifists in opposition to it. Because of this, they could no longer be an effective political force in opposition. On 14 January 1816, shortly before that year’s anniversary dinner celebrating Fox, George Tierney, who would become the Whig leader in the Commons the following year, wrote to Grey that the end of the Foxite-Grenvillite coalition was at hand. This suggests that the ties between the Grenvillites and the Whig party considerably weakened before these two groups finally separated from each other in 1817 over differing attitudes towards the radical reform movement (Sack, *The Grenvillites* ch. 7). Under these circumstances, Brougham came back to the Fox dinners with other Mountain Whigs.

The London Fox Club was more effective in promoting party unity at the national level than was the London Pitt Club. The Fox Club limited its membership to fifty, whereas the London Pitt Club was widely open and popular with approximately 1,300 members by 1816. This suggests that the latter club could have drawn more support from the people in the capital, but such potential popularity did not strengthen the unity of the Tory party. Many parliamentary Tories and even leaders of the party did not become members of the Pitt Club. An available membership list includes only twenty-five members of the House of Lords and thirty-nine MPs. Besides, the list does not include leading members of the Tory party, such as Lord Liverpool, who led the Tory government from 1812 to 1827, and Robert Peel, who would be the leader of the Conservative party in the post-1832 period. These facts demonstrate that the London Pitt Club was open widely to the people out-of-doors, but it did not serve as a significant rallying point for the Tory party (Powney 37-71). On the other hand, as we have seen, the London Fox Club attracted influential members among different groups of the Whig party and was more successful in strengthening the unity of the party.

Fox Clubs and Dinners in the Localities

The London Fox Club and the Fox dinners it hosted served as a significant focal point for the Whigs in the capital, but to what extent did provincial Fox clubs and dinners play the same role in the localities? And how important and influential was the cult of Fox outside the capital? To answer these questions, this section will first examine the number and the geographical spread of local Fox clubs and dinners in Britain, and then investigate the extent to which these clubs and dinners were successful in uniting national and local Whigs particularly in support of the reform movement.

Without available minute books or lists of members, it is unclear how many Fox clubs actually existed outside London. Local "Fox dinners" were undoubtedly held in some provincial towns, but they were reported only occasionally as hosted by "Fox clubs."[7] Also, there is no efficient way to ascertain the reality of the reports suggesting the existence of clubs. Presumably, local Fox clubs were, if any, very small in number, and most of the local associations bearing Fox's name were in fact only annual dinners, not clubs or societies established for regular activity. This difficulty in locating local Fox clubs is surprising considering that it is relatively easy to find the Pitt clubs

[7] Regarding the "Norfolk Fox Club," the "Edinburgh Fox Club," and the "Suffolk Fox Club," see *York Herald* 29 Jan. 1819; *Caledonian Mercury* 26 Jan. 1822; *Morning Chronicle* 30 Jan. 1822; *Morning Post* 24 Aug. 1822.

established in the localities. The Pitt clubs were formed in at least sixty-one provincial towns across Britain, many of which were located in Lancashire and Yorkshire (Masaki 392-3).

When it comes to the Fox dinners, the number and the geographical spread of them were limited. In early-nineteenth-century England, Fox dinners were held possibly only in six local towns in a limited number of years: Ipswich (1822); Newcastle (from 1812 to 1814, 1817, and 1818); Norwich (from 1820 to 1822); Bristol (from 1813 to 1816); Bury St. Edmunds (1821); York (1819); and Richfield (1814). In Scotland, the Fox dinners may have been held in five towns: Arbroath (1812); Edinburgh (1801, 1804, and from 1808 to 1825); Cupar Angus (1811); Glasgow (1801, and from 1810 to 1825); and Dundee (1810 and 1811). In other words, the Fox dinners were presumably held in a total of thirteen localities in Britain including London. Of course, there might have been some in other places. But, again, it is worth noting that the number and the regional expansion of the Fox dinners were indeed more limited than those of the Pitt dinners. It is quite natural to assume that local Pitt dinners were held even in the regions where local Pitt clubs were not established. So, the number of local Pitt dinners was doubtless more than sixty-one and probably at least more than seventy or eighty.

Despite their limited regional spread, however, the Fox dinners could have played an important political role as a rallying point for national and local Whigs in some towns. As in London, the Fox dinners held in the localities were attended by men in the upper and middle classes. They were often initiated and organised by the Whig grandees or other influential Whig MPs who actively supported reform. It is unclear whether the London Fox Club promoted the organisation of the Fox dinners. Boyd Hilton has stated that local Fox clubs "were run by James Perry, the editor of the leading Whig newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*" (Hilton 203), but this statement cannot be verified by the available sources. It is certain, however, that most Whigs involved in the Fox dinners in the localities were members of the London Fox Club. For example, among leading figures at the Newcastle Fox dinners was Earl Grey, who exerted a strong influence across Northumberland. The Norfolk Fox dinners held at Norwich and the "Suffolk Fox dinners," which were held at Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds, were both organised by the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Albemarle respectively.

Unsurprisingly, these local Fox dinners provided national and local Whigs with significant opportunities to display their rivalry with the Pitt clubs and dinners and also in opposition to the Tory government. At the Suffolk Fox dinner in 1822, for example, James Macdonald, MP for Calne, attacked the Pitt clubs by calling them political associations representing the repressive "Pitt System" under which the current Tory administration operated (*Morning Chronicle,* 24 Aug.

1822). At the Norfolk Fox dinner held on 20 January 1820, T. W. Coke, MP for Norfolk, stated that: "It was not possible that any man, not actually paid for advocating corruption, could be blind to the system of maladministration, carried on by the present Ministry." Alluding to Canning's song, "The Pilot that weathered the Storm," he also insisted that a "system of coercion had been introduced by the little pilots who imitated the great pilot" (*York Herald and General Advertiser,* 29 Jan. 1820). As these clearly show, the rivalry between Pitt and Fox, even after their death, was one of the significant divisive elements in local politics in Britain.

The Fox dinners also encouraged national and local Whigs to express their liberal attitudes to urgent issues, whereby they attempted to differentiate themselves from the Tories. On domestic issues, they supported parliamentary reform, the abolition of slavery, economic reform, Catholic Emancipation, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and the freedom of assembly, publication and petition. On the issues of foreign affairs, they supported the liberal movement in European countries against the Congress system.

In order to justify their political stance, national and local Whigs at the Fox dinners employed the name of Fox. The issue of parliamentary reform was a case in point. They opposed radical reform proposals such as annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage, but most of them supported some degree of moderate reform, such as Earl Grey in his speech at the 1817 Newcastle Fox dinner (*Morning Chronicle,* 25 Sep. 1817). They often insisted that they supported reform because they followed Fox's political principles. For example, at the Suffolk dinner on 2 August 1822, James Macdonald pointed out that "Mr. Fox was always convinced of the necessity of Reform," and went on to claim that "if that great man had lived to witness the seven years' struggle since the war which Government had maintained against public opinion, he would have been more strongly confirmed in that sentiment." Sir Henry Bunbury, who chaired this dinner, maintained that "Mr. Fox thought that the source of legitimate power was in the people." He quoted the speech Fox made in the House of Commons on 26 May 1797, stating that "to extend the right of election to housekeepers, is the best and most advisable plan of Reform" (*Morning Chronicle,* 24 Aug. 1822).

Despite this evidence of their significance, the Fox dinners were not a common feature seen across Britain in this period. One of the most plausible reasons for this was that many local Whigs increasingly doubted that these dinners were necessary and useful enough to meet their political demands. To consider this more fully, the Newcastle Fox dinners will now be examined as a case in point.

Among provincial Fox dinners, those in Newcastle were especially prominent because they usually received national attention. The primary reason for this was that it was Earl Grey, the leader of the Whig party, and young John Lambton, the future first Earl of Durham, who were among the main speakers at these dinners. Grey chaired them, except for the first two, chaired by Sir Ralph Milbanke, ex-MP for the county of Durham, and Sir Charles Monck, MP for Northumberland (all three men were members of the London Fox Club). The Newcastle Fox dinners could potentially be an effective provincial focal point for national and local Whigs, fighting against the Newcastle and Northumberland Pitt Club. At every dinner, more than a hundred men in the upper and middle classes attended.

Among local Whigs in Newcastle, especially notable was the Unitarian barrister James Losh (1763-1833), an active middle-class reformer supporting Earl Grey from the 1790s. When Grey and other parliamentary Whigs had established the Society of the Friends of the People in April 1792, Losh had joined (Dickinson). In the early nineteenth century, he became one of the most influential local Whigs on Tyneside. He opposed radical reform measures, such as annual parliaments, the secret ballot, and universal manhood suffrage, but he was still a progressive reformer, insisting that a "Reform in Parliament, and that one which would restore to the people, a substantial representation, short parliaments, cheap elections and representatives moderately paid for their services, I consider essential to the well being of our country" (Losh, I xvi, 56, 71). He had a close relationship not only to some influential national Whigs, such as Grey and Brougham, but also metropolitan radicals including Major John Cartwright.

Losh was an avid diarist. In the diaries he kept from 1811 to 1833, he clearly showed his initial positive expectation and his subsequent disappointment with the Newcastle Fox dinners, and also with Grey. In the immediate aftermath of the 1813 Fox dinner, Losh optimistically wrote: "Every thing was conducted very well and the meeting was in every respect such as the friends of civil and religious liberty might have wished for" (Losh, I 8). His exaltation was shared by W. A. Mitchell, the editor of the radical Whig newspaper, the *Tyne Mercury*, which, just before this dinner, published the full speech made by Fox at Westminster Hall in 1780 to impress on the local public in Newcastle that he had been an active reformer (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* 28).

Losh and other local Whigs, however, gradually became critical of the Newcastle Fox dinners. At the 1814 dinner, he was in favour of Grey's strong opposition to governmental corruption, but at the same time he was disappointed in him, noting in his diary that "Lord Grey never in direct terms mentioned Parliamentary Reform" (Losh, I 40). At the 1817 and 1818 dinners, Grey expressed his support for parliamentary reform, but in a vague way. Because of this, some local

Whigs and middle-class reformers, in particular, were increasingly concerned about how seriously Grey was engaged in reform. In the immediate aftermath of the last Fox dinner, which took place on 30 December 1818, the *Tyne Mercury* betrayed its considerable disappointment with the Fox dinners and Grey's ambiguous attitude to reform. By then, Losh's initial high expectation was greatly tempered, writing that "I thought [Grey] injudicious in speaking so much about Parliamentary reform, as it was evidently his object to avoid pledging himself to any specific plan or specific time for bringing it forward" (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* 36-41; Losh, I 85). Losh demanded that Grey and other national Whigs take a progressive attitude towards reform and offer a clear and concrete agenda for it, but his demand was not met.

Because of this, Grey and national Whigs lost the support of many local Whigs. Under these circumstances, they encountered a difficult situation in organising future dinners. In a letter sent by Grey to his wife, five days prior to the 1818 dinner, he confided his distress: "I cannot tell you how this Fox dinner annoys me." After this year, a plan to hold another Fox dinner was discussed, but Losh and other middle-class reformers in Newcastle insisted that holding a Fox dinner would be useless if national Whigs could not launch a reform agenda (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* 40-41).

There were sound reasons why Grey and national Whigs hesitated to be more precise in their attitude to parliamentary reform. First, they could not agree on what kind of reform would satisfy middle-class reformers. In addition, they considered that, in order to lead the reform movement successfully, they needed to gain support from the landed gentry, who were nevertheless fearful of it in the face of the alarm caused within the propertied elite by the growth of popular radicalism (Derry 171). Grey also hesitated to offer his full support for parliamentary reform because conservative members of the party, such as Earl Fitzwilliam, opposed it. As the party leader, he considered that the unity of the party was much more important than leading the reform movement out-of-doors (Turner 132-5). Under these circumstances, national and local Whigs in Newcastle gave up holding another Fox dinner after 1818.

It may be difficult rom this case study alone to derive the general situation in which national and local Whigs were placed in the localities. It is evident, however, that many other Fox dinners followed a similar course to those in Newcastle: from the initial positive expectation to the following disappointment. For example, the Bristol Fox dinner, probably held for the first time in 1813, was welcomed and well attended by local Whigs, who had supported Sir Samuel Romilly, the leader of the Mountain Whigs, at the 1812 general election. Nevertheless, the following Bristol Fox dinners quickly lost popularity and support from among local Whigs. As Peter Brett has

explained, one of the primary reasons for this was a problematic toast given to "Members of the City of Bristol." At the 1812 general election, Romilly and the radical orator Henry Hunt were defeated by the staunch Tory, Richard Hart Davis, and the conservative Whig, Edward Protheroe. It is unclear how and why the toast to be given at the 1813 dinner was decided, but local Whigs and middle-class reformers in Bristol who attended it were frustrated with the toast and gave a loud hiss to it (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* 85-6; "Political Dinners" 542-3). Similarly, the York Whig Club, which was launched in 1818 and continued to be active until 1822, was also disrupted by the intense conflict between conservative Whigs and progressive reformers (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* ch. 2). Based on these examples, it can be suggested that, in many regions in Britain, national and local Whigs were in agreement in opposing both Tory policies and popular radicalism, but there was serious political tension over the issue of reform between the parliamentary Whigs and their middle-class allies in the localities.

Some local Whigs had expected that the Fox dinners might allow them to make contact with the national Whig party and to work with the party to promote parliamentary reform. But many local Whigs, including middle-class reformers, came to believe that Fox had not been a sincere supporter of such reforms. This can be demonstrated with many examples. When a public political dinner was held among London radicals at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 1 May 1809, chaired by Cartwright, a toast to the memory of Fox was proposed, but it was loudly and furiously hissed and eventually thrown out. In his *Political Register* published on 28 March 1812, the radical reformer William Cobbett also ridiculed and attacked the inconsistency and ambiguity of Fox's attitude to reform (Dinwiddy 8-9, 15). Even for some local Whigs, the cult of Fox was not always useful to the reform movement, because they believed that Fox had not always been an active reformer. They therefore could not feel so strong a kinship with Fox as the national Whigs could. This was demonstrated by Losh's diary entry for 6 February 1814:

> I certainly had no partiality towards Mr. Fox as my opinions differed greatly from his upon many important subjects, and as I always thought and always avowed my opinion, that he sacrificed greatly too much to party attachments. Personally my knowledge of him was very slight, indeed I never was in private conversation with him except once, and then I thought he received me very coldly. Indeed, I believe he was displeased by the warmth with which I spoke to him on the subject of Parliamentary Reform. (Losh, I 32-3)

In addition, it was widely known that Fox's attitude towards parliamentary reform differed considerably when offered in public and in private (L. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* 252-8). It was also clear that Fox had been an active supporter of reform only in limited periods of time: in the

early 1780s and the late 1790s (Dinwiddy 6; Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster* 46-7).

Under these circumstances, by the end of the 1810s, some national Whigs realised that the cult of Fox was out-of-date and ineffective. In 1820, this was demonstrated by the ex-Whig MP, John Nicholls, who had joined the Whig Club in 1787 and had been a member of the Society of the Friends of the People in the 1790s (Thorne).

> Mr. Fox is no more; but [the Whigs] endeavour to acquire popularity by assuming his name. They find that it is in vain [...] Would they engage their Country's support, let them bring forward some great public measure which the Country may be interested to obtain [...] It is well known, that the leaders of the Foxite party are among those who are the most averse to Reform [...] It may be told, perhaps, that Mr. Fox was himself a great advocate for a Reform of the House of Commons. Yes, that is true. But [... from 1780] he ceased to be the sincere advocate of Reform [...] without being disloyal to that party into whose service he had entered. (Nicholls, I 212-4)

Nicholls proposed that the Whig party should abandon the cult of Fox, should take more note of the disturbed state of the country, and should declare its support for parliamentary reform and even give a lead to the reform movement.

Most English Fox dinners lasted only for a brief period and eventually declined in popularity. Many Scottish dinners, however, followed the opposite direction. Notably, the Fox dinners in Edinburgh and Glasgow continued for more than ten years. According to Trent Orme, the main reason why these dinners played a significant role in local politics for such a long period was that the Scottish electoral system was so closed that the electorate, as well as the broader public, were not given opportunities to express their political sentiments at elections, and they thus needed to develop alternate places and forms for that purpose (Orme, "Toasting Fox" 593). In addition, it seems that, unlike many of their English counterparts, the Edinburgh and Glasgow dinners did not stop because of serious political tension between conservatives and reformers (Cockburn 425). This implies that there was a considerable regional diversity in the impact of the cult of Fox on urban communities.

Nevertheless, the Scottish Fox dinners could have followed a similar trend to their English counterparts to some extent. First of all, the Edinburgh Fox dinners lost popularity temporarily during the post-war years because of some dispute over the political principles of the party. In towns in the Tay area, such as Dundee, Arbroath, and Cupar Angus, local reformers continued to meet at public dinners until the late 1810s, but they had been so frustrated with the Whig party's ambiguity about reform that they had dropped the name of Fox from the title of the dinners

(Orme, "Toasting Fox" 593, 603-4). In the early 1820s, the Edinburgh Fox dinners substantially recover their popularity, the leading Scottish Whig Henry Cockburn describing the 1823 one as a "very successful convocation" (Cockburn 403); but they could not survive in the latter half of the decade. It is not clear why the Scottish Whigs suddenly stopped hosting the Fox dinners in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1825. But probably, as Orme has suggested, the public political dinners celebrating the dead were gradually regarded as old-fashioned, and they increasingly became a place for supporting and praising great living statesmen (Orme, "Toasting Fox" 605).

Liverpool Concentric Society

As the previous section demonstrated, the Fox clubs and dinners did not expand widely in early nineteenth-century Britain. Most of them could not have been deeply ingrained in the urban communities and did not play an important role in local politics. On the other hand, there were many other local Whig clubs and societies without the title of Fox across Britain. They were established particularly in large constituencies.[8] Some of them lasted long, carried out constant and regular activity, and had a significant impact on local politics. Supported by local Whigs and middle-class reformers, they initiated or engaged actively in the reform movement in the 1810s. Interestingly, they often employed the cult of Fox in support of reform. To offer a case study of these Whig clubs and societies, this section will focus on the Liverpool Concentric Society.

In the early nineteenth century, Liverpool was the second largest port town in Britain. This parliamentary borough grew rapidly in the eighteenth century due to the expansion of the Atlantic trade from the mid-seventeenth century. In Liverpool, the right to vote was restricted to freemen, but there were numerous and powerful middle-class men without the vote. They were mainly men engaged in trade and commerce. Many of them possessed a keen political consciousness and reacted swiftly to national and local politics (Port & Thorne; Escott; Menzies). Under these circumstances, politics in Liverpool was not easily controlled by a handful of local patrons, but was susceptible to considerable ideological strife.

[8] Nevertheless, local Whig clubs and societies might have been smaller in number than their Tory counterparts. Except for the Fox clubs and dinners, there were at least twelve Whig clubs and societies established in the early nineteenth century: Bristol Concentric Society; Cirencester Whig Club; Cheshire Whig Club; Colchester Independent Club; Devon County Club (Devonshire Whig Club); Essex Whig Club, Gloucester (Constitutional) Whig Club; Kent Liberal dinner; Liverpool Concentric Society; Maldon Independent Club; Nantwich Whig Club; York Whig Club (A. Mitchell 54-5; Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* chs. 1-2; Fisher).

The Concentric Society was established on 21 November 1812. From then on, it served as a significant rallying point for local Whigs in Liverpool until its final closure at the end of 1822. The leading and direct cause of its establishment was the defeat of the Whig candidates in the 1812 general election. In this election, two Tory candidates, George Canning and Isaac Gascoyne, were challenged by two "Mountain" candidates, Henry Brougham and Thomas Creevey. During the election, Canning and Gascoyne supported the government's war policy and opposed parliamentary reform, while Brougham and Creevey insisted on peace and reform. The election ended in the victory of the Tory candidates, but local Whigs did not give up opposing Toryism after the election. This resulted in the establishment of the Concentric Society (*Liverpool Mercury*, 22 Jan. 1813; on Liverpool political clubs in the period see Whittingham-Jones).

The Concentric Society was led by influential middle-class reformers in Liverpool, such as the Unitarian minister William Shepherd, the founder and editor of the *Liverpool Mercury* Egerton Smith, and Colonel George Williams. Many members of this society were merchants, bankers, lawyers, and professional middle-class men. National Whigs did not join this club as official members. This is probably because, unlike many of the towns where the Fox dinners were held, Liverpool was not within the Whig grandees' sphere of influence. After its launch, this club quickly became popular. It was originally founded by "30 friends," but the number of members had increased rapidly to 800 by January 1817 and then to about 1,000 by 1819. It seems that some members were working-class men (*Liverpool Mercury,* 22 Jan. 1813, 24 Jan. 1817; Moore 138-9). This society gathered and discussed regularly at its weekly meetings, quarterly meetings, and annual dinners. It occasionally published the proceedings of these meetings in the *Liverpool Mercury* to influence local public opinion (Whittingham-Jones 131).

Generally, the Concentric Society pursued two mutually related political purposes. First, it attempted to undermine the dominant local power seized by the Tories, as demonstrated in Egerton Smith's speech at the 1818 annual dinner that: "The main object of our association is to make a stand against the debasing tendency of tory principles" (*Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Dec. 1818). At the dinners and meetings, members of the society insisted that the "Pitt system," which they thought still underpinned the policies of the current Tory government, was harmful to the country, and also that the Tories were the "disciples of Pitt" and anti-reformers (*Liverpool Mercury,* 3 Jun. 1814, 6 Dec. 1816). They also attacked Tory MPs for Liverpool and some influential local Tories. At the 1818 anniversary dinner, John Edward Taylor, the founder of the *Manchester Guardian*, attacked Canning, because this Tory MP opposed the distribution of parliamentary seats to Manchester by advocating the theory of virtual representation (*Liverpool*

Mercury, 11 Dec. 1818). Shepherd also attacked John Gladstone, an influential local Tory and Canning's patron, as an anti-reformer supporting the Pitt system (*Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Jan. 1822, 27 Dec. 1822). In the 1818 general election, Canning and Gascoyne were re-elected in the end, but were vigorously challenged by the Whig candidate, Lord Sefton, who was energetically supported by members of the Concentric Society.

Second, in order to fight against Tory politics and draw support from middle-class reformers, the Concentric Society pursued the following six liberal measures: peace, free trade, economic reform, tax reduction, religious liberty and parliamentary reform (*Liverpool Mercury,* 22 Jan. 1813; Checkland). Among these, however, the last one was its prime concern. At the annual dinners, the society often gave a toast: "The great object of our association, Parliamentary Reform" (Whittingham-Jones 131; *Liverpool Mercury,* 16 Apr. 1819). On 11 December 1812, shortly after launch, the Concentric Society made Brougham and Creevey honorary members and wrote to them that among the six reform measures, parliamentary reform was "above all" important (*Liverpool Mercury,* 22 Jan. 1813).

The Concentric Society itself did not bring forward a concrete proposal for parliamentary reform, but at dinners and meetings, individual members did advocate reform measures, such as shorter parliaments (annual or triennial), the extension of the vote to householders, and the secret ballot (*Liverpool Mercury,* 6 Dec. 1816, 11 Dec. 1818, and 11 Jan. 1822). The society attempted to be a rallying point for various reformers (see Egerton Smith's speeches in *Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Dec. 1818 and 21 Jan. 1820). In his speech at the 1818 annual dinner, Shepherd mentioned the meaning of the concentric circles designed as the "ingenious emblem upon our dinner tickets," insisting that "these Concentric circles [...] are intended to intimate the fact, that our society contains within it's [*sic*] compass various classes and descriptions of the friends of freedom, and as a means of obtaining and securing freedom–of parliamentary reform" (*Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Dec. 1818). To this end, the society was willing to grant membership to those reformers who lived in such neighbouring towns as Manchester and even in remote towns, such as Bristol and London (*Liverpool Mercury,* 18 Dec. 1820).

The Concentric Society was one of the local Whig associations which developed the cult of Fox. At the meetings and dinners, it often gave a toast to "the immortal memory of Charles James Fox." Egerton Smith regarded free speech as one of the principles of Fox (*Liverpool Mercury,* 3 Jun. 1814, 8 Sept. 1815), and James Williams proudly stated that "I carry his likeness attached to my watch" (*Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Dec. 1818). Outside the society, the cult of Fox was popular among

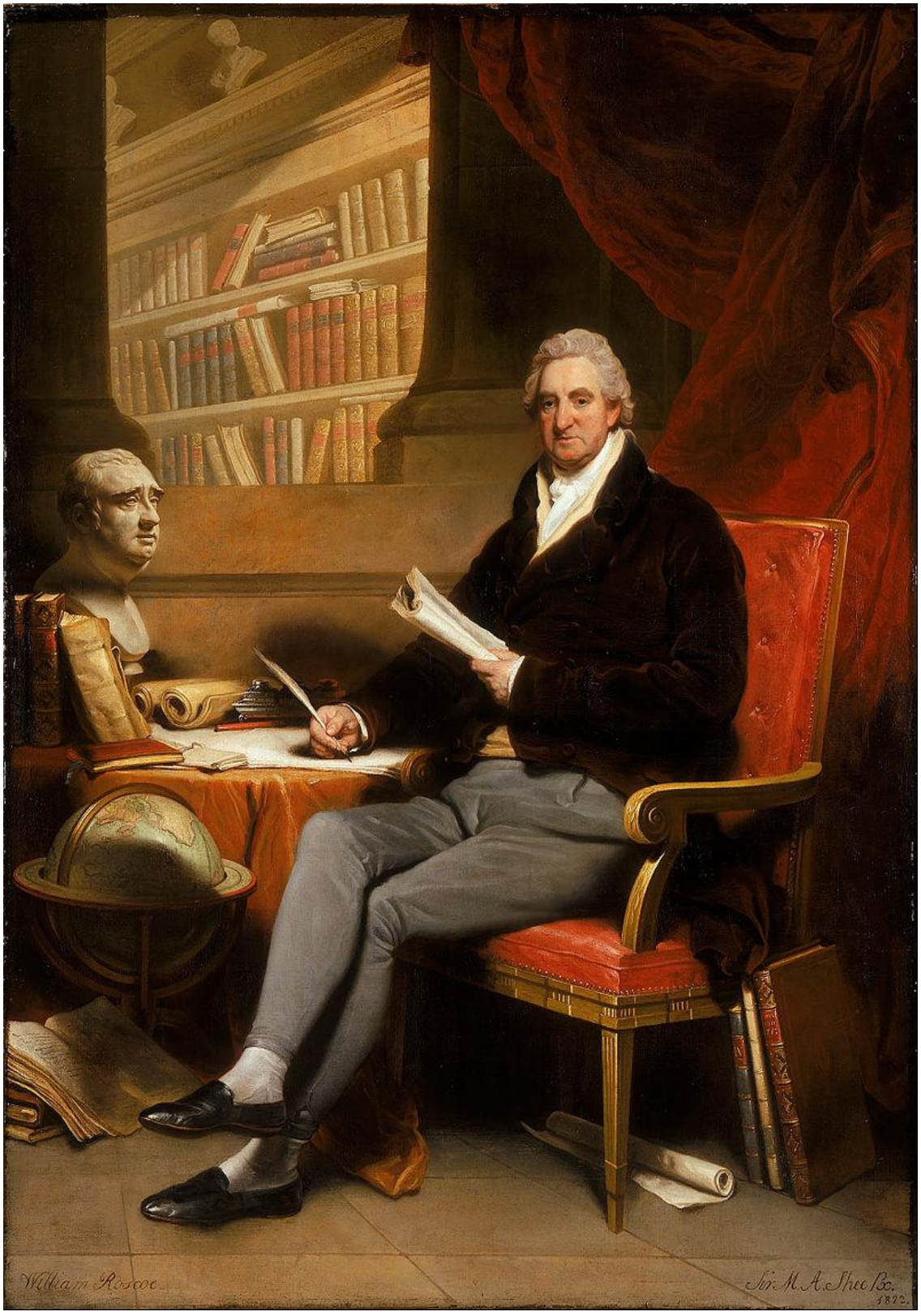

Figure 1: William Roscoe, by Martin Archer Shee (1822) [public domain]

local Whigs. As figure 1 demonstrates, William Roscoe (1753-1831), Whig MP for Liverpool between 1806 and 1807, a prominent leader of local Whigs and various liberal reform campaigns, though not a member of the Concentric Society, placed an order for a self-portrait, in which the bust of Fox was depicted next to him. He was very influential and highly respected by younger reformers in Liverpool, and the "Roscoe circle" included Shepherd and many members of the Concentric Society. In addition, local Whigs employed the cult of Fox to promote reform. In April 1819, the *Liverpool Mercury* published the report of the sub-committee of Westminster, which had been established on 12 April 1780, in order to inform or remind the public that Fox, as the chair of that famous sub-committee, agreed at least once on radical reform measures including annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage (*Liverpool Mercury,* 23, 30 Apr. 1819). This newspaper also posted an open letter written by "A CONSISTENT FOXITE," who was probably a member of the Concentric Society. He stressed that Fox had been an aggressive reformer, if not a radical one, not only in his early political career around 1780, but throughout his whole career.

> At all times [...] there is abundant evidence to show that his notions of Parliamentary Reform went to the extent of making the House of Commons the *express organ of the public voice* [...] The very essence of Whiggism, according to Mr. Fox, consisted in maintaining inviolate as a fundamental doctrine, *the right of representation* [...] Mr. Fox [insists] [...] "I must declare that Government is not only for, but from, the people, and that the people are the only legitimate sovereigns [...] Representation was the universal panacea: the cure for every evil [...] representation was the sovereign remedy for every evil; the infallible security against popular discontent; [...] give to the people, not the unreal mockery, but the *efficient substance* of representation."(*Liverpool Mercury,* 16 Apr. 1819)

The image of Fox created in this letter was somewhat an edited one to impress readers that he had been a genuine and authentic reformer. The author of the letter insisted that Fox had been a reformer at "all times," although it was known that he had been an ambiguous reformer except for limited periods. The author might have possessed a mistaken understanding of Fox, but perhaps he was aware that he had created a historically wrong image of him. The problem is, however, what he meant to do by articulating this kind of exaggeration. He arguably wanted to redeem Fox's honour as a reformer. He believed that it was Fox who had inherited the legacy of Whiggism in the late eighteenth century, and also that one of its core elements was support for parliamentary reform. The cult of Fox was ineffective in many regions in Britain, but the example of Liverpool suggests that in some local communities it could be powerful and influential.

As a political association which actively advocated reform, the Concentric Society expressed more sympathy for the Mountain Whigs than the mainstream Whigs. It sought to build a friendly and reliable relationship with them in a variety of ways. Every dinner hosted by this club gave toasts

to many Mountaineers, such as Whitbread, Creevey, Bennet, Coke, Romilly, Lord Tavistock, and particularly Brougham. At the 1816 anniversary dinner, the Irish merchant James Kenny Casey made a proposition that Brougham should be recruited as a Whig candidate at the next parliamentary election (*Liverpool Mercury,* 6 Dec. 1816). Besides him, toasts were given at many meetings to Creevey and Whitbread (*Liverpool Mercury,* 8 Dec. 1815). Bennet, though he might not have been an honorary member, was given a toast in at least nine dinners, and Brougham in at least ten. Brougham was also invited to the meetings of the Concentric Society several times (*Liverpool Mercury,* 14 Apr. 1815). When he gained a seat for Winchelsea in July 1815, this society soon held a celebration dinner and presented Brougham and Creevey with commemorative cups (*Liverpool Mercury,* 8 Sept. 1815). The society also awarded honorary membership not only to these two national Whigs but also to other members of the Mountain Whigs and their relatives, such as Whitbread, Coke, Lord Tavistock, and the Duke of Bedford (*Liverpool Mercury,* 22 Jan. 1813, 20 May 1814, 6 Aug. 1819).

The relationship of the Concentric Society to the Mountain Whigs was one of the significant elements of its own Whiggism. At the 1818 annual dinner, James Williams stated that "only by the reform of Parliament, *I believe*, can real lasting advantage be experienced." He went on to insist that:

> Is it the tories [...] or professed whigs with tory heart, who are afraid of reform, *that are doing this?* [...] I hope it will not be thought I am intending to reflect on all that are called whigs. No–*true, genuine whigs*, such as *really love their country*, *I esteem*, Mr. Fox was so called, I venerate his memory [...] I trust, his best principles are retained in my heart. Mr. Whitbread was a whig, I have wept over his loss. Francis Russell, Duke of Bedford, was likewise a whig. (*Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Dec. 1818)

The Concentric Society believed that the Mountain Whigs were "true, genuine whigs," and were patriots who were willing to save the country from the Tory government through their support for reform. At the same time, however, it also criticised some members of the Whig party for hesitating to support reform, calling them "professed whigs with tory heart" (the Concentric Society also criticized the mainstream Whigs' support for an alliance with the Grenvillites). This clearly explains the reason why the Mountain Whigs were popular among members of the Concentric Society. These national and local Whigs alike believed that "true" Whigs as the "real" Fox's descendants were committed reformers.

On some questions, however, the Concentric Society and the Mountain Whigs took different political stances, especially over the issue of why parliamentary reform was necessary. For the Mountain Whigs, crown influence was the real threat to the constitution and the major source of

governmental corruption, while the Concentric Society only rarely attacked crown influence but focused on the excessive electoral influences of the borough-mongering oligarchy.[9] The society claimed that borough-mongers and their landed allies exercised corrupt and undue influences on local politics and formed a ministerial "borough faction" in the Commons. Egerton Smith insisted that borough-mongers were anti-reformers forming an "odious and despotic oligarchy," and warned that they, as well as sinecurists and pensioners, threatened the interests of the middle classes (*Liverpool Mercury,* 2 Jan. 1818). As this demonstrates, the Concentric Society tried to shape its own Whiggism to defend and promote the interests of the middle classes. They were thus ready to attack the landed elite including conservative Whigs, whenever necessary, and so was Losh in Newcastle, who prided himself in his independence from aristocrats (Losh, I 171-2).

The Concentric Society actively supported the Mountain Whigs, but it also sought to develop good relations with other political groups out-of-doors, such as metropolitan radicals. For instance, it granted honorary membership to Burdett and Cartwright (*Liverpool Mercury,* 6 Aug. 1813). The dinners hosted by the society celebrated Burdett more frequently than Brougham (*Liverpool Mercury,* 8 Sept. 1815); they toasted Cartwright on at least nine occasions and Burdett at least sixteen. When he was invited to the 1818 annual dinner, 320 local notables and middle-class men gathered. This turnout was the highest among all dinners hosted by the society (*Liverpool Mercury,* 11 Dec. 1818). The dinner was notable for its toasting list. The third toast was "The Sovereignty of the People." It was given often at radicals' meetings and dinners, but it was hated by many Whigs and their moderate supporters in the localities. The Concentric Society, however, had toasting in first and second position "The King" and "The Prince Regent, and may his future councils be guided by his early principles." Then, after "The Sovereignty of the People," they gave "The Constitution, the whole Constitution, and nothing but the Constitution." As the toast list indicated, the toast of "The Sovereignty of the People" did not mean that the Concentrics opposed constitutional monarchy. Except for this dinner, the quarterly meeting in January 1819 was the only occasion on which this toast was given (*Liverpool Mercury,* 15 Jan. 1819). On the other hand, another toast, "The source of all legitimate Government – the People," was often given at the meetings and dinners (*Liverpool Mercury,* 14 Apr. 1815).

The Concentric Society also forged its connection with metropolitan radicals through more direct political action. This was exemplified by its relationship with the Hampden Club. The Hampden Club was a political society founded in London by Thomas Northmore in the spring of 1811. At the beginning, it was a moderate political club for propertied reformers who could afford to pay a

[9] For an example of an attack by the Concentrics on crown influence see *Liverpool Mercury,* 6 Aug. 1819.

three-guinea annual membership fee. After Cartwright became a central figure of this club in May 1813, however, it turned into a more radical association advocating annual parliaments and the extension of the franchise to direct taxpayers (Miller, "Major John Cartwright" 615-19). The Mountain Whigs had a connection with London radicals but hesitated to join the Hampden Club (Rapp 56). On the other hand, the Concentric Society held an extraordinary meeting on 14 January 1817 and resolved to send an agent to a meeting which would be hosted by the Hampden Club. At that time, the Hampden Club attempted to organise a national reform movement, requesting various reform groups across Britain to send their delegate to a reform meeting hosted by it. The Concentric Society responded positively to this and dispatched Thomas Hume, a local landowner, as its representative. Besides, at this extraordinary meeting, the Concentric Society resolved to acquiesce in all measures supported by the delegate meeting, even if these measures included radical proposals such as annual parliaments, universal manhood suffrage, and the secret ballot (*Liverpool Mercury,* 24 Jan. 1817). The delegate meeting took place on 22 January at the Crown and Anchor Tavern. The delegates were small in number at less than fifty, but there were nationally famous radicals, such as William Cobbett, Henry Hunt, Samuel Bamford, and the chairman Cartwright. This meeting resolved to support many reform measures, including householder franchise (*Morning Chronicle,* 23 Jan. 1817; Thompson 697-9, 705). Following this meeting, on 28 January, Burdett announced that he would present a motion in favour of reform to the House of Commons, and on the next day Lord Cochrane began to submit to the Commons reform petitions sent from various towns (Miller, "John Cartwright and Radical Parlimanetary Reform" 724; Cobbett and Hansard, 35 78-99). These efforts to achieve parliamentary reform ended in failure, because a large majority of MPs strengthened their conservative and anti-reform attitude after the Regent was attacked by a London mob on 28 January. In addition, owing to a series of repressive measures legislated immediately after the riot, such as the re-establishment of the Secret Committee, the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, and the enactment of the Seditious Meetings Act, the activities of reformist political groups were severely restrained (Thompson 699-700). Although these restrictive measures did not ban the Concentric Society, the Hampden Club lost political influence and the nation-wide reform movement quickly declined.

The reform movement created by metropolitan and local reformist societies was unsuccessful in the 1810s, but in order to achieve reform the Concentric Society could choose other options than relying on the Whig party in Parliament. It was not a local association subordinate to the central party organisation, but a voluntary society which decided its own policy for itself. In the early

nineteenth century, national parties and local political groups were surely connected to a certain extent, but these two bodies operated independently of each other.

Nevertheless, there was a certain reservation in the Concentric Society's sympathy and support for radicalism. This society relished the term "radical reform," as it occasionally appeared as one of the toasts at the dinners: "The grand object of the Concentric Society, –A Radical Reform in Parliament" (*Liverpool Mercury,* 8 Sept. 1815). The Concentric Society, however, was careful enough to keep a certain distance from extreme and left-wing radicals, such as William Cobbett and Henry Hunt. At the 1818 annual dinner, for example, J. K. Casey insisted that "we [should] not imitate Mr. Cobbett or Mr. Hunt [...and] we still revere the memory of Charles Fox" (*Liverpool Mercury,* 6 Dec. 1816). At the 1820 annual dinner, Egerton Smith attacked Cobbett by calling him a "common libeler" (*Liverpool Mercury,* 21 Jan. 1820). As these examples suggest, the Concentric Society sent its delegate to the reform meeting called by the Hampden Club, but it was unwilling to support the more militant working-class radicals.

It is also worth paying attention to the meaning of the term "radical reform" articulated by the Concentric Society. At the 1815 dinner celebrating Brougham's successful election, Shepherd referred to the relationship between Roscoe and Brougham:

> Gentlemen, soon after his introduction into Parliament Mr. Brougham publicly declared his conviction of the necessity of a reform in the House of Commons. For a time, however, his views on this head were somewhat limited. But, in consequence of a free and friendly discussion of the question with that strenuous and enlightened advocate of every good principle, Mr. Roscoe, he became a convert to the cause of radical reform. (*Liverpool Mercury,* 8 Sept. 1815)

According to Shepherd, it was under Roscoe's influence that Brougham became an active advocate of "radical reform." By inserting an anecdote that the local notable in Liverpool influenced the national politician, Shepherd may have sought to express some local pride. What should be noted, however, is that both Brougham and Roscoe viewed some radical reform measures, such as annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage, as dangerous and inconsiderate. They rather supported more modest and pragmatic reform proposals (Lobban; Taylor & Thorne). The Concentric Society insisted on "radical reform," perhaps because it believed that the terms were effective enough to persuade the public that it was urgent and indispensable to achieve substantial reform. At the same time, however, this society opposed those radical measures which it thought would undermine the constitution.

In order to achieve parliamentary reform, the Concentric Society sought a relationship with London radicals and insisted on the necessity of "radical reform" on many occasions. Nevertheless, this society's commitment to radicalism was not deep. The society did not renounce the political principles of Fox and kept contact with the Mountain Whigs. It believed that this political stance would serve its own interest because, considering that parliamentary reform had to be granted ultimately in Parliament, it thus needed to make an ally with pro-reform MPs. In this respect, the Mountain Whigs were a significant political group with which the Concentric Society should continually negotiate and deliberately foster a constant and strong relationship.

Conclusion

This essay has considered the extent and the ways in which the posthumous cult of Fox had an impact on Whig politics in British urban communities. It reveals three significant features of his cult within a Whig associational culture. First, the cult of Fox was popular and influential within the closed Whig circles in the capital. It was explicitly expressed on many occasions, particularly at the dinners hosted by the London Fox Club, and could have actively contributed to the unity between the Whig party and its intimate allies in London. This may well be linked to the aristocratic and exclusive temperament of the Whig party stressed by Leslie Mitchell (*The Whig World* 18, 39).

Secondly, however, the cult of Fox was not shared fully among local Whigs and middle-class reformers. Many of these regional allies of the party did not feel sincere or genuine sympathy to Fox. Holding the Fox dinners in the localities was the national and local Whigs' reaction to the extra-parliamentary reform movement fermented during the post-war period. Many local Whigs initially had positive expectations for the dinners and attempted to use them to engage in promoting the reform movement, but they were soon disappointed and felt frustrated that national Whigs were unwilling to initiate a reform campaign. The growing frustration of local Whigs was one of the significant reasons why the Fox dinners were not embedded in the local communities. National Whigs also realised that the dinners were not useful or practical enough to broaden active support from the public.

Third, the situation was nevertheless different in some regions in Britain. In Edinburgh and Glasgow, the Fox dinners, while support declined in the late 1810s, were popular and lasted until the mid-1820s. In Liverpool, the cult of Fox was also powerful and influential among local Whigs and middle-class reformers. The Fox dinners in Edinburgh and Glasgow came to an abrupt halt in 1825, and the Liverpool Concentric Society ended its activity at the end of 1822. It is unclear

why these Scottish and English Whig associations terminated their activity by the mid-1820s, but it is evident that they did not disappear because of their inner conflict or their frustration with national Whigs. Members of the Concentric Society, for example, kept contact with the Mountain Whigs and especially Brougham, even after its closure in 1822. A plausible reason why these Whig associations ended their activity in this period was the general decline of the reform movement in the more prosperous early 1820s.

In order to appreciate the broader implication of these features, it may be worth re-considering them from two specific perspectives: the relationship between national and local politics, and the development of urban Whig politics in the 1820s and the following period. Over the first issue, this study has largely agreed with O'Gorman and Phillips. In the early nineteenth century, the parliamentary Whigs and their supporters in the localities were only loosely connected to each other on the basis of mutual independence. Local politics basically operated through the autonomous decision-making process within the localities. This is demonstrated by the case studies of the Newcastle Fox dinners and the Concentric Society. Attendants at these dinners and members of this political club had a close connection with national Whigs, but could make political decisions on their own initiative. Arguably, this political culture was substantially different from that in the modern period. According to Gary Cox and Angus Hawkins, a significant turning point came in the late Victorian era. In the process of democratisation in this period, local political societies became more formally connected to, and more tightly controlled by, the national political parties in Parliament, and as a result they considerably lost much of their autonomy (Cox; Hawkins, *British Party Politics* and *Victorian Political Culture*).

Nevertheless, paying attention to political identity, symbolism, and ideology rather than organisational structure, it can be stressed that in the early nineteenth century many local politicians were ready to commit themselves to national parties for their own purposes, but to different degrees in different regions. The political impact of the cult of Fox was remarkable in the capital. It was in London that Whig MPs and aristocrats gathered from across the country during the parliamentary session, that they and their close friends of both genders were influential and outstanding in the social circles even when they were a minority group in Parliament, and also that a political power base supporting Fox had been formed since the late eighteenth century (L. Mitchell, *The Whig World* ch.3; Corfield et al.). Outside the capital, the cult of Fox also played a role in connecting national and local politics. In some provincial towns, middle-class reformers engaged in Whig politics through the cult and principles of Fox.

Similarly, comparing Newcastle and Liverpool reveals that in Newcastle, which was within the sphere of influence of Whig grandees, Fox's cult was not very popular or long-lasting, whereas it was so in Liverpool, where Whig grandees were not influential. This paradoxical situation needs to be explained by conducting a further careful analysis. Part of the answer is that Losh and other middle-class reformers in Newcastle were probably more familiar than the Concentrics with the "real" Fox as an ambiguous reformer through personal connections with Whig grandees. As seen in the second section, Losh actually met Fox once and evaluated him negatively and cynically. In addition, when they attempted to engage in the reform movement, Losh and his local friends could not entirely ignore the Whig grandees who were influential in their community, whereas members of the Concentric Society could neglect the Whig grandees because of their absence in Liverpool and sought a relationship with the reformist Mountain Whigs on their own initiative. For the Concentric Society, expressing the cult of Fox was highly beneficial, partly because the Mountain Whigs sincerely believed that they were the real, genuine, and authentic Foxites.

Next, what kind of political impact did the cult of Fox have on the development of urban Whig politics after the 1810s? It was evident that the London Fox Dinners continued to celebrate the political principles of Fox and also serve as one of the most significant rallying points for the Whigs in the capital. In the localities, by contrast, the political significance of the cult of Fox was increasingly weakened. In this respect, as seen above, Orme's argument that influential and living members of the party, rather than the dead leader, were frequently celebrated in the localities is persuasive. This argument also urges us to be conscious of the limitation of Leslie Mitchell's statement that "[i]n the debates of 1828-9, which finally allowed full emancipation to dissenters and Catholics, and in those of 1830-32, which finally reformed parliament, Fox's name is invoked again and again" ("Fox, Charles James" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). Perhaps this statement would prove to be reliable through the examination of utterances given by the Whig party in Parliament several times before and after 1830, but it might not be applicable to the reality of local Whigs and middle-class reformers in these years, given that local Fox dinners were not held after the mid-1820s.

In the 1820s, the Whig leaders continued to take a retrospective approach of employing the cult of Fox to maintain the unity of the party, but at the same time they realised that the image of Fox was not useful or effective in the localities. In this respect, John Nicholl's proposition in 1820 seen in the second section can be regarded as important, because the Whig party went along with it during the 1820s. Convinced of the limitation of the Fox dinners, they gradually became aware that they should advocate parliamentary reform more actively and strenuously to draw support

from the middle classes. This shift in their attitudes towards reform was further promoted in the changing political context of the waning of popular radicalism, which had made the landed and propertied classes hesitate to support reform. In this period, Earl Grey began to insist that reform would be a precondition of supporting or forming a government. He also stated that reform should be initiated by the government, rather than by a massive popular movement. He continued to hang out the banner of reform until he was appointed as prime minister in November 1830 and then his government soon initiated the discussion of the Reform Bill (Brett, *The Liberal Middle Classes* 44-5; Derry 174-83; L. Mitchell, *The Whig World* chs. 6 and 8).

Regarding the posthumous cult of Fox after the passage of the Reform Acts in 1832, historians have offered conflicting interpretations. On the one hand, N. B. Penny and John Dinwiddy insisted on the declining significance of Fox. Penny pointed out that "the Reform Bill replaced Fox as a common reference point for party feeling," while Dinwiddy claimed that "After 1832, Fox cannot be said to have had any real influence" (Penny 105; Dinwiddy 16). On the other hand, Michael Ledger-Lomas has challenged this, stating that the cult of Fox lasted long into the Victorian period. This conflict may be resolved when seen from the perspective of regional diversity: in the post-reform period, the cult of Fox was certainly no longer so relevant in the localities, but it was still powerful and influential among the Whig party and its allies in the capital. At least, the London Fox Club and the Fox dinners hosted by it survived in the Victorian era and into our own times (Sebag-Montefiore).

Appendix A: members of the London Fox Club

This list is based on the Holland House Papers, MSS. 51516 (British Library)

Duke of Bedford
Earl Grey
Earl Fitzwilliam
~~Marquis of Douglass~~
~~Lord St. John~~
Lord Holland
Lord Say & Sele
Lord Robert Spencer
Lord G. A. H. Cavendish
Lord Morpeth
Lord John Russell
Mr. Serjt. Lens
Sir Arthur Piggott
~~Samuel Whitbread, Esq.~~
~~Rt. Hon. Mr. Baron Adam~~
George Byng, Esq.
~~Mr. Serjt. Runnington~~
Mr. Serjt. Heywood
Henry Martin, Esq.
~~James Perry, Esq.~~
Robert Adair, Esq.
William J. Denison
Hon. W. Maule
Sir Thomas Bell
W. G. Adam, Esq.
Charles Calvert, Esq.
~~Charles Fox Townshend, Esq.~~
~~Francis Horner, Esq.~~
Robert Greenhill Russell, Esq.
General Fergusson
John Allen, Esq.
James Barnett, Esq.
W. L. Hughes, Esq.,
Henry Tripp, Esq.
James Hamphreys, Esq.
~~Hon. George Ponsonby~~
Dudley North, Esq.
Edward Ellice, Esq.
John Warton [Wharton], Esq.
Captain Charles Adam, R. N.
~~Sir John Throckmorton, Bart.~~
J. G. Lambton, Esq.
Sir M. W. Ridley, Bart.
~~Sir Charles Monk [Monck], Bart.~~
Mr. R. W. Clarkson
Hon. L. Dundas
Hon. George Petre
Duke of Norfolk
Duke of Devonshire
T. W. Coke, Esq.
~~Lord Crewe~~
Lord Cowper
Sir Thomas Mostyn
W. H. Whitbread
Marquis Tavistock
W. P. Honywood
Lord Petre
Mr. Stephenson
Mr. Scarlet

Appendix B: Attendants at the London Fox Dinners

Members of the House of Lords

H. R. H., Duke of Sussex
Duke of Bedford
Duke of Devonshire
Duke of Leinster
Duke of Norfolk
Marquess of Lansdowne
Earl of Albemarle
Earl of Besborough
Earl Cowper
Earl Fitzwilliam
Earl Grey
Earl Grosvenor
Earl of Rosslyn
Earl of Thanet
Baron Erskine
Baron Holland
Baron Ponsonby
Baron St. John
Baron Saye and Sele

Members of the House of Commons

Names underlined are ex-MPs

Lord George Cavendish
Lord Cowper
Lord Crewe
Lord Henry Fitzgerald
Lord William Fitzgerald
Lord Archibald Hamilton
Lord Howick
Lord Kinnaird
Lord Milton
Lord Morpeth
Lord Normanby
Marquess of Tavistock
Lord John Russell
Lord William Russell
Lord Robert Spencer
Lord John Townshend
Sir John Aubrey
Sir Ronald C. Ferguson
Sir Robert Heron
(Sir) James Macdonald
Sir James Mackintosh
Sir Arthur Piggott
Sir Matthew W. Ridley
Sir George Robinson
Sir Samuel Romilly
Sir William Rowley
Sir Robert Wilson
Hon. James Abercrombie
Hon. Henry G. Bennet
Hon. Lawrence Dundas
Hon. Thomas Dundas
Hon. William R. Maule
Hon. George Ponsonby
(Hon.) General George Walpole
Colonel William L. Hughes
Colonel George J. Robarts
Captain Charles Adam
Adair, Robert
Adam, William
Allen, John H.
Barclay, George

Barnett, James
Barrett Lennard, T.
Bernal, Ralph
Birch, Joseph
Brougham, Henry
Byng, George
Calvert, Charles
Carter, John
Chaloner, Robert
Coke, Thomas W.
Combe, Harvey C.
Concannon, Lucius
Creevey, Thomas
Denison, William J.
Denman, Thomas
Erskine, David
Ellice, Edward
Graham, James R.G.
Grant, John P.
Gordon, Robert
Honywood, William P.
Horner, Francis
Hume, Joseph
James, William
Kennedy, Thomas F.
Lambton, John G.
Martin, Henry
Moore, Peter
North, Dudley
Ord, William
Russell, Matthew
Russell, Robert G.
Scarlet [Scarlett], James
Taylor, Michael A.
Tierney, George
Thorp, John T.
Waithman, Robert
Warre, John A.
Wharton, John
Whitbread, Samuel
Wyvill, Marmaduke

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