

Political Life

Introduction

The political life of St George Hanover Square invites us to consider the relationship between parish, borough and metropolis, and also between local and national politics in Westminster. As we have seen, the vestry was filled with notable persons, whether the aristocratic elite of the closed vestry or the more trade-oriented membership of the vestry following Hobhouse's Act 1831. These people were the gatekeepers to many sites of political negotiation in the parish, particularly the homes of the aristocracy and clubs like Brooks's. The electorate of St George's was particularly influential in the choice of MPs for the borough, as it was numerous and often ran counter to the radical impulse of Westminster parishes dominated by independent middling tradesmen such as St Clement Danes.¹ In 1784 there were 2,325 votes in the parish, 20.3 per cent of the Westminster total.² Both elected representatives and political operatives, such as election managers, or in the later 19th century, party organisers, were involved in the day-to-day business of metropolitan and municipal politics, attending vestry meetings and presenting their petitions in Parliament.

1720–1780

When St George Hanover Square was formed, one of the churchwardens was Lord George Carpenter, Westminster MP from 1722 to 1727, presaging the influence of vestrymen in both local and national politics. He already lived on the Grosvenor Estate when he was ennobled (cr. 1st Baron Carpenter 1719). Aristocratic titles continued to flow to residents of the Estate (or indeed the parish, following its formation), and a list of all those 28 so honoured in the mid 18th century runs

¹ Cross ref to St/ CD and possibly Knightsbridge and Hyde (do the Middx red books cover any of this?)

² Poll book data from Harvey, Green and Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database*; 'History of Elections in Westminster, 1749–1852'.

from Carpenter's fellow founding vestryman, the 1st Earl de la Warr in 1719, to the 1st Earl Grosvenor, conferred upon Richard Grosvenor in 1761. Grosvenor Square, Grosvenor and Upper Grosvenor Streets, and to a lesser extent Brook and Upper Brook Streets were occupied by many members of both Houses of Parliament in the mid 18th century; in Grosvenor Square, residences of peers and MPs outnumbered all others by more than two to one. When the parish vestry was appointed in 1725, all of the men of both houses were selected. In everything from its name to the equestrian statue of George I placed at the centre of the gardens in Grosvenor Square, the parish developed as a spatial symbol and celebration of the Hanoverian regime.³ Aristocratic factionalism and the increasingly independent commercial interest in the parish meant that it was not as politically homogenous as might be thought, given its resplendent new squares. New centres of power developed in the clubs and aristocratic houses which sprung up around the parish.

Arlington Street was particularly fashionable amongst politicians. On the west side, 'the Enjoyment of so good a Prospect and free Air, makes them to be taken up by Persons of Quality.'⁴ When Henry Pelham purchased number 22 from William Pulteney in 1740, his neighbours were Lord Tyrconnel and Lady Codrington, while the Earl of Cholmondley, the Duchess of Norfolk and Lord Carteret lived further down the street. Robert Walpole lived in Arlington Street from 1716 to 1732, when he moved to 10 Downing Street.⁵ Pelham rebuilt his house, moving in soon before he became First Lord of the Treasury, and then extended into the neighbouring plot when it became available.⁶ Pelham died in 1754 and his house was later inhabited by political luminaries including Granville Leveson Gower.⁷

³ J. Schlarman, 'The social geography of Grosvenor Square: mapping gender and politics, 1720–1760', *The London Jnl*, 28:1 (2003), 23–5.

⁴ Strype, *Survey of London*, book vi, chap. 5.

⁵ N. Thompson, '22 Arlington Street in the 18th Century' in P. Campbell (ed.), *A House in Town: 22 Arlington Street Its Owners and Builders* (London, 1984), 103.

⁶ N. Thompson, '22 Arlington Street in the 18th Century', 108–11.

⁷ N. Thompson, '22 Arlington Street in the 18th Century', 116.

In 1727 and 1734, Westminster returned two government Whigs unopposed. The election of 1741 gives the first statistical impression of the political leanings of the voters living in St George Hanover Square. The ministerial candidates, Sundon and Wager, were elected for Westminster with 52.8 per cent of the votes. In St George's, they garnered 569 and 548 votes respectively, while the Independents Edwin and Vernon polled 308 and 334. The ratio of 63.5 per cent of votes for the Court candidates to 36.5 per cent for the Independents in St George compared with 83.8 per cent and 16.2 per cent in the Court strongholds of St Margaret and St John, and 21.3 per cent and 78.7 per cent in those redoubts of the Independents, St Clement Danes and St Mary-le-Strand. St James Piccadilly had a similar level of support for Court candidates to St George's of 58.1 per cent.⁸

A 'middling sort' political identity continued to develop as several parishioners, emboldened by disputes with the vestry in 1741, joined a movement to abolish select vestries in Westminster the next year. These men were culturally, socially and physically separate from the aristocratic worlds of the Grosvenor and Hanover estates, as retailers, manufacturers of luxury goods or innkeepers around New Bond Street, Old Bond Street and Piccadilly.⁹ Several of the members of this campaign expanded their interest in politics, in one case joining their erstwhile opponents in being co-opted onto the vestry, while another acted as a local manager for the Independent candidate in the 1749 Westminster by-election.¹⁰

Court candidate Lord Trentham received 51.1 per cent of votes in Westminster. In St George's he received 65.4 per cent of votes following a recount, and the esquires and gentlemen of the parish voted three to one in favour of Trentham.¹¹ The tradesmen's votes were vital as they 'were more

⁸ N. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities. Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*, (Oxford, 1989), 175.

⁹ G. Williamson, 'The Nature of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Popular Politics in the City of Westminster: The Select Vestry Committee of 1742 and the Parish of St George Hanover Square', Unpublished MA thesis (Birkbeck, University of London, 2014), 48–9 and Appendix 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67–72.

¹¹ N. Rogers, 'Aristocratic Clientage, Trade and Independency: Popular Politics in Pre-Radical Westminster', *Past & Present*, 61 (1973), 79 and 81.

assiduous in using their political rights'.¹² Wealthy tradesmen might act as conduits of aristocratic clientage. John Phillips, a carpenter of Brook Street, received numerous lucrative building contracts from the Bedford Estate during the 1740s. He used his local influence with his employees in the building trade, food retailers and others, especially strong in his home parish of St George Hanover Square, to secure votes for Trentham.¹³ The migration of fashionable society to the parish continued and with it came political influence. By 1751 the Grosvenor Estate alone was home to 49 MPs and more than 23 per cent of the peers eligible to sit in the House of Lords.¹⁴

Government candidates were returned unopposed in Westminster following an easy victory in 1754, until a candidate emerged from the followers of the influential London radical John Wilkes; Sir Robert Bernard gathered sufficient support to step in unopposed in 1770. A contest ensued in 1774, when the government put forward two strong candidates in Hugh Percy and Lord Thomas Pelham Clinton, while Wilkes lent his support to Lord Mahon and Lord Mountmorres, who also enjoyed the backing of several rival aristocratic interests. Mountmorres was an Irish peer and a parishioner with an address in Hertford Street; he unsurprisingly cast only a single vote for himself. In St George's 57.2 per cent of voters gave their support to the government candidates in tandem while 32 per cent of voters chose Mahon and Mountmorres, comparing with 61.5 per cent and 30 per cent across the entire constituency. More than three-quarters of Mahon and Mountmorres' support were employed in building, dealing or manufacturing, while only 7.7 per cent were rentiers, compared to more than a quarter of government supporters, showing the existence of large voting blocs of both tradesmen and gentlemen.¹⁵ Long-time Wilkes associate Humphrey Cotes only received 130 votes

¹² 'The Social Character of the Estate: Introduction', in *Survey of London: Vol. 39, the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 1 (General History)*, ed. F.H.W. Sheppard (London, 1977), pp. 83-86. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol39/pt1/pp83-86> (accessed 5 July 2019).

¹³ N. Rogers, 'Aristocratic Clientage, Trade and Independency: Popular Politics in Pre-Radical Westminster', *Past & Present*, 61 (1973), 90.

¹⁴ 'The Social Character of the Estate: Introduction', in *Survey of London: Volume 39, the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 1 (General History)*, ed. F H W Sheppard pp. 83-86. *British History Online*.

¹⁵ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1754-90, 'Westminster'*; I.R. Christie, 'The Wilkites and the general election of 1774', in idem, *Myth and reality in late eighteenth-century British politics* (1970), 250.

across Westminster, although curiously more than a third of those came from St George's and 10 per cent were dealers from Oxford Street, one of the least salubrious areas of the parish.¹⁶

1780 – 1831

A new reformist electoral force emerged in the late 18th century. Fox represented Westminster from 1780 until his death in 1806 and his electoral successes coincided with an era of local independence from government and Court influence.¹⁷ Fox's support was particularly strong in his home parish of St George's. Fox lived in St James' Street, just south of Piccadilly and just inside the parish, between his club Brooks's and the grand residence of some of his most famous political allies, Devonshire House. both important gathering places for the Whigs.

Fox came second in Westminster in 1780 to Admiral Rodney, a fellow member of Brooks's¹⁸, and in 1784 to Lord Hood. However, Fox topped the poll in St George's in both elections. In 1780, 74.3 per cent of Fox's votes in St George's came from plumpers, 10 per cent higher than in Westminster as a whole. In 1784 a 'massive' 84.3 per cent of Fox's Westminster votes were from plumpers (who voted for a single candidate, discarding their second vote); the St George's figure was even higher at 86.5 per cent.¹⁹ His share of the total vote in 1784 was 32.8 per cent in Westminster, but 39.6 per cent in St George's, which was also the parish with highest percentage of voters for Fox.²⁰

Rebuilt following a fire in 1733, Devonshire House fronted onto Piccadilly and was perhaps chief amongst the venues of the aristocracy due to its huge public rooms that could comfortably

¹⁶ Poll book data from Harvey, Green and Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database*; 'History of Elections in Westminster, 1749–1852', p.20 from *London Electoral History*; 'The Social Character of the Estate: Introduction', in *Survey of London: Volume 39, the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 1 (General History)*, ed. F H W Sheppard, pp. 83–86. *British History Online*.

¹⁷ Harvey, Green and Corfield, 'Westminster Man: Charles James Fox and his Electorate, 1780–1806', *Parliamentary History*, 20:2 (2001), 161.

¹⁸ R. Ollard, 'The Brooks's of Charles James Fox', in P. Ziegler and D. Seward (eds.), *Brooks's: a social history* (1991), 40–3.

¹⁹ Harvey, Green and Corfield, 'Westminster Man', 164–6.

²⁰ Harvey, Green and Corfield, 'Westminster Man', 170–1.

accommodate 1,200 people. These elevated the duke and his wife of 1774, Lady Georgiana Spencer, to a role as taste-makers in high society.²¹ The duchess of Devonshire became a fervent supporter of the Whigs and her home a centre of opposition politics revolving around Charles James Fox and the Prince of Wales. Devonshire House points us to the importance of aristocratic residences and the women who hosted political gatherings.²² Her political dinners were an important setting to secure support for an opposition otherwise lacking in power and patronage, as well as numbers in parliamentary votes.²³ They were even used to conduct foreign policy during brief periods when the Whigs were in government.²⁴ Huge celebrations were held there for Whig triumphs such as their entry into government in 1782.²⁵

Political women did not always share their husband's outlook and could hold political primacy at home; Frances Legge held gatherings of her favoured opposition Whigs at her home in Grosvenor Square, including William Windham and Thomas Pelham, despite her husband George Legge being, in the words of Sir Gilbert Elliott, a 'violent Tory'. Elliot, who attended a dinner at the Legges', feared the 'internal mortification' of Mr Legge at having to quietly suffer the expression of opinions so contrary to his own.²⁶

Canvassing by aristocratic women was vital to Fox's victory in 1784, the duchess of Devonshire foremost amongst them.²⁷ Her visibility in the campaign established her as a political force in her own right.²⁸ At the close of the poll, a huge procession pulled Fox's coach from Palace Yard, via Carlton House and along Piccadilly to Devonshire House where he proclaimed he was 'as much at home as at my own house.'²⁹ Less obviously political festivities at the house and in the surrounding

²¹ A. Foreman, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (New York, 2001), 33.

²² E. Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life C.1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005), 84–97.

²³ Foreman, *Georgiana*, 74 and 78; Chalus, *Elite Women*, 93.

²⁴ Foreman, *Georgiana*, 113–4 and 117.

²⁵ Foreman, *Georgiana*, 89–90.

²⁶ Countess of Minto (ed.), *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, vol. I (London, 1874), 267.

²⁷ *The History of the Westminster Election* (1784), xi–xii, 178, 319, 476, 483, 494, 574.

²⁸ Foreman, *Georgiana*, 139–46 and 152.

²⁹ *The History of the Westminster Election* (1784), 64.

area, including a display by balloonists launched from Grosvenor Square, helped to associate the Whigs with taste and fashion, particularly through Georgiana's use of their unofficial colours of blue and buff.³⁰ Devonshire House remained at the centre of Whig social and political organisation for a new generation including Charles Grey and Richard Sheridan, although events such as the Regency crisis caused attendance to falter.³¹ By the 1790s, Georgiana's dinners were reduced to quiet affairs aimed at reconciling feuding factions.³²

In the by-election of 1788 pitting Samuel Hood against the Foxite candidate Lord John Townshend, the latter won a second seat for Fox's cause, but without equalling Fox's personal popularity in the parish, polling roughly similar percentages of the vote in Westminster and St George Hannover Square, the latter a slightly higher 54.9 per cent.³³ From 1790 the government became more wary of the cost of Westminster contests and agreed with the opposition to only put up one candidate each. In 1790 Fox and Hood were still forced into a contest by radical candidate John Horne Tooke, who also stood in 1796. Fox topped the poll in both these elections taking 41.7 per cent and 40.3 per cent of votes in Westminster.³⁴ Separate voting figures for St George's parish are not available for 1796, but in 1790 Fox was even more dominant than previously, when he took 56.2 per cent of votes. Despite their enthusiasm for Fox's moderate, Whiggish brand of reform, the parish showed very little enthusiasm for the radical cause. Horne Tooke received a meagre 8.8 per cent of votes in the parish, compared to 20.1 per cent across Westminster.³⁵

In 1802 Fox again topped the poll in the borough, with Alan Gardner second as he had been in 1796 and independent candidate John Graham in third. Turnout was low across Westminster and St George's was no exception. However, Fox fared disproportionately poorly in the parish, coming

³⁰ Foreman, *Georgiana*, 168–9.

³¹ Foreman, *Georgiana*, 206–7, 213–4, 223.

³² Foreman, *Georgiana*, 279–80.

³³ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1754–90*, 'Westminster'; Harvey, Green and Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database*.

³⁴ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790–1820*, 'Westminster'.

³⁵ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790–1820*, 'Westminster'; Harvey, Green and Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database*.

second with 41.3 per cent of the vote. Sir Alan Gardner was supported by significantly more plumpers than Fox, who relied heavily on electors splitting their votes between the two, making up 62.9 per cent of his votes in the parish.³⁶

This early suggestion of increasing political conservatism in the parish is borne out by the results of the next election for which complete figures are available in 1818. In Westminster, Sir Samuel Romilly topped the poll around 100 votes ahead of Sir Francis Burdett, a tactical victory for the Whigs over the reformers. Royal Navy officer Sir Murray Maxwell came third, over 400 votes behind but still a significant showing for the conservative vote, while three radical candidates received negligible numbers of votes. Maxwell's support amongst the 'leisured classes and higher professions' gave him a natural constituency in St George Hanover Square, where he topped the poll. Romilly came a close second in the parish while Burdett languished far behind in third. Burdett received more plumpers than any other candidate across the borough, but in St George's his 290 compared with 618 for Maxwell, respectively 34.8 per cent and 48.6 per cent of their total in the parish. Nearly half of all voters classed as rentiers plumped for Maxwell.³⁷

Romilly committed suicide in 1818, sparking a by-election in which John Cam Hobhouse emerged as the reformist candidate, having actively participated in canvassing and leading voters to the poll through the streets of St George's during Romilly's election.³⁸ However, after an ill-advised speech lambasting moderates at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Hobhouse was defeated by the Whig George Lamb, who polled particularly well in the western parishes such as St George's.³⁹ Hobhouse was hampered by the presence of much of the elite in Westminster, who were not usually to be found in town during general elections. The 1820 general election was notable for St George's strong support for Lamb, who stood against Burdett and Hobhouse. Both sides canvassed vigorously in the

³⁶ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790–1820*, 'Westminster'; Harvey, Green and Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database*.

³⁷ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790–1820*, 'Westminster'; Harvey, Green and Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database*.

³⁸ BL Add. MS 47235, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 22 Jun. 1818.

³⁹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790–1820*, 'Westminster'.

parish but Hobhouse was conscious of his lack of support there; 61 per cent of its voters plumped for Lamb and his supporters remained unwavering between 1819 and 1820.⁴⁰ His earlier success proved unsustainable. After Burdett was elected alongside Hobhouse in 1820, the two were returned unopposed for more than a decade.⁴¹

Burdett and Hobhouse regularly dined or met together at Brooks's during the late 1810s and early 1820s and Hobhouse continued to attend after he ceased to be MP for Westminster.⁴² The club remained a redoubt of Whiggery, although its use for political machinations instead of convivial dining could be distasteful to some members. After Henry Brougham convened a meeting there to persuade other Whigs to consider entering into coalition with Canning in 1827, Lord Essex was disgusted more by the venue than the manoeuvring: 'Devonshire House, Bedford House, and Lansdowne or Burlington House are the places where men of high principle and character should be assembled to form an endeavour to advise their sovereign.'⁴³

Lansdowne House was in fact the gathering place where another group of Whigs had earlier agreed to reject Canning.⁴⁴ Purchased incomplete by William Petty Fitzmaurice, 2nd earl of Shelburne from Lord Bute in 1765, it was renamed upon the ennoblement of Shelburne following his brief period as Prime Minister in 1783–4. In 1809 Lansdowne House passed to Shelburne's second son, the third marquess, who was also a prominent Whig statesman.⁴⁵ As de facto leader of the House of Lords, many important Whig meetings were held at his London home and Hobhouse reported meeting the

⁴⁰ BL Add. MS 56541, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 18 Mar. 1820, 22 Mar. 1820; *Hist. Parl. Commons 1790–1820*, 'Westminster'./.

⁴¹ *Hist. Parl. Commons 1820–1832*, 'Westminster'.

⁴² BL Add. MS 47235 and 56541–8, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, e.g. 18 Feb. 1818, 16 Mar. 1820, 2 May 1820, 9 May 1820, 31 May 1820, 3 Jun. 1820, 25 Jun. 1820, 5 Dec. 1820, 27 Jan. 1821, 3 Feb. 1821, 7 Feb. 1821, 10 Mar. 1821, 20 July 1821, 12 Feb. 1822, 4 Feb. 1823, 11 Feb. 1823, 11 Mar. 1823, 17 Apr. 1823, 27 May 1823, 10 Jun. 1823, 12 Jun. 1823; Lady Dorchester (ed.), *Recollections of a Long Life by Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse)*, iv (London, 1910), 344.

⁴³ P. Ziegler, 'Brooks's of the Reform Bill' in P. Ziegler and D. Seward (eds.), *Brooks's: a social history* (1991), 48.

⁴⁴ P. Ziegler, 'Brooks's of the Reform Bill' in P. Ziegler and D. Seward (eds.), *Brooks's: a social history* (1991), 47.

⁴⁵ S. Barson, 'Lansdowne House, Westminster', *English Heritage Reports and Papers* 17 (1999).

Duke of Devonshire and Lord Lansdowne there in 1831.⁴⁶ His longevity as a political host was such that when he was made President of the Council in 1846, Lord Campbell was compelled to 'mention the credit he brings to the party by presiding in Lansdowne House.'⁴⁷

Despite his relative lack of support in St George's, Hobhouse began as MP living in a house at 2 Hanover Square that his father let for the season and moved with his family to 10 Hill Street, Berkeley Square.⁴⁸ He was no doubt mindful of the need for a place to sleep in town if he was to be a successful politician, having returned to his family home at Whitton at 6.30 in the morning following a day's campaigning in Westminster in 1818.⁴⁹ He continued to dine regularly with his father who moved into 42 Berkeley Square.⁵⁰ He was a faithful representative, receiving deputations from the parish, presiding over meetings of parishioners and presenting addresses from them to the House of Commons.⁵¹ Hobhouse was also keenly aware of the need to link an appreciation of borough and vestry politics with national aims. He chaired a meeting of St George's parishioners in 1831 to discover the truth of a statement made by Lord Wharnccliffe that the shopkeepers of Bond Street and St James's Street were opposed to reform.⁵²

1831–1868

The Vestries Act 1831, also known as Hobhouse's Act, gave metropolitan vestries the opportunity to transition from select vestries to choosing vestrymen via ratepayer elections. Hobhouse's Act was passed in St. George's with 2,460 votes for and 25 against, becoming one of five metropolitan

⁴⁶ J. Powell, 'The Third Marquess of Lansdowne', *Parliamentary History* 22.1 (2003), 67; Lady Dorchester (ed.), *Recollections of a Long Life by Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse)*, iv (London, 1910), 108.

⁴⁷ Mrs. Hardcastle (ed.), *Life of John, Lord Campbell*, II (1881), 207.

⁴⁸ BL Add. MS 56541–2, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 17 Apr. 1820, 20 Feb. 1821.

⁴⁹ BL Add. MS 47235, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 19 Jun. 1818.

⁵⁰ BL Add. MS 56542, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 9 May 1824.

⁵¹ BL Add. MS 56541–2, *Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 18 Oct. 1820, 19 Oct. 1820, 25 Oct. 1820, 25 Jan. 1821, 26 Jan. 1821, 26 Feb. 1821.

⁵² Lady Dorchester (ed.), *Recollections of a Long Life by Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse)*, iv (London, 1910), 142.

parishes to adopt it.⁵³ In Hobhouse's own assessment, 'in the great parish of St. George, Westminster, it worked admirably from the beginning'.⁵⁴ The Act had a stark effect on the social composition of St George's vestry; 40 per cent of vestrymen were aristocrats in 1815, a figure that was halved by 1845. The aristocrats were replaced by middle-class commercialists and with this change the vestry's political outlook was radicalised.⁵⁵ Radical London vestries were mostly dominated by aristocratic estates where large numbers of middle-class people were concentrated and St George's was a prime example, with the Grosvenor estate covering much of its area.

At this time, 'arch-localist' John Leslie dominated the vestry.⁵⁶ A virulent opponent of the social reformer Henry Chadwick, Leslie published several pamphlets detailing his thoughts on metropolitan government and represented the parish on bodies such as the Commissioners of Sewers and the Metropolitan Board of Works.⁵⁷ He was still a member of the latter when he died aged 84 in 1879.⁵⁸

A turning point was reached for Westminster's parliamentary representation in 1832. Hobhouse was appointed Secretary at War early in the year and the Great Reform Act was passed, both events signalling the alignment of the Westminster MPs with the government's outlook. Westminster Radicals like Francis Place abandoned Hobhouse and encouraged Colonel George De Lacy Evans to stand against him in the general election. Despite popular approbation of Evans and the destruction of Hobhouse's headquarters, Hobhouse and Burdett retained their seats by a comfortable margin,

⁵³ David R. Green, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790–1870* (Farnham, 2010), 93.

⁵⁴ Lady Dorchester (ed.), *Recollections of a Long Life by Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse)*, ii (London, 1909), 131.

⁵⁵ B. Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government in Early Victorian London* (Woodbridge, 2011), 48.

⁵⁶ B. Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government in Early Victorian London* (Woodbridge, 2011), 173–4.

⁵⁷ See for instance J. Leslie, *Remarks on the present state of the poor law question, with illustrations of the advantages arising to the poor by means of the workhouse system of relief* (London, 1834); *A practical illustration of the principles upon which the Poor Law Amendment Act is founded, as exhibited in the administration of the poor rates in the parish of St. George, Hanover Square, for the year ending Lady-day-1835* (London, 1835); *Further illustrations of the principles upon which a metropolitan poor rate is administered in the parish of St. George, Hanover Square : with a few desultory observations on the principle upon which poor laws are founded and on the proposed extension of that system to Ireland* (London, 1836); *A short address to the representative vestries under Sir John Hobhouse's vestry act* (London, 1845).

⁵⁸ *Standard*, 20 December 1879.

receiving solid support from the electors of St George's.⁵⁹ Many previous Tory voters in the parish backed Hobhouse as they were denied a candidate and feared an Evans victory.⁶⁰ Hobhouse was made Chief Secretary for Ireland in the newly formed government, but resigned mere months later when it failed to repeal the house and window taxes, to face the Westminster electors once again. Faced by a Conservative candidate in Bickham Escott and Evans's renewed campaign, Hobhouse gained a clear majority in St George's, gaining 697 votes and Escott trailing with 339.⁶¹ However, Evans topped the poll across the borough and took the seat.⁶² Following Evans' election, one of the Westminster MPs was always a military man, until it became a one member seat in 1885.

The parish also witnessed popular political agitation, particularly in and around Hyde Park. Its wide open spaces allowed huge gatherings to take place. Groups headed by the radical artisan John Gast campaigned for political rights on the back of a royal funeral procession there in 1821 and presaged meetings of over 100,000 people organised by the Chartists in the 1850s and other groups in the 1860s. These meetings were sometimes contested by the police and the ensuing confrontations could lead to riots.⁶³ Tyburn had a long association with free speech connected with the final words of people hanged there in the 18th century and although the last execution there occurred in 1783, the site later became known as Speakers' Corner. The Royal Parks and Gardens Regulation Act 1872 both sanctioned and sanitised the political association of the site.⁶⁴

His views becoming less and less radical, the Reform Society challenged Burdett to resign his seat and spark a by-election, which he duly did in 1837, standing as a Conservative. He was opposed by the young and wealthy supporter of Chartism, John Temple Leader. Once a reviled radical, Burdett sparked a revival of Westminster Conservatism, winning particularly convincingly in parishes such as

⁵⁹ R.E. Zegger, *John Cam Hobhouse: A Political Life, 1819–1852* (Columbia, 1973), 187 and 200–2.

⁶⁰ E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George De Lacy Evans, 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983).

⁶¹ R.E. Zegger, *John Cam Hobhouse: A Political Life, 1819–1852* (Columbia, 1973), 202–7.

⁶² *Morning Chronicle*, 13 May 1833.

⁶³ John Michael Roberts, 'The Enigma of Free Speech: Speakers' Corner, the Geography of Governance and a Crisis of Rationality', *Social and Legal Studies* 9:2 (2000), 283.

⁶⁴ Michael Roberts, 'The Enigma of Free Speech', 277–9.

St George's.⁶⁵ Disraeli claimed the win could largely be attributed to his organisation from the Carlton Club of canvassing by 'all the nobility, fashion, and influence of our party'.⁶⁶ Disraeli canvassed the streets of Mayfair alongside Sir Robert Pigot, and drew on the locality, particularly a street mostly populated by foreign chefs, for his novel *Tancred* (1847).⁶⁷ Burdett also numbered Lord Robert Grosvenor amongst his supporters.⁶⁸

John Temple Leader, was the Radical son of a Whig merchant who resigned his own seat at Bridgwater to challenge Burdett. Despite his loss to Burdett, Leader stood again at the general election later in the year, winning a seat alongside De Lacy Evans, which he held until 1847. Active in London society, Leader entertained regularly at his home in Putney and a rented house in Stratton Street in St George's. He abandoned his political career in 1844 and left for the continent.⁶⁹

Naval officer Henry John Rous won an unlikely victory in 1841, on a wave of Conservative wins across the country. Rous' decisive lead of 285 votes in St George's was vital to his win by little fewer than 100 votes over the third placed Evans. Rous enjoyed huge personal popularity and his love of horseracing gave him greater cache amongst the aristocratic sporting fraternity. He was also a local inhabitant, residing in Berkeley Square.⁷⁰ Conversely, Evans was hampered by his frequent absences from both borough and Parliament, necessitated by his ongoing service as a major-general, and also his inattention to vestry meetings.⁷¹

Rous' campaign manager was Thomas Arber, a master builder, auctioneer and house agent.⁷² A resident of Brook Street, Hanover Square, Arber also chaired charitable meetings in aid of the

⁶⁵ M. Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster, 1780–1890* (London, 2012), 29–30.

⁶⁶ W.F. Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, vol. I (New York, 1910), 367.

⁶⁷ W.F. Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, vol. I (New York, 1910), 370.

⁶⁸ G. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors: Life in a Whig Family, 1822–1839* (London, 1965), 74.

⁶⁹ ODNB, Leader, John Temple (1810–1903).

⁷⁰ ODNB, Rous, Henry John (1795–1877); E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George de Lacy Evans 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983), 118–20.

⁷¹ B. Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government in Early Victorian London* (Woodbridge, 2011), 71.

⁷² M. Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster, 1780–1890* (London, 2012), 213.

destitute.⁷³ Arber had promised to fund the costs of the 1841 contest beyond the first £1,000, apparently amounting to a further £2,000.⁷⁴ He did expect a return on his generosity and successful marshalling of the vote. Following the election he asked for a position in the government service for his son, whose short sightedness made him unfit for the building trade. Arber was thought sufficiently valuable to warrant patronage and Peel himself gave the positive response to Arber's request.⁷⁵ Arber continued as secretary to Lord Mandeville's campaign in 1847.⁷⁶

Rous was appointed to the Admiralty in 1846 prompting a by-election, which was won by a resurgent Evans, who gained a majority in every parish including St. George's. The result was a disaster for the Conservatives of Westminster; Evans held the seat for the next twenty years.⁷⁷

In 1847 the Westminster Reform Society chose Radical MP Charles Lushington to run alongside Evans and the pair narrowly edged out independent Liberal and sanitation campaigner Charles Cochrane (Lushington a mere 12 votes ahead of Cochrane) and a Conservative candidate, Lord Mandeville. Cochrane topped the poll in St George's with 27.5 per cent of votes cast in the parish and Lushington came last, very nearly enough to shift the vote in Cochrane's favour as 30.6 per cent of total votes were cast in St George's.⁷⁸

Ultra-Radical William Coningham stood in 1852 and took enough of Evans' votes for Evans to come second after the Westminster Reform Society candidate Sir John Shelley. Evans' brand of radicalism was becoming decidedly old-fashioned and his lead over the Tory Lord Maidstone was whittled to fewer than 400 votes.⁷⁹ Evans and Shelley were elected unopposed in 1859, the former a hero of the

⁷³ *Morning Post*, 16 Nov. 1843.

⁷⁴ N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, (London, 1953), 132.

⁷⁵ N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, (London, 1953), 366.

⁷⁶ *Morning Post*, 26 July 1847.

⁷⁷ E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George de Lacy Evans 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983), 125–8.

⁷⁸ E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George de Lacy Evans 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983), 131–3.

⁷⁹ *Daily News*, 10 July 1852; E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George de Lacy Evans 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983), 139–42.

Crimean war.⁸⁰ A great supporter of the Volunteer movement that year, Evans became an honorary member of the St George's Volunteer Rifle Corps.⁸¹

Evans retired from public life in 1865 and despite leaving the Westminster Liberals in a divided state, the Liberal candidates Robert Grosvenor (a retired captain of the Cheshire Yeomanry and 2nd Baron Ebury from 1893) and John Stuart Mill triumphed over William Henry Smith in the election that year.⁸² In an election following the Reform Act 1867, Grosvenor was returned again in 1868, this time with Smith. Agitation in favour of reform disrupted the parish when in 1866 a huge gathering organised by the Reform League was denied entry to Hyde Park by the police. The crowds instead marched down Park Lane and on to Trafalgar Square.⁸³

1868–1900

The 1874 election saw the Liberals perform disastrously across the UK, losing 145 seats and ceding their majority. Conservatism dominated Westminster and Smith was returned alongside Sir Charles Russell, the pair retaining their seats in 1880 and the latter retiring due to ill health in 1882.⁸⁴ Leading Liberals decided a new club was needed to extend the membership of the Reform and to accommodate a more aggressive brand of Liberalism in the hope of renewing the party's electoral fortunes. The organising committee, which initially met at Devonshire House, included Spencer Compton Cavendish MP, then styled the Marquess of Hartington and eldest son of the 7th duke of Devonshire, and William Edwardes MP, 4th Baron Kensington. The duke of Devonshire became the

⁸⁰ *Morning Post*, 29 Apr. 1859.

⁸¹ E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George de Lacy Evans 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983), 189.

⁸² E.M. Spiers, *Radical General: Sir George de Lacy Evans 1787–1870* (Manchester, 1983), 196–7; *Standard*, 13 July 1865; *The Times*, 14 Nov. 1918.

⁸³ *Daily News*, 24 July 1866.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1883.

club's first president and it was named in his honour.⁸⁵ The club found premises in the defunct Crockford's Club, on the west side of St James's Street.⁸⁶

Private homes in the parish continued to be important sites of political negotiation. Salisbury avoided London society where possible and despite spending upwards of £60,000 on his Arlington Street residence when he inherited it in 1868, he used it more as an office than for entertaining. Nevertheless, it had rooms large enough for the entire cabinet to meet in.⁸⁷ Other Tory grandees were dotted around the parish, including Randolph Churchill in Berkeley Square, Cranbrook in Grosvenor Crescent and the self-made W.H. Smith in Grosvenor Place. Yet more were just as nearby to the east in St James's. Such proximity fostered a political intimacy based around face-to-face meetings, in which crises could be addressed privately and in a convivial environment.⁸⁸ When the Conservatives used their majority in the Lords to block extension of the franchise in 1884, negotiations to agree a compromise including redistribution of seats took place at Lord Salisbury's house in Arlington Street. The deal that was reached, involving the creation of mostly single member seats, became known as the 'Arlington Street compact'.⁸⁹

The Redistribution of Seats Act 1885 divided the Westminster constituency into three single-member seats, one still called Westminster, which was won by William Burdett-Coutts, who went on to hold it until 1918. A new constituency called St George Hanover Square was also created in 1885, which was coterminous with the civil parish. The new seat was initially won by Lord Algernon Percy, who had represented the Westminster seat since 1882. New party associations were formed; the St George, Hanover Square Conservative Association in 1885 and the St George's Liberal Association which followed in 1886.⁹⁰ Extension of the franchise in the 1880s also led to the establishment of

⁸⁵ H.T. Waddy, *The Devonshire Club – and "Crockford's"* (1919), 12–9.

⁸⁶ *Daily News*, 13 Aug. 1874.

⁸⁷ M. Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2004), 36–7.

⁸⁸ Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World*, 42–4.

⁸⁹ T.A. Jenkins, *Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Manchester, 1996), 100.

⁹⁰ M. Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster, 1780–1890* (London, 2012), 189.

new political clubs with lower fees and wider membership. The Primrose Club was established in Park Place in 1886 to capitalise on the popular Conservative Primrose League and boasted 6,500 members, in contrast with the 600 of its near neighbour Brooks's.⁹¹

The constituency of St George Hanover Square rose to national prominence when the Liberal Unionist George Joachim Goschen was invited to join Salisbury's Conservative cabinet as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1887. Needing a seat but preferring to win thanks to Liberal voters, Goschen stood in a by-election for the Liverpool Exchange constituency, where he was narrowly defeated. Instead he was forced to accept the generosity of Lord Percy, who resigned his seat. Goschen was successfully elected for St George Hanover Square, winning more than three-quarters of the vote. He was re-elected in 1892 and 1895 without opposition.⁹²

The Liberals were victorious in the 1892 election and Goschen decided to switch allegiances from the Liberal Unionists to the Conservatives, joining the Carlton Club early the next year.⁹³ He returned to government with the Conservatives as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1895, but left the Commons in 1900 when he received a peerage.⁹⁴

⁹¹ A. Taddei, 'London clubs in the late nineteenth century', *Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History* 28 (University of Oxford, 1999), 20–2.

⁹² T.J. Spinner, *George Joachim Goschen: The Transformation of a Victorian Liberal* (Cambridge, 1973), 134-7.

⁹³ Spinner, *George Joachim Goschen*, 177.

⁹⁴ Spinner, *George Joachim Goschen*, 187-8 and 223-4.