

## 5. 'Fresh Crown and Anchor sentiments': radical reform in the Strand, 1817–1847

Despite some caricaturists' attempts to associate the Crown and Anchor with devilry, subterfuge and sedition, the prominence of the tavern in the visual culture of the period helped ascribe it a legitimate, if not always celebrated, place on the political landscape. This is also evident in the representation of the tavern in the text-based print mediums of the early nineteenth century. If we return momentarily to Sir Francis Burdett's first victory in the Middlesex elections in 1802, when the deep-blue cavalcade brandishing 'No Bastille' banners crawled its way from Brentford to London, *The Times* report of events illuminates far more than simply the logistics of the proceedings. '*Suffice it to observe*', they wrote, 'that the motley cavalcade passed along the Strand to the Crown and Anchor Tavern where Sir Francis was met by his Committee'.<sup>1</sup> If the tavern had taken on its own symbolic meaning in the visual culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its nomenclature also provided political commentators in the mainstream press a form of political shorthand. That Britain's leading newspaper should use the tavern as a metonymy speaks volumes both of its salience on the London political landscape and of the cultural understanding of the venue at the turn of the century.

Not only did the print culture of the period (both visual and text) help embed the cultural understanding, legitimacy and identity of the venue as a site of political opposition, it also informed the cultural and social conventions by which the space operated, or could at least be expected to operate. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White refer to the 'cultural conditions' of a space determining 'what may and may not be said, who may speak, how people may communicate and what importance must be given to what is said'.<sup>2</sup> By the early nineteenth century, the Crown and Anchor had been accruing such conventions for at least half a century.

How these conventions affected the radical relationship with the space in the years leading up to the 1832 *Reform Act*, and in the years immediately following, forms the overarching focus of this chapter. It examines how, by conforming to the established conventions of the Crown and Anchor, a new generation of radicals gained vital access to a venue during a period when few public spaces were available to them. In the early nineteenth century, the increasingly

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1 *The Times*, 30 July 1802. The italics are mine.

2 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, quoted in James Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the language and culture of popular politics in modern Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 113.

politicised (though disenfranchised) middling and plebeian classes sought a voice in the political public sphere, and this chapter explores how the Crown and Anchor—seemingly an archetypal venue of Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere—accommodated the ranks of its increasingly plebeian radical tenants. Nor were the new inhabitants passive users of the space; plebeian radicals often contested and refashioned many of the conventions for their own gain. The status of the venue provided radicals an avenue through which to challenge the formal machinery of government and allowed them to fashion a collective political identity. Crucially, those excluded from formal political power found in the tavern their own locus of power—an alternative parliamentary space. By populating the venue and examining its use over time by a variety of groups, including the interactions between them, it is evident that the habitation of the public sphere was more complex than a bourgeois–plebeian binary allows.

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Taverns such as the Crown and Anchor had existed as radical sites of public discourse, conviviality and political exchange in Britain well before the early nineteenth century. As Peter Clark reminds us, they can be traced back at least as far as the twelfth century, to be joined in the seventeenth century by the new social urban phenomenon of the coffee house; together they drew urban sociability into the public arena as never before.<sup>3</sup> As wine and coffee were imbibed, business was transacted, gossip exchanged and newspapers perused. The coffee house and the tavern, observes John Brewer, were involved in

all the processes by which culture were shaped: the creation of works of art and the imagination, their communication, reception and consumption. Groups of writers, artists and performers debated their ideas and projects, criticized their friends and rivals, and penned their polemics in coffee-house booths.<sup>4</sup>

By drawing together the networks of the reading public, the tavern and the coffee house developed a reputation for encouraging a ‘polyphony of public conversations which challenged the voice of the crown’.<sup>5</sup> The right to this

3 Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A social history 1200–1830* (London: Longman, 1983). See also Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The emergence of the British coffeehouse* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005); John Barrell, ‘Coffee-house Politicians’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 43 (2004), pp. 206–32; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 34; Epstein, *In Practice*, pp. 90–105; Steve Pincus, ‘“Coffee Politicians Does Create”: Coffeehouses and Restoration political culture’, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 67, no. 4 (1995), pp. 807–34.

4 Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 50. John Barrell, however, warns against idealising the coffee house as an egalitarian institution, as Habermas implies, and questions ‘how far distinctions of rank could possibly have been suspended in public coffee rooms’. Barrell, ‘Coffee-House Politicians’, p. 212.

5 Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 37. See also E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 675, who argues that ‘the informal club and the tavern meeting was one part of the democratic process which had survived the repression of 1796–1806’.

exchange and dissent was also fiercely protected. In 1675, Charles II attempted to close all coffee houses, but, following a public outcry, he was forced to rescind his order and allow the venues to reopen.

The size and location of the Crown and Anchor tavern, coupled with its patronage by liberal-minded aristocratic reformers, made it a natural venue for the Whig and radical political dinners that became a key feature of tavern operations from the late eighteenth century. The phenomenon of the political dinner has received much attention from historians, including J. Ann Hone's in-depth study of London radicalism and Marc Baer's recent, more localised study of Westminster dinners, as well as broader studies focusing also on the regional incarnations of such events by Frank O'Gorman, James Epstein and Peter Brett.<sup>6</sup> These studies emphasise the procedures and protocols of the meetings, and how, as Brett notes, such dinners were used as a platform for Members of Parliament, providing a 'half-way house' between Westminster and broader public opinion.<sup>7</sup>

Baer finds continuities between the 'five quintessential types' of dinners from parties across the political spectrum. The first three typologies relate to various stages of the electoral process—where dinners were held for returning or new candidates prior to elections, during the campaign itself to rouse support and publicity, and post-electoral victory dinners. The anniversary dinner and gatherings unrelated to an election but of a political nature (such as the prison release celebrations) make up the quintuplet.<sup>8</sup> Despite their logistical differences, such dinners were highly ritualised affairs, and many conventions established at such events during the eighteenth century continued through the first half of the nineteenth. Hobhouse's toast to 'the People' at his liberation dinner was starkly reminiscent of those scandalous offerings for which the Duke of Norfolk was heavily censured by his King in 1798. As Epstein found with a radical dinner in Ashton in Lancashire in 1822, the Duke's toasts also had an enduring influence well beyond the walls of the Crown and Anchor and the bounds of the metropolis.<sup>9</sup>

Given the locale of his analysis, Baer's study reinforces the unequivocal relationship between the Crown and Anchor and key radical Whig

6 J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London 1796–1821* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982); Marc Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster, 1780–1880', *Parliamentary History*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2005), pp. 183–206; Peter Brett, 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: Platform, meeting place and battleground', *History*, vol. 81, no. 264 (1996), pp. 527–52; James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political language, ritual, and symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 147–65; Frank O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The social meaning of elections in England, 1780–1860', *Past and Present*, vol. 135 (1992), pp. 79–115.

7 Brett, 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', p. 547.

8 Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster', p. 186.

9 Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 154–8. As Baer also observes, the recurrence of the toast suggests that 'the nexus between patrician and plebeian politicians has been underestimated'. Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster', p. 192.

parliamentarians involved with the Westminster constituency such as Charles James Fox and, later, Sir Francis Burdett. After Burdett switched to the seat of Westminster, the tavern was the pre-eminent venue for meetings of electors in the lead-up to election campaigns, and for subsequent electoral victory processions during his long parliamentary career. By 1820, Burdett was still being ‘chaired’ through the streets of London—not to Parliament, but to the Crown and Anchor.<sup>10</sup>

The prints examined in the previous chapter suggest that in the minds of some commentators at least, an increasingly plebeian, strident and ‘disloyal’ radical clientele had begun to occupy the building, but Baer’s reading of the political dinners suggests the opposite; he points to a shift in the political milieu and contends that by the 1820s ‘this contentious political machine in the most significant political centre in the nation was at its heart less radical than moderate, whiggish or loyal’.<sup>11</sup> Yet as Baer notes, the political dinner required the purchase of a ticket, and as such excluded many plebeian radicals. Although ‘Whiggish’ and ‘moderate’ elements undoubtedly continued at the tavern throughout the early nineteenth century, a broader sweep of political gatherings reveals that activity at the Crown and Anchor extended well beyond the extra-parliamentary affairs of those already embraced by formal political power and supports the case for viewing the venue as an integral part of radical culture for more than half a century.

The sense of a widening political nation at the Crown and Anchor was reflected, as we have seen, in visual culture at the turn of the nineteenth century. If we return briefly to the loyalist ripostes spawned by William Hone’s brilliant political satire, we find that the shift in purpose and milieu at the venue was clearly apparent by 1820. In *The Loyal Man in the Moon*, the narrator of the parody discovers to his horror that a venue ‘just like the Crown and Anchor’ was operating on Lunaria. The function of the venue was clear to the narrator, for here, in this parallel Lunar tavern,

it was resolv’d, by this committee  
To hold a meeting, somewhere in the city,  
To which all sorts of folks should be invited,  
To see, as they declar’d, ‘the people righted;’<sup>12</sup>

10 See, for example, *The Times*, 14 July 1818.

11 Baer, ‘Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster’, p. 196.

12 *The Loyal Man in the Moon* (London, 1820), reproduced in Edgell Rickword, *Radical Squibs and Loyal Ripostes: Satirical pamphlets of the Regency period, 1819–1821* (London: Redwood Press, 1971), pp. 107–34.

With the ascension of the dazzling orator Henry Hunt on the radical London scene, the issue of universal male suffrage to see 'the people righted' entered Crown and Anchor dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, under Hunt's tutelage, those excluded from the formal machinery of government found in the venue their own locus of power. The tavern's long-established political and parliamentary-like culture provided the ceremony, formality and legitimacy reminiscent of the parliamentary space. At meetings, a chair was invariably appointed, resolutions were debated and speakers took turns to address the audience, who, in turn, verbalised their approval ('hear hear') or disapproval. According to Hunt, however, there was a crucial difference between the operations of the official centre of political power and those of the Crown and Anchor. When he addressed his supporters in the tavern in 1819, Hunt spoke directly to a constituency excluded from formal political power and he sought to unsettle the convention that saw the parliamentary elite take centre stage on the Crown and Anchor platform. Though entry to the meetings sometimes involved the purchase of a ticket (in order to pay for the hire of the room), Hunt assured 'every man that had paid for his ticket' that they were 'as much entitled to address them as he or any other friend of universal suffrage who at that moment happened to be in the room'.<sup>14</sup> If the voice of the people was excluded from Whitehall, radicals could argue that it could be heard resonating through the walls and corridors of the Crown and Anchor.

The status of the tavern as an analogue to Parliament is particularly evident in the choice of the Crown and Anchor for meetings of national assemblies of plebeian reformers. In January 1817, several newspapers reported on a meeting of '[d]elegates from various Petitioning Bodies in Great Britain, for Reform in Parliament', which met at the Crown and Anchor.<sup>15</sup> Delegates travelled from small and large towns across England, including Bristol, Norwich, Middleton, Lynn, Manchester, Lancashire and Liverpool. Radical luminary Major Cartwright stood in as the delegate for Glasgow, Scotland's radical stronghold.<sup>16</sup> Before starting the meeting, the delegates from Westminster—Hunt, William Cobbett and Mr Brooks<sup>17</sup>—ceremoniously received 'vouchers' from each of

13 See *The Triumphal Entry of Henry Hunt Esq. into London on Monday September 13, 1819...A full report of the speeches at the Crown and Anchor* (London, 1819). On Henry Hunt, see John Belchem, *'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English working-class radicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

14 *The Times*, 14 September 1819.

15 *Morning Chronicle*, 24 January 1817; *The Times*, 24 January 1817; *Leeds Mercury*, 25 January 1817.

16 On Major John Cartwright, see F. D. Cartwright (ed.), *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (1826; reprinted, New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969) 2 vols; Rachel Eckersley, 'Of Radical Design: John Cartwright and the redesign of the reform campaign, c.1800–1811', *History*, vol. 89, no. 296 (2004), pp. 560–80; John Osborne, *John Cartwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

17 This is likely to have been Samuel Brooks, the veteran Westminster reformer. See Alice Prochaska, 'Brooks, Samuel', in Joseph Baylen and Norbert Gossman (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* [hereafter *BDMBR*] (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 65–6; Iowerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London, John Gast and his Times* (Kent: Dawson, 1979), pp. 74, 108–9.

the country delegates entitling them to represent the reformers of their towns. The representatives of the regional areas had assembled at the request of Major Cartwright and Jones Burdett (brother of Sir Francis) as representatives of the Hampden Club, a network of reform groups initiated by Cartwright to advance the cause of parliamentary reform.<sup>18</sup> Cartwright and Jones Burdett had been deputed by the Hampden Club to

lay before the assembled delegates of the petitioning bodies of the country in favour of reform, the heads of a bill for that measure, which it was intended in March next to lay before the whole body of that society, previous to its being submitted to Parliament.<sup>19</sup>

The Hampden Club members were generally regarded as moderate middle-class reformers and the bill reflected their temperate approach to parliamentary reform. The bill declared that members of the House of Commons should be elected by householders; that the counties and cities be divided into electoral districts, with each district returning one member; and that elections should be conducted annually.

The Crown and Anchor meeting debated and discussed the three tenets of the resolution for hours. Finally, they rejected the notion of limiting suffrage to householders (owners of property), voting by a majority to instead support Hunt's resolution for universal male suffrage. Buoyed by his success, Hunt pressed further. Despite vocal opposition from Cobbett, he convinced the meeting to support vote by ballot, which was also carried. With two blows against moderate reform measures, the more radical members of the meeting pushed on. The delegate from Manchester, Mr Mitchell, launched the third strike when his proposal that 'property ought form no part of a Member of Parliament's qualifications' as 'virtue and talents were sufficient' was carried by a 'considerable majority'. The democratic processes in the Crown and Anchor altered the original proposal to such a degree that the meeting agreed to omit any reference whatsoever to the Hampden Club in the bill.

Whether Cartwright or Jones Burdett anticipated the strength of the venue's radical temper is unclear, as is their reaction to the viperous attack on the club launched by Cobbett. Though he held the individual members of the club such as Cartwright and the Burdetts in the 'highest regard', Cobbett nevertheless

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18 For a discussion of the Hampden Club, and this meeting in particular, see Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1884; reprinted, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), chs 1 and 3; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 691–710; Naomi C. Miller, 'Major John Cartwright and the Forming of the Hampden Club', *Historical Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1974), pp. 615–19. In this, her second paper on Cartwright, Miller claims that both she and other historians mistakenly attributed Cartwright a founding role in the Hampden Club, which he did not join until 1813, after which time he did become a leading figure. She attributes the founding role to Cartwright's friend Thomas Northmore.

19 *The Times*, 24 January 1817.



insisted that 'there was not, if it were possible to describe them, a body of the dirtiest scavengers in England that he could more sincerely despise than that very society in its collective capacity'.<sup>20</sup> Despite these obvious hostilities (which others at the meeting shared with Cobbett), the key point in this episode is that the Hampden Club sought approval for its reform bill first within the Crown and Anchor meeting. The Hampden Club clearly considered that the sanction of those gathered at the tavern was crucial to the endorsement of the club as a leading exponent of reform in the country and a way of legitimising the submission of the Bill to Parliament. The people's parliament, however, would have none of it unless the moderates in the Hampden Club embraced more sweeping and much deeper political change.

The meeting produced a swift reaction from *The Times*. 'Ill friends are they to parliamentary reform', they chastised, 'who adopt such a course as this'.<sup>21</sup> The newspaper was most concerned that it was 'not aware till after the event had taken place' that the group had assembled. Taking issue with the 'secrecy' of the event, they questioned the representative nature of a group who met in that same 'dark, suspicious, and irresponsible manner' by which they had proposed parliamentary members be chosen—'that is, by ballot'. Significantly, then, even *The Times* now expected the Crown and Anchor to operate as an open and accessible part of the public sphere. They viewed amended resolutions as too extreme for the good of the country, charging the group with 'endeavouring, so far as in them lies, not only to overthrow the constitution directly and openly, but to subvert the very nature and habits of Englishmen'.

Although the use of the tavern in this fashion might point to, as Habermas contends, plebeian activity as mere mimicry of the bourgeois sphere, the events themselves, and the response to them from the mainstream public press, suggest otherwise. The strength of *The Times'* opposition suggests that the meeting's resolutions were out of step with what might be expected at the venue, and perhaps that the extreme views of the group might have gained some credibility from the venue itself—making it a dangerous, though powerful force in the testing political climate of the early nineteenth century. Though the Crown and Anchor's new plebeian tenants were in many ways conforming to the established cultural conventions of the venue, they evidently were prepared to challenge its politics and refashion the space for their own political purposes.

Domestic parliamentary reform was the central goal of Britain's radicals in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but a survey of Crown and Anchor meetings reveals that the focus of its tenants was not entirely insular. Many meetings convened at the tavern at this time had a strong international

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

perspective, and many gatherings were held in support of revolutionary activity abroad. In October 1820, for example, '300 persons of respectability' met at the tavern for the purpose of 'celebrating the revolutions in Naples, Spain and Portugal'.<sup>22</sup> Large meetings were held in 1823 to discuss ways to assist the independence movement in Greece, and during the 1840s thousands gathered to voice their support for the revolutionaries in Poland.<sup>23</sup>

The adoption of the Crown and Anchor as an alternative parliamentary space and outlet for the plebeian voice in the foreign affairs of the nation is perhaps most clearly evident in a meeting convened in early June 1823. Hunt organised the meeting to voice support of the 'brave Spaniards in the glorious struggle against the united tyrants of Europe'.<sup>24</sup> He advised the tavern delegates of his wish to invite the Spanish Ambassador, for, 'as the aristocracy of the country had assembled to express its opinion on the unprincipled invasion of Spain by France', he considered it 'expedient' that the people should also assemble 'for the same purpose'. Hunt clearly stamped the Parliament, as presently constituted, as an outlet for the voice of the aristocracy. It was the Crown and Anchor that provided a channel for the voice of the people.

As this episode reveals, proceedings at the tavern did not occur in isolation to those operating nearby at Whitehall. As Leslie Mitchell notes in her biography of Charles James Fox, 'geography allowed Westminster to press on the nerve of politics'; so too, the Crown and Anchor.<sup>25</sup> The two political spaces intersected on many occasions throughout the period. With the return of a number of more radical MPs to Parliament, the inflammatory content of the speeches and conduct of the radical members at the Crown and Anchor often found their way into the parliamentary record, when members were called upon to explain their actions or were castigated for their participation in tavern events. One case in point is the furore that stemmed from a dinner in May 1810, held to celebrate the release of Burdett from the Tower, following his vocal opposition to John Gale Jones's own imprisonment in the Coldbath Fields House of Correction. Samuel Whitbread, a Whig MP, attended the dinner but was sharply criticised by fellow Whig J. C. Curwen for his participation:

<sup>22</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3 October 1820.

<sup>23</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 17 May 1823; *Morning Chronicle*, 16 May 1823. The tavern also hosted meetings of the Peoples' International League in the late 1840s. See the pamphlets: *The Report of the 14th Anniversary of the Polish Revolution: Celebrated at the Crown and Anchor tavern, on 29th November 1844* (London, 1845); *Report of a Public Meeting, held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Strand, on Monday, November 15, 1847, 'to explain the principles and objects of the Peoples' International League'* (London, 1847).

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, 3 June 1823.

<sup>25</sup> Leslie G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 34.



It was not to the inflammatory proceedings of a drunken meeting in a tavern that he looked for the opinion of the people. He abhorred such meetings, and lamented that men of character, talents and respectability should be found to countenance them.<sup>26</sup>

Although Whitbread defended the venue as a legitimate outlet of the voice of the people, the censure clearly had effect.<sup>27</sup> With the tantalising (though momentary) promise of the Whigs' return to government in 1811, Whitbread is reported to have distanced himself from the venue in preparation for a possible ascendancy to the Whig leadership.<sup>28</sup> As it was, the Whigs were to wait almost two decades for the opportunity.

The intersection of Crown and Anchor politics with events at Whitehall is further illustrated during the volatile events of October 1831. The early years of the 1830s were potent times throughout Britain and with the election of the Whigs to office came the tantalising promise of political change with the proposed *Reform Act*, based in no small measure on the original resolution of the Hampden Club. Like that proposal, the Whigs' *Reform Act* fell well short of universal male suffrage and caused deep divisions among radicals.<sup>29</sup> The refusal of the House of Lords to concede even partial reform, however, inflamed the disenfranchised. On news of the rejection, *The Times* despaired, 'What have the Lords *done?*'<sup>30</sup> The country convulsed with resentment and widespread rioting and unrest followed. Several of the Lords who voted against the Act had their homes attacked by incensed Londoners.

Lest there be no reform at all, many disparate radical voices united in support of a bill that promised to extend the franchise to only a limited number of the adult male population. As news of the rejection of the Act spread, the Crown and Anchor tavern became the focal point of metropolitan anger. 'Immense numbers' gathered in the Strand and the building was bursting with people,

26 *Parliamentary Debates*, 4 May 1809, p. 379, quoted in Michael Roberts, *The Whig Party 1807–1812* (London: Macmillan, 1939), p. 249. See also Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster', p. 194. On Curwen, see J. V. Beckett, 'Curwen, John Christian (1756–1828)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37334>> (hereafter ODNB).

27 Roberts, *The Whig Party 1807–1812*, p. 249.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 324. It was not the first time that Whitbread avoided a Crown and Anchor meeting for fear of political retribution. He reportedly approved of the motions of the Great Reform Dinner meeting in May 1809, but declined to attend as he considered it would be held against him. See *Morning Chronicle*, 6 May 1809. See also Roger Fulford, *Samuel Whitbread, 1764–1815: A study in opposition* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 252.

29 There are many works that focus on the radical involvement with the agitation over the *Reform Act*. Take, for example, Philip Harling, 'Parliament, the State, and "Old Corruption"', in Arthur Burns and Joanne Innes (eds), *Rethinking the Age of Reform, Britain 1780–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 98–113; Nancy LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Belchem, 'Orator' Hunt, pp. 221–69; D. J. Rowe, 'Class and Political Radicalism in London, 1831–2', *Historical Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1970), pp. 31–47; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, pp. 268–99.

30 *The Times*, 10 October 1831.

with one observer noting that the ground floor was so full that a ‘stranger would have supposed the meeting was there’.<sup>31</sup> The same was true on the next floor, ‘all the way up the staircase to the great room’. Those unable to bear the pressure of the overcrowding were forced to leave the building so that ‘two streams—one of ingress, the other of egress—were constantly flowing’ from the building.

As those excluded from political power rallied at the Crown and Anchor, the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, held crisis talks with his Whig parliamentary colleagues.<sup>32</sup> The events of the evening of 12 October 1831 illustrate the connections between the two spaces of political power. After dining at the home of a fellow Whig MP, the Prime Minister returned in his carriage to Downing Street about 11 pm. Shortly before Earl Grey’s arrival, a group of 13 men led by radical stalwart Francis Place confronted the Prime Minister’s doorman. Place demanded that his delegation from the tavern receive an audience with the Prime Minister to discuss the state of unrest in the metropolis and the stalled reform agenda. With images of the French Revolution still so vivid in the collective memory of Britain’s ruling elite and with domestic discontent percolating, Place’s entourage would surely have caused some trepidation at Downing Street. Nevertheless, Grey agreed to meet with the delegation that evening.

The attention that Place’s group received in the conservative press at the time illustrates the importance of exploring the connections between the physical structures of the public sphere and popular radical culture. Even though its editor had little regard for the politics of the reforming Prime Minister, the conservative *Courier* newspaper saluted Grey for his courage and poise in meeting with the group at such a late hour and on such short notice. For all the Prime Minister knew, the *Courier* columnist censured, the Crown and Anchor entourage could have been ‘a deputation from the Rotunda revolutionists...and reserve, or even rudeness, on the part of the noble Earl would hardly have warranted surprise’.<sup>33</sup>

The term ‘Rotunda revolutionists’ emanated from the Blackfriars Road Rotunda—a building that became another locus of popular political activity in the early 1830s (and to which we will return later in the book). Under the control of indomitable radical Richard Carlile, the building became home to a diverse array of radical voices. It was the first time London radicals had a building *controlled* by members of the radical movement; it was a space of and for their own.<sup>34</sup> Despite reports of many respectable attendees at Carlile’s seditious

31 See *Morning Chronicle*, 9 October 1831.

32 On Earl Grey, see E. A. Smith, ‘Charles, Second Earl Grey and the House of Lords’, in R. W. Davis (ed.), *Lords of Parliament Studies, 1714–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 79; John W. Derry, *Charles, Earl Grey: Aristocratic reformer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

33 *Courier*, 14 October 1831.

34 For further analysis of the role of the Rotunda in radical culture, see Chapters 6–8 of this study.

and blasphemous Rotunda events, the use of the building as the headquarters of the National Union of the Working Classes (NUWC) saw the site become synonymous with working-class radicalism: the unstable, unpredictable 'other', Edmund Burke's 'swinish multitude'. The *Courier* columnist was drawing on the collective understanding of the two venues when he chose to juxtapose Place's group from the Crown and Anchor with the potential threat had the delegation indeed emanated from the Rotunda. While it had operated for only a brief period as a radical venue, the Rotunda quickly established an identity as a space seething with revolutionary possibility. The powerful imagery associated with the venue allowed radicals drawn to the Rotunda to define themselves and their politics with their space and many wore the term 'Rotundanist' as a badge of honour. Space was again being employed as political shorthand.

For others, including Francis Place, the Rotunda men smacked of the unrestrained, unrespectable 'mob' elements of popular radicalism. 'Most of these men were loud and long talkers', wrote Place, and were 'vehement, resolute reckless rascals whose purpose was riot as providing an opportunity for plunder'.<sup>35</sup> Radical politics at this time was racked by what a contemporary observer described as 'the everlasting splittings and factions of the Londoners'.<sup>36</sup> So when Place could not badge his group with an organisational or an ideological tag because of these differences, the institutional label of the Crown and Anchor, like that of the Rotunda, provided the unifying and codifying banner for the delegation.

The throngs who assembled at the Crown and Anchor the evening before Place's mission to Downing Street were not the unruly mobs Place generally associated with the threat of riot and revolution at the Rotunda. *The Times* considered the meeting on 11 October as the 'most remarkable' of 'all the great political meetings held at the Crown and Anchor for these 40 years past'.<sup>37</sup> This was due not only to the sheer number who turned out, but primarily to the respectable appearance and conduct of the crowd. The more extreme tenets of radicalism that emanated from the Rotunda were a direct affront to a newly evolving moral code—from which a radical movement struggling for a place in the hegemonic order was not immune. For these radicals, the Crown and Anchor allowed for a safer public expression of their political dissent. In adopting the tavern nomenclature, the members of Place's delegation clearly and firmly located themselves within the radical political spectrum. They were at once distancing themselves from the unrespectable milieu of the Rotunda while at the same time drawing upon the collective cultural understanding and political legacy of the tavern. Despite sustained attempts to blacken those associated with the venue in both visual and text-based print culture, it nevertheless retained an identity as

35 Francis Place Papers, Add. Ms. 27791, ff. 47–57.

36 *White Hat*, 16 October 1819.

37 *The Times*, 11 October 1831.

a venue for respectable political dissent and the promulgation of reform through established means and processes. In this light, the willingness of the 'noble Earl' to meet with the delegation is clearer: by presenting the group as a Crown and Anchor delegation, Place had signalled to Earl Grey that his group did not pose a physical threat.<sup>38</sup> The tavern was, after all, familiar ground for the Earl from his early political life.<sup>39</sup>

From this episode it is evident that in adopting the Crown and Anchor as an alternative parliamentary space, more moderate and middling radicals could unite under its banner. Like the official seat of power, however, it also offered an outlet for an array of political voices. That Place's group unified more moderate voices under the Crown and Anchor nomenclature is not to suggest that the tavern itself was always a site of radical harmony and unity. Certainly, by the time Francis Place led his delegation to Downing Street in October 1831, the Crown and Anchor had become a locus for 'respectable' popular radicalism. But the Rotunda had opened as a radical venue only a year earlier and before this the Crown and Anchor often witnessed dissenting voices of rival radical groups—divisions based both on personality and on class and ideological lines.

If we return momentarily to the earlier decades of the century, we can see the seeds of class discontent in radical London's response to the turbulent events at Peterloo. The deaths and injuries occasioned by the attempt of the yeomanry to disperse the reform meeting caused outrage in many quarters of Britain. Radical groups sought to harness the popular fury by raising funds to support those injured or imprisoned, and focused largely on Hunt as the leading orator at Peterloo. In early September 1819, *The Times* reported a meeting of a group calling themselves the 'Westminster Committee of 200' who had met at the Crown and Anchor to determine the best way to distribute the funds that had been raised for those injured or arrested at Peterloo.<sup>40</sup> Those assembled included prominent metropolitan radicals such as Richard Carlile, Thomas Evans and his son, Thomas John Evans.<sup>41</sup> Arriving late to the meeting, Alexander Galloway

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38 Place was not always concerned with ensuring the authorities recognised the radicals' peaceful agenda. As Paul Pickering notes, Place and other early nineteenth-century reformers, drawing on the philosophies of Utilitarian James Mill, invoked the threat of violence as a means of realising political reform. See Paul A. Pickering, "'Peaceably if We Can, Forcibly if We Must': Political violence and insurrection in early-Victorian Britain', in B. Bowden (ed.), *Terror: From tyrannicide to terrorism in Europe, 1605–2005* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2008), pp. 114–33. For a detailed account of Mill and the 'language of menace', see Joseph Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), especially pp. 48–96.

39 As an example, see his speech at the Crown and Anchor in Thomas Erskine, *Declaration of the Friends of the Liberty of the Press, Assembled at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Saturday, January 19, 1793* (London, 1793), pp. 14–15.

40 *The Times*, 9 September 1819.

41 On the Evanses' participation in early nineteenth-century radicalism, and specifically the ultra-radical Spencean set, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), passim; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, especially pp. 177–91.

apologised for his tardiness, explaining that he had found that another radical committee, including Dr Watson, John Gale Jones, Arthur Thistlewood, Samuel Waddington and Thomas Preston, had assembled 'under the same roof' to take into consideration the 'self same question'.<sup>42</sup>

The meeting agreed to adjourn to enable Galloway to consult with the rival group over the best means to defray the funds that had been raised. The 'Westminster Committee of 200' met again on 8 September to discuss the outcome. A letter from the rival group, who had since removed themselves from the Crown and Anchor to the White Lion Tavern, was read to the meeting. It was clear that despite Galloway's endeavours, they continued to advance their plans alone. While the White Lion group acknowledged that the Westminster Committee of 200 had met for 'similar purposes', it went on to document arrangements already in place for a 'triumphal procession' to welcome Hunt back to London, including consigning flags of silk to the painter for 'suitable inscriptions' to be placed on them. The booking of the Great Room of the Crown and Anchor for the reception provided a sharp sting in the tail. 'The effects which were produced upon different members of the Committee', *The Times* jeered, 'convinced us there were some shades of difference in the political views of the Reformers assembled'.<sup>43</sup>

Resolution after resolution followed, as Galloway's Crown and Anchor group scrambled to regain control of radical London's response to this seminal event. After much discussion on the propriety of organising a mass procession, it was decided that a deputation be sent to meet with the White Lion group. After half an hour, they returned to the Crown and Anchor and, according to *The Times*, reported favourably on the plans that Thistlewood's group had in place.<sup>44</sup> *The Times* recorded that the Crown and Anchor group then passed a resolution declaring their intention of 'co-operating with Messrs. Watson and Co'. Sardonicly, the editor continued that

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42 On Alexander Galloway, veteran of the 1790s radical movement, machine-maker and engineer, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, esp. pp. 9–21, 108–12, 125–35; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*. On Dr James Watson, veteran ultra-radical and surgeon, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 104–40; T. M. Parssinen, 'The Revolutionary Party in London, 1816–20', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 45 (1972), pp. 266–82. On Thistlewood, ultra-radical and future leader of the Cato Street conspirators, see Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, esp. pp. 89–133; John Milsome, 'Arthur Thistlewood and the Cato Street Conspiracy', *Contemporary Review*, vol. 217 (1970), pp. 151–4; David Johnson, *Regency Revolution: The case of Arthur Thistlewood* (Compton Chamberlayne, UK: Compton Russell, 1974). On Thomas Preston, London-born shoemaker and member of the Spencean underground, see Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, esp. pp. 90–127; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 19–20, 43–6, 106–32.

43 *The Times*, 9 September 1819.

44 *Ibid.*

[s]o eager were they to show that they were in earnest, they absolutely adjourned from the place in which they were sitting to the White Lion, in order to extend their fraternal embrace to their brothers in reform who were there assembled.<sup>45</sup>

The happiest member of the group was undoubtedly the landlord of the White Lion Tavern.

Despite the derision of *The Times*, the rival groups never really achieved this level of cooperation. While the *Examiner* referred to the events of the next evening as a 'foolish dispute' between the two radical parties, *The Times* offered a detailed report with the headline 'Rupture Among the Radicals', following a joint meeting of the two groups at the Crown and Anchor.<sup>46</sup> The 'Ultras' from the White Lion, it reported, took the chair of the meeting, offending Galloway and his party, who 'considered it no less than a usurpation of the very post they themselves occupied the former evening'. The *Morning Chronicle* reported that the White Lion 'junto' were 'far more formidable' and declined to report the meeting in detail as 'to describe what followed would be impossible'.<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, however, delighted in recounting the events. A great fracas ensued; the White Lion members determined to proceed with the procession and the Crown and Anchor radicals equally determined to oppose the plan. They feared that such a crowd assembled, so soon after Peterloo, might arm 'their foes with weapons furnished by imprudence or misconduct'. According to *The Times*, the meeting descended into disarray. It reported the surprise of the Crown and Anchor group 'that a deputation of 5 persons from an unknown body, should presume to dictate to, or alter the fixed determination of a recognized Committee, acting under the known confidence of Mr Hunt'.<sup>48</sup>

The editor advised readers that they were unable to report the outcome of the meeting, for

at about one o'clock, we left the party contending who should pay for the room...Mr Waddington swore he'd be d—d if they should pay, for 'they vere inwited'. Others said they had elected their own Chairman, and proceeding in their own way, had made themselves responsible. In this way they fought on.

Despite concluding that 'want of rest compelled us to retire from the contest', the 'trifling, squabbling, penniless boobies' at the centre of the fray would continue to entertain the readers of the press for the rest of the week.

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45 *Morning Chronicle*, 10 September 1819.

46 *Examiner*, 12 September 1819; *The Times*, 11 September 1819.

47 *Morning Chronicle*, 11 September 1819.

48 *The Times*, 11 September 1819. See also *Morning Chronicle*, 11 September 1819.



Notwithstanding the condescension of the mainstream press, the divisions and rivalry between the two groups had a strong ideological basis. The White Lion group represented the more extreme elements of radicalism, some of whom considered physical force a legitimate means to reform the political system. Just eight months after these meetings, Thistlewood would be executed alongside his fellow Cato Street conspirators.<sup>49</sup> There was also, however, a class element to the division. When Carlile, Evans and Galloway were deputed to meet with the White Lion group, they discovered 'men of intelligent minds, but evidently and unfortunately depressed by poverty'.<sup>50</sup> When *The Times* taunted, on 13 September, that the scene had become a case of "'White Lion versus Crown and Anchor" or "Fast versus feast"', they were referring to a dispute between the price of the planned dinner at the Crown and Anchor—the White Lion group opting for a cheaper dinner in order to allow Hunt's less wealthy supporters to join the occasion. Galloway reported going 'below stairs' to find the rival committee—a fitting architectural metaphor for the hierarchical class divisions that dogged the popular radical movement as much as wider British society in this period.<sup>51</sup>

What both this episode and the events surrounding the rejection of the *Reform Act* in 1831 reveal is that different radical groups and their disenfranchised supporters aligned their ideology and identity strongly with physical spaces. Despite a week of mocking the rival radical groups vying for Hunt's procession honours, even *The Times* was forced to concede the immense success of Hunt's procession: 'there was never an assembly of persons...conducted in so peaceable a manner; and we never before saw any where the proportion of the middling, and we might add the upper classes of society was so great.'<sup>52</sup> In the face of a potential overthrow by the more threatening White Lion milieu, the sigh of relief from *The Times* is almost palpable. The established cultural and political conventions of operation at the Crown and Anchor had been upheld.

In the case of the 1831 Reform crisis, radical leaders could use the Crown and Anchor to entice 'respectable' working-class radicals away from the maelstrom

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49 The Cato Street conspiracy involved an attempt in 1820 to assassinate British cabinet ministers and overthrow the government by ultra-radicals, led by Arthur Thistlewood and guided by agent provocateur, the Home Office spy George Edwards. See G. T. Wilkinson, *An Authentic History of the Cato Street Conspiracy* (London, 1820); Robert Shaw, *Cato Street* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972); Iain McCalman, 'Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795–1838', *English Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 403 (1987), pp. 309–33; Milsome, 'Arthur Thistlewood and the Cato Street Conspiracy'; Johnson, *Regency Revolution*.

50 *The Times*, 11 September 1819.

51 This is not to suggest that radicalism was divided along strict class demarcations. Many radicals saw a benefit of eliminating distinctions between the working classes or middle classes, preferring a coalition of the 'useful' or 'productive' classes in their campaign for social and political reform.

52 *The Times*, 14 September 1819. The *Morning Chronicle*, 14 September 1819, reported that 'such a crowd was never before seen in London'.

of the Blackfriars Road Rotunda. Following the rejection of the *Reform Act*, Burdett and Place moved quickly to establish a National Political Union with its headquarters at the Crown and Anchor.<sup>53</sup> It was to be a union that would break

through the trammels of caste to associate for the common interest in a common cause'; a union 'not of the working classes, nor of the middle classes, nor of any other class; but of all reformers,—of the masses, and the millions.'<sup>54</sup>

The National Political Union endeavoured to encourage the establishment of branch unions in the various wards and parishes of London with the Crown and Anchor providing the central office.

Although the National Political Union was reported to have signed some 'respectable "working" men' to its ranks, it failed to convince the Rotunda stalwarts to unite with them. The failure of the short-lived National Political Union is due in large part to the deep suspicion and resentment of working-class radicals at their exclusion from the extension of the franchise proposed in the *Reform Act*. If class tensions had been simmering within the tavern environment throughout the first three decades of the century, the passage of the *Reform Act* in 1832 would bring the issue of class even further to the fore.<sup>55</sup>

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The strong association of the Crown and Anchor radicals with support of the *Reform Act* as an interim measure did not signal the end of the tavern's radical political associations. There was a discernible lull in political activity at the tavern in the wake of the tumultuous events of 1832, as many of the Crown and Anchor's middling population retired from public political agitation, content with their own political success. The few meetings held over the ensuing 18 months, however, reveal a radical movement regrouping. The tavern soon became, once again, a key metropolitan venue for the disenfranchised. In December 1832, a meeting of Middlesex electors was held in the Great Room of the tavern to discuss the best means to ensure the return of Joseph Hume to Parliament. Hume, who had begun his parliamentary life as a Tory, was now

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53 For a discussion of the National Political Union, see Rowe, 'Class and Political Radicalism in London', pp. 31–47; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*, pp. 287–311; Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution*, pp. 77–87, 126–31; Dudley Miles, *Francis Place, The Life of a Remarkable Radical 1771–1854* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988), pp. 184–234.

54 *The Times*, 5 November 1831. See also *Poor Man's Guardian*, 5 November 1831; *Examiner*, 6 November 1831.

55 Thousands of men were now newly enfranchised, but the property qualifications of the Act ensured that vast numbers of the working class remained excluded from the franchise. E. P. Thompson's remains one of the best accounts of working-class reaction to the passing of the Reform Bill. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 888–909.

one of the staunchest advocates of universal male suffrage in the Parliament.<sup>56</sup> In the crowded Crown and Anchor meeting, he vowed to continue the fight to see the extension of the franchise, to realise vote by ballot and 'every measure to secure and extend civil and religious liberty'. His pledge was met with rapturous applause.<sup>57</sup> With only limited enfranchisement eventually delivered by the *Reform Act*, the tavern remained, as the lunar man in the moon envisaged 20 years earlier, a venue dedicated to seeing the 'people righted'.

As Hume was enthusiastically greeted on the tavern platform, former Crown and Anchor personalities began to fade from the venue. Hunt, who lost favour at the tavern during 1830–31 with his vocal opposition to the *Reform Act*, remained an impassioned supporter of universal male suffrage, but lost his seat of Preston in the 1833 election, and died of a stroke just two years after retiring to private life.<sup>58</sup> Hobhouse's involvement with the Crown and Anchor was cut short with his sudden shift away from radical reform. He was quickly ostracised by his old radical colleagues as he refused to pledge his support for the further extension of the franchise. Reform had consolidated the Whigs in power, and Hobhouse moved from outsider to political insider. Even as late as 1847, Hobhouse's betrayal had not been forgotten by a new generation of Crown and Anchor radicals. That year, celebrating the return of radical members to Parliament, Irish Chartist MP Feargus O'Connor revelled in his electoral victory over the old Crown and Anchor luminary. Hobhouse's only chance to remain in politics, O'Connor maintained, would be a seat in the House of Lords:

If asked what Chartism could do, he answered it could do as much as the Queen, for it had made a peer of Sir J. C. Hobhouse. (Laughter) Thus it appeared that to lose the confidence of the people was to acquire fitness for companionship with the pantalooned old women of the House of Lords.<sup>59</sup>

The tavern's most prominent sage of the nineteenth century, Sir Francis Burdett, was also fast losing favour. Despite being imprisoned twice for his support of other radicals, gaining kudos for initiating the public agitation against the cruelties of Coldbath Fields House of Correction and generally championing the radical cause for three decades, his support of the *Reform Act* as a final settlement saw him denigrated in the working-class radical press as 'Sir Francis the Apostate'.<sup>60</sup>

56 On Joseph Hume, radical and politician, see Valerie E. Chancellor, *The Political Life of Joseph Hume, 1777–1855* (London: V. Chancellor, c. 1986); Ronald K. Huch and Paul R. Ziegler, *Joseph Hume, the People's MP* (Philadelphia: Diane Publishing, 1985).

57 *The Times*, 9 December 1832.

58 On Hunt's later years, see Belchem, 'Orator' Hunt, pp. 270–5.

59 *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, 30 October 1847.

60 *Working Man's Friend*, 9 March 1833.

As Baer observes, the numbers attending Burdett's political dinners had begun to decline during the late 1820s.<sup>61</sup> The events were interrupted occasionally by the likes of Hunt and Cobbett, who chose to chastise Burdett on home turf for abandoning his radical principles.<sup>62</sup> The decision to end his annual election dinners in 1832 signalled the beginning of the end of his long reign at the tavern. Though Burdett maintained sporadic involvement with the venue for a few years after 1832, by 1838, it was clear that the relationship had come to an end. Despite some supporters hoping that Burdett would receive 'as hearty a welcome at the Crown and Anchor as [he] ever did at any former period',<sup>63</sup> at a meeting of 'tradesmen' convened in the tavern on 22 May, Burdett was received with much hostility, with the crowd angrily calling for the 'turn-coat' to appear and asking 'where is Judas Burdett?'.<sup>64</sup> Emulating the theatrics of Parliament, a 'radical spouter' quickly 'dragged' working-class radical publisher Henry Hetherington to the chair to prevent Burdett taking control of the meeting. 'It is impossible to describe the uproar which continued throughout the whole of the proceedings', *The Times* reported, and it was 'with great difficulty that the hon. baronet...was able to force his way out of the room'.<sup>65</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* reported that Burdett was forced to hide in one room of the tavern before being accompanied down the Strand by the police.<sup>66</sup> Although Burdett, as Samuel Bamford recalled, was 'one of our idols, and we were loathe to give him up', the old tavern stalwarts simply had too strong an association with the *Reform Act* as a final political settlement for the new Crown and Anchor milieu.<sup>67</sup>

Burdett's 'unseating' (both literally and metaphorically) from the Crown and Anchor did not mean an end to the tavern's prominence as a radical parliamentary stronghold. The *Reform Act* had motivated a new generation of radicals who were now more aware than ever of their exclusion from the political process. It also left them in possession of the extra-parliamentary venue. The 'elite of the Crown and Anchor spouters' now included the great 'Irish Agitator' Daniel O'Connell, Sir William Molesworth, Henry Brougham and John Roebuck.<sup>68</sup>

61 Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster', p. 198.

62 See, for example, the reports in *Poor Man's Guardian*, 1 December 1832; *Examiner*, 2 December 1832.

63 Letter from Stephen Dann, *The Times*, 9 April 1838.

64 *Morning Chronicle*, 22 May 1838. See also *Leeds Mercury*, 25 May 1838.

65 *The Times*, 22 May 1838.

66 *Morning Chronicle*, 22 May 1838.

67 Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, p. 24.

68 The reference to the Crown and Anchor elite is from *The Times*, 21 July 1835. On Daniel O'Connell, see Oliver MacDonagh, *O'Connell: The life of Daniel O'Connell, 1775–1847* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991); Paul A. Pickering, "'Irish First': Daniel O'Connell, the native manufacture campaign, and economic nationalism, 1840–44", *Albion*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2000), pp. 598–616; Kevin B. Nowlan and Maurice R. O'Connell (eds), *Daniel O'Connell: Portrait of a radical* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1984). On Sir William Molesworth, see Alison Adburgham, *A Radical Aristocrat: The Rt Hon. Sir William Molesworth, Bart., PC, MP of Pencarrow and his wife Andalusia* (Cornwall: Tabb House, 1990). On Henry Brougham, see Robert Stewart, *Henry Brougham, 1778–1868: His public career* (London: Bodley Head, 1986); William A. Hay, 'Henry Brougham and the 1818 Westmorland Election: A study in provincial opinion and the opening of constituency politics', *Albion*, vol.

O'Connell, a magnificent orator, delighted Crown and Anchor audiences with his impassioned and often mocking speeches slamming the Tory and Whig collusion over the *Reform Act*.<sup>69</sup> But it was to be Joseph Hume whom *The Times* conferred with highest Crown and Anchor honours; he, they claimed, occupied the 'professors chair of what many persons consider high treason, but the most charitable call misprision of treason, at the far-famed Crown and Anchor'.<sup>70</sup>

*The Times* had often chided the more radical of the earlier Crown and Anchor leaders, and the tone of their editorials sharpened depending on the threat posed by its new inhabitants to the long-established cultural conventions of the tavern. Following 1832, however, there is a discernible shift in the way the newspaper chose to describe the disenfranchised crowds attracted to events at the tavern. In June 1836, it reported on a meeting convened by O'Connell at which they described the audience as 'several members of the House of Commons who are distinguished for their ultra-radical principles, a considerable proportion of the printers and publishers of unstamped publications, and a tolerable sprinkling of unwashed artisans, Radical pothouse spouters, and Irish hod-men'.<sup>71</sup> Two years later, the reports continued in a similar vein. On reporting a meeting held in May 1838 to 'consider petitioning parliament' regarding the timing of the new Queen's coronation, *The Times* observer noted that the room was densely crowded by 'those who are in the daily habit of the almost endless meetings of the Radicals'.<sup>72</sup> It was therefore 'natural', they concluded, 'to anticipate that an outrage on the common principle of good manners would be committed'.

One of their most biting indictments of the Crown and Anchor assembly occurred in 1837 when a meeting was held to again assert a voice in the foreign affairs of the nation by protesting the 'unjust and oppressive' colonial policy of the British government towards the Canadian people, who had begun to agitate for greater self-governance. *The Times* editor lamented: 'Incredible as it may sound, these "working-men" are said to have actually wasted their time, spent their money, and worn their shoes the worse, in order that they might assemble at the Crown and Anchor.'<sup>73</sup>

36, no. 1 (2004), pp. 28–51; Michael Lobban, 'Henry Brougham and Law Reform', *English Historical Review*, vol. 115 (2000), pp. 1184–215. On John Roebuck, see S. A. Beaver, 'Roebuck, John Arthur (1802–1879)', ODNB, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23945>>

69 *Working Man's Friend*, 9 March 1833.

70 *The Times*, 6 January 1838.

71 *The Times*, 2 June 1836. For other reports on the meeting, see *Examiner*, 5 June 1836; *Preston Chronicle*, 4 June 1836.

72 *The Times*, 22 May 1838.

73 *The Times*, 5 April 1837.

The fear of the unstable and unpredictable mob evident in the reporting of Rotunda radicals in 1831 found a new target with the post-1832 Crown and Anchor tenants.<sup>74</sup>

The disparaging reports of *The Times*, however, do not appear to have dented the enthusiasm of the new Crown and Anchor milieu. On 4 March 1837, the *London Mercury* reported the ecstatic response of early Chartist leader Bronterre O'Brien to a meeting at the tavern to petition Parliament for more extensive political reform:

I have been present at all sorts of political meetings...but never was it my good fortune to witness so brilliant a display of democracy as that which shone forth at the Crown and Anchor on Tuesday night. I often despaired of Radicalism before; I will never despair again after what I witnessed on that occasion...Four thousand democrats, at least, were at the meeting. The immense room of the Crown and Anchor was crowded to overflowing, several hundreds stood outside on the corridor and stairs or went away for want of accommodation.<sup>75</sup>

The meeting was convened to consider the most famous political petition of the early nineteenth century. When the London Working Men's Association, founded by William Lovett and Henry Hetherington, met at the tavern to petition for social and political rights for the working classes, they compiled the six points for a petition that would later become the People's Charter.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the Crown and Anchor can lay claim as the birthplace of Chartism—the first mass working-class movement in Britain. The resistance of an earlier generation of radicals to the moderate reform measures espoused by the Hampden Club reveals how long these ideas had been percolating at the Crown and Anchor.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the middling classes no longer took an interest in political reform and political opposition at the tavern after 1832. When they again found reason to oppose the government of the day, they turned once more to the Crown and Anchor as the site for their public

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74 These tenants included the 3000 people who assembled at the Crown and Anchor in 1834 to petition the King on behalf of the persecuted Dorchester unionists led by George Loveless (the Tolpuddle Martyrs). The meeting was addressed by Feargus O'Connor and Daniel O'Connell. See Joyce Marlow, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs* (St Albans, Herts: Panther, 1974), pp. 127–8.

75 *London Mercury*, 4 March 1837, reprinted in Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 57–61.

76 For an account of the meeting, see *The People's Charter; With the address to the radical reformers of Great Britain and Ireland and a brief sketch of its origin* (London, 1848), p. 4. For more on William Lovett, prominent London radical, Owenite and Chartist, and Henry Hetherington, radical publisher (including of the *Poor Man's Guardian*) and journalist, see Chapter 7 of this study.



campaigns.<sup>77</sup> In the same year that the People's Charter was born, a group united by different political persuasion came together to agitate for the repeal of the *New Poor Law Act*.<sup>78</sup> The chair of the meeting, Earl Stanhope, was pleased that despite their 'differing in political opinions', they assembled in the large room of the tavern '[n]ot for the purpose of any party politics, but to exercise their constitutional rights, and in fulfilment of their public duty, to deliberate upon one of the most important subjects that could engage their attention'.<sup>79</sup> The tavern remained a central site of public debate of most important political questions of the period.

The use of the tavern by another powerful political group of the period, the Anti-Corn Law League, reveals the continuity of language, protocols and practices in relation to the Crown and Anchor, which had developed incrementally since the 1790s.<sup>80</sup> In 1842, the League employed a strategy reminiscent of that adopted by Francis Place's delegation to Prime Minister Grey in 1831. Rather than present unannounced on the doorstep of Downing Street, however, the Anti-Corn Law League politely gave advance warning to new Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel. Addressed from the tavern, and signed by John Brookes, chairman of a 'preliminary meeting of deputies from associations and religious congregations from various parts of the kingdom', the letter requested: 'That you will favour the deputation with an interview on the subject of the repeal of the corn laws... previous to the announcements of the intentions in Parliament on Wednesday next.'<sup>81</sup>

Despite attempting to avoid offending respectable sensibilities by issuing a written request, it nevertheless elicited a sharp response by *The Times*—remarkably similar to the rebuke of the effrontery of Place and his delegation by the *Courier*. *The Times* chided the League for its audacity, suggesting the futility of their efforts to throw Peel 'on his haunches in a single interview' to 'defer or modify his own well-considered plans till they accord with these fresh

77 'Old Corruption', as E. P. Thompson noted, still 'had vitality as the protracted struggle for the repeal of the corn laws was to show'. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 905.

78 *Morning Chronicle*, 28 February 1837. For a discussion of the plebeian reaction to the 1834 Poor Law, see John Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (London: Croom Helm, 1986). See also Nicholas Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1834–44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971); Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws 1700–1930* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

79 *Morning Chronicle*, 28 February 1837. See also *London Dispatch and People's Political and Social Reformer*, 5 March 1837; *Examiner*, 5 March 1837. The speech was also published in full the same year. See *Earl Stanhope's Speech, on the New Poor Law, at a meeting held at the Crown and Anchor tavern* (London, 1837). A full account of the meeting, taken from the *Champion Newspaper* of 5 March 1837, was also circulated as a pamphlet: *Great Meeting at the Crown and Anchor on the Inhuman Poor-Law Act* (London, 1837).

80 On the Anti-Corn Law League, see Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People's Bread: A history of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000); Archibald Prentice, *A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1853).

81 *The Times*, 9 February 1842. See also *Morning Chronicle*, 10 February 1842.

Crown and Anchor sentiments'.<sup>82</sup> The insouciant use of the phrase is telling. It was not necessary for *The Times* to expand on these 'fresh sentiments'. Political shorthand had again come into play.

The continued use of the tavern by moderate and middling rank reformers assisted with maintaining the association of the venue with moderate political opposition. Ironically, it also assisted with access to the site for the plebeian political milieu. The difficulties faced by Thistlewood and friends in paying for the room in 1819 were, in the early Chartist years, overcome with some ingenuity. When a meeting was convened at the tavern in March 1841 to remonstrate Parliament against the continuation of the New Poor Law, *The Times* reported that it was disturbed by a 'large body of Chartists' whose avowed object was 'to take possession of rooms for which other people pay, and thus to gain a platform for their own purposes for free'.<sup>83</sup> *The Times* correspondent was indignant at the intrusion of the respectable gathering as he lamented the 'avowed *tactique* of those misguided persons...to convert every public assembly to which they can gain admittance into an arena for some riotous exhibition of their own'. Like the newspaper's outrage over the secrecy of the 1817 Hampden Club meeting, the actions of the Chartists interrupted more than simply a meeting in progress. They threatened the long-established Crown and Anchor protocols and the established cultural understanding of the venue as a moderate and legitimate venue of the public sphere.

Just as radicals of the 1790s responded to the threat posed by John Reeves' loyalist Crown and Anchor society, the tavern's new radical milieu of the 1840s also raged against the involvement of more moderate middling groups at the venue. Indeed, Feargus O'Connor's radical newspaper, the *Northern Star*, saw the relationship between the Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League as a confrontation between enemy camps. Although by this time there were many other choices for meeting places in the capital, the Crown and Anchor remained a central site in the machinations of political opposition. The *Northern Star* announced the 'total defeat of the Combined Armies of the League' by the 'Advance of the Royal Chartist Army of Observation' in what it dubbed the 'Great Battle of the Crown and Anchor'.<sup>84</sup> O'Connor launched a viperous and sustained campaign against the League, whom he considered 'Malthusian beggars', who expected workers to join in bettering the condition of the 'masters' yet who had never shown any disposition to do the same for the worker. The question of the Corn Laws paled to insignificance, according to O'Connor, compared with the failure to adopt the Charter.

82 *The Times*, 9 February 1842.

83 *The Times*, 12 March 1841. See also the report of an earlier meeting in *Examiner*, 7 March 1841. The tactic was Chartist policy and not restricted to meetings at the Crown and Anchor. See Paul A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 4.

84 *Northern Star*, 13 March 1841.

The continuities between the pre and post-1832 years at the tavern are further evident in the relationship between the venue and Whitehall. Radical Members of Parliament continued to be censured within the House of Commons for their participation in Crown and Anchor meetings. In March 1838, Lord Maidstone took O'Connell to task for his public accusations of corruption against Tory House of Commons Committees, raising the allegations, he maintained, in order that O'Connell might contradict them. 'I am exceedingly obliged to the Noble Lord', countered O'Connell, 'for giving this publicity to the sentiments I entertain on the subject of Committees'. He confirmed that he had said 'every word of that' and, further, that he believed 'it to be perfectly true'.<sup>85</sup> A fracas then ensued with threat and counter-threat between Whig and Tory members over whether O'Connell's Crown and Anchor sentiments might result in a prosecution. The matter was eventually dropped, though not before O'Connell's parting shot that rather than retire from public censorship, he indeed courted it—not within the halls of Parliament, but at the Crown and Anchor. There, he pledged, he would appear 'from day to day and hour to hour, singly and alone, to answer any charge'. O'Connell was clearly signalling that in order to uphold his mandate to the people, he was to be held accountable not to the Parliament, but in the venue consecrated as the 'Real House of Commons'.

Remarkably, the connections between O'Connell, the Crown and Anchor and the House of Commons committee system were anticipated, in the form of a graphic satire, a decade earlier, at the time of the struggle for Catholic emancipation. The print *To Be...or...Not To Be The Clare MP: O'Connell and the Minister at the Bar of the (Crown) and (Anchor)*<sup>86</sup> (Figure 5.1) was produced by Charles Williams in 1828 in response to the election of O'Connell as the member for County Clare. Many Tory MPs, including Robert Peel, opposed the election, which they deemed illegal because of O'Connell's Catholicism. The matter was referred in the first instance to a House of Commons Election Committee. The print provides a clever double play on the term 'the Bar' as Prime Minister Wellington and O'Connell stand within the one 'bar' in which O'Connell was a legitimate member. At the same time, Peel thumbs his nose to O'Connell as he enters the door marked 'Committee Room', which bears the sign 'No Admittance but to True Blues', in reference to the Tory stranglehold on the committee process. The print reminds us that the Crown and Anchor had become a political symbol in its own right (as was reminiscent of the early nineteenth-century graphic satires surveyed in Chapter 4), identifying the tavern only in symbolic form. It also sharply illustrates the status of the venue as an analogue to Parliament.

85 *Northern Star*, 3 March 1838. See also J. A. Hamilton, *The Life of Daniel O'Connell* (London: W. H. Allen, 1888), pp. 142–4.

86 BM 15538.

Charles Williams, 1828. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.

87 For a more detailed account of the events surrounding the meeting, see Pickering and Tyrrell, *The People's Bread*, pp. 166–9.



acting to protect the moneyed interests.<sup>88</sup> The content of Peel's speech did little to allay the League's hostility. They quickly issued their 'emphatic condemnation' of Peel's refusal to repeal the laws.

As Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell observe, even before the march to the House of Commons, the League viewed the Parliament with 'scepticism and contempt'.<sup>89</sup> They could 'point to a national constituency that far exceeded the parliamentary one'.<sup>90</sup> And as the League presented itself as a rival body to those occupying the seat of power, the Crown and Anchor provided an essential component of this challenge. As Clifford Geertz argues, all political authority requires a 'cultural frame' and, as other scholars have noted, every cultural frame requires a 'centre' that has a 'sacred status'.<sup>91</sup> As Lynn Hunt offers, such a 'centre' is 'the heart of things, the place where culture, society and politics come together'.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, such extra-parliamentary action of the League, and of other more plebeian groups excluded from the formal centre of political power, also required a rival 'centre'. The Crown and Anchor provided the physical 'heart' and the 'centre' for Britain's expanding political nation.

Reports in the mainstream press during this period also suggest that Crown and Anchor radicalism continued to have a strong influence on those occupying official seats of power at Westminster. Though *The Times* had long opposed the radical call for the introduction of a ballot system for voting, it conceded that there were merits in the 'secret system' in the face of the continuing power of the Crown and Anchor milieu to influence the parliamentary process:

Where is the conscientious member who, being required to give an *open vote* in Parliament, can dare to exercise his honest convictions with any feeling of freedom or independence? Let him dare to do so, and forthwith he is pounced upon by the tribunals of the Crown and Anchor...the poor creatures who sit for these little metropolitan despotisms must vote, if they vote openly, under the goad and the lash.<sup>93</sup>

*The Times* was clearly still coming to terms with the demands of the public sphere and the extra-parliamentary political forces that coursed through it. Crucially, their reporting suggests that the Crown and Anchor had assumed a remarkable place on the political landscape of early nineteenth-century London—a space inhabited by those generally excluded from formal political

<sup>88</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 10 February 1842.

<sup>89</sup> Pickering and Tyrrell, *The People's Bread*, p. 166.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>91</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 87. See also Epstein, *Radical Expression*, p. 76.

<sup>92</sup> Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, p. 87.

<sup>93</sup> *The Times*, 13 January 1838.

power but who collectively had an impact on the stronghold of power. It also suggests a more integrated and interlinked public sphere than the notion of a plebeian counter-sphere allows.

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Given the vehemence of political discourse and the heterodox sentiments often expressed at the Crown and Anchor, we must consider why, despite successive waves of imprisonments for sedition and treason, the tavern remained a 'safe' outlet for political expression. As early as 1794, *The Times* reported that it witnessed toasts 'of the most seditious tendency', which 'ought to have sent the speakers to Botany Bay'.<sup>94</sup> Referring to the United Irishmen in 1797, Edmund Burke also complained that 'nor was the club at the Crown and Anchor one jot less treasonable than the Committee at Belfast; and what is worse the names are higher and members of parliament openly show themselves there'.<sup>95</sup> The long legacy of institutions such as the tavern with freedom of speech that Habermas linked so strongly with the emergence of the public sphere goes some way to explaining this protection, although as Barrell and Epstein remind us with the case of John Frost, such legacies were never assured.<sup>96</sup> The Home Office could not legislate to attack the function of a radical forum without encroaching on the rights of innocent recreational ale-house clubs.<sup>97</sup> True, individual speakers could still be prosecuted for libel, but the relatively close environment of the ale house meant that spies and shorthand recorders—the Home Office's main weapons in the prosecution of individuals—were easily detected.

Further, as Brett argues, political meetings guised as election or other celebratory dinners curiously escaped the definition of the public meeting or public speaking outlawed in both the Seditious Meetings Bill of 1795 and its offspring, the *Seditious Meetings Prevention Act* of 1819.<sup>98</sup> It is little wonder they quickly became such a popular form of political assembly during this period. The cultural understanding of the venue—as a parliamentary stronghold and political dining establishment—allowed the popular radical groups (whose meetings did not always involve dining) to exploit this wider legacy of tavern-based dissent and the political safety afforded by the Crown and Anchor's large parliamentary membership.

94 *The Times*, 5 May 1794.

95 Edmund Burke to Mrs Crewe, Correspondence, vol. iv, p. 448, quoted in H. P. Wheatley, *London Past and Present* (London, 1891), p. 480.

96 Barrell, 'Coffee-House Politicians'; James Epstein, "'Equality and No King": Sociability and sedition: the case of John Frost', in Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds), *Romantic Sociability: Social networks and literary culture in Britain, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 43–61.

97 Iain McCalman, 'Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating Clubs in London 1795–1838', *English Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 403 (1987), p. 311.

98 Brett, 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', p. 539.



The absence of prosecutions emanating from the tavern is not to suggest that it was immune to the surveillance measures of the authorities.<sup>99</sup> When Hunt addressed his supporters there following his 'triumphal return' from Peterloo in 1819, he alerted the assembly to the presence of a magistrate, Mr Birnie, 'who had made his appearance that evening more than once in the gallery'.<sup>100</sup> Hunt directed the meeting 'to abstain from all invidious and inflammatory language' to prevent the police magistrate taking 'any advantage'. John Gale Jones was defiantly indignant that 'the presence of a magistrate at such a moment was a direct insult on all the company'. It is not clear from the public record how long Birnie tried his luck; while the presence of the magistrate undoubtedly made for good theatre for Hunt, the interference of the authorities in a public meeting so soon after Peterloo risked the wrath of a populace enraged by the callous response from the authorities both in Manchester and in London.

The relative political safety of the tavern as an outlet for public political dissent also raises the issue of women's involvement in Crown and Anchor radicalism. We know that despite the high possibility of public chastisement, some women in this period nevertheless chose to avow their radicalism in the public sphere. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the public record contains scant reference to the participation of women in Crown and Anchor meetings. The gendered nature of Crown and Anchor radicalism is starkly evident in both the visual culture surveyed in the previous chapter and in the public print culture mined for this chapter. Epstein and Baer both note the paucity of female involvement in public political dinners either in the metropolis or in regional England.<sup>101</sup> Epstein argues that such dinners not only allowed the formation of politically motivated clubs and associations, they were essentially masculine stomping grounds providing 'arenas for testing the courage of men's political convictions'. The 'challenges and counter-challenges to drink particular toasts or to stand by one's words and allegiances were', according to Epstein, 'in certain important respects analogous to the code of the duel'.<sup>102</sup> Elaine Chalus agrees that taverns supplied 'important, and uniquely male, venues for politicized socialising', though she maintains that this should not obscure the fact that "'Society" itself was charged with

99 The only prosecution I have been able to identify with the tavern involved activity just outside its walls. In 1819, one of Richard Carlile's young shopmen was arrested on the steps of the tavern for holding a placard that informed passers-by of a meeting to protest against the Peterloo massacre, though he was later acquitted in court.

100 *The Times*, 14 September 1819. There are other records of surveillance of Home Office spies at the tavern such as those reports submitted in the early 1830s monitoring the meetings at the tavern of the National Political Union. See, for example, Home Office Papers, HO64/13, fo. 105; HO64/13, fo. 124; HO64/14, fo. 138.

101 Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster', p. 201; Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 159–60. See also Jonathon Fulcher, 'Gender, Politics and Class in the Early Nineteenth-Century English Reform Movement', *Historical Research*, vol. LXVII (1994), p. 68.

102 Epstein, "'Equality and No King'", pp. 47–8.

politics' and that women's participation in parliamentary politics occurred within other settings, such as the private dinners, which while held within the home, nevertheless had strong political agendas.<sup>103</sup>

Although the deeply masculine milieu of the tavern (as well as societal pressure on women to abstain more generally from public politics) acted to curtail the participation of women, it would be misleading to suggest that women were entirely absent from Crown and Anchor functions. They were certainly present at the tavern for the many cultural activities that took place outside the venue's political functions, including balls and soirees held in the tavern's great assembly room.<sup>104</sup> Former actress and later Owenite preacher Miss Eliza Macauley provided lectures at the tavern on music, elocution and literature.<sup>105</sup> Women were also present at meetings with a clear political focus. As early as 1789, an advertisement for a dinner to debate the review of the characters of Pitt and Fox declared that 'admittance to Ladies and Gentlemen' was 'half a crown'.<sup>106</sup> The furore over the King's treatment of Queen Caroline also saw women assemble at the tavern in great numbers in September 1820.<sup>107</sup> Joyce Marlow reports that in a meeting at the tavern to petition the King on behalf of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, attended by up to 3000 people, the 'preliminaries' involved a 'lady who had travelled from Dorchester putting 2s. 6d. on the table to defray the expenses of the meeting'.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, issues in which women were seen to have a legitimate involvement, such as the temperance movement, also saw women participate in large numbers. When Hunt and Cobbett discovered the presence of women at a meeting they convened to advocate temperance among the working classes (ironically in a tavern), they stopped the meeting and cleared a central space in the room for women to take their seats.<sup>109</sup> The incongruity between place and function also did not deter the organisers of the 1837 Great Temperance Festival where many women, who were 'remarkable for their superiority of dress and their attractive countenances', were among the 800 who assembled in the Great Room.<sup>110</sup> *The Times* clearly took no issue with female involvement in such a respectable cause.

103 Elaine Chalus, 'Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Historical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2000), p. 675.

104 See, for example, a ball held in 1803 at which there was a 'numerous and highly respectable assemblage of both sexes'. *The Times*, 21 February 1803.

105 See the broadsheet *Miss Macauley's Literary and Musical Regalia at the Crown and Anchor*, NS1069 B137, fo. 38, City of Westminster Archives, London.

106 *The Times*, 21 April 1789.

107 *The Times*, 8 September 1820.

108 Marlow, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs*, p. 127.

109 *A Full Report of the Proceedings of a Public Meeting Held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, the Strand, on Monday, Dec. 13, 1819, to consider the propriety of adopting a plan for abstaining from the use of wine, spirits, beer, tea, coffee &c.* (London, 1819).

110 *The Times*, 27 December 1837.

Though the *Northern Star* observed only one woman amongst a crowd of almost 2000 assembled to consider the question of postponing the coronation in May 1838<sup>111</sup> (yet another example of quasi-parliamentary activity at the Crown and Anchor), by November 1842, they reported that women were present in large numbers in a meeting convened in honour of the 'political victims' imprisoned during the government's renewed assault on political dissent during the early Chartist years.<sup>112</sup> On that occasion, the paper noted, the tavern was 'crammed to suffocation' and it was not only the number of women who fainted from the congestion that most startled the editor, but the number of men who followed suit. Later again, in a meeting convened in March 1846 in order to evince 'sympathy with the Poles in their present struggle', the *Northern Star* noted that the large room of the tavern was densely crowded and contained a 'sprinkling of the fair sex'.<sup>113</sup>

From what we know of the participation of women in mass street demonstrations, it is likely that the big political events at the tavern, which attracted thousands to the Strand site, might well have included many women. What is clear is that when women did participate, they did so from the floor or the gallery, but never, it seems, from the platform. A thorough survey of private records of Crown and Anchor associates lies beyond the scope of this study, but the issue of female participation in this archetypal space of the public sphere nevertheless warrants further investigation. What is clear is the prominence of women from 1848 when the Crown and Anchor made way for a new institution at the Strand premises, the Whittington Club. The brainchild of Douglas Jerrold, the Whittington was a unique example of mid-century urban sociability (Figure 5.2).<sup>114</sup> It was one of the first such clubs to be aimed at the lower middle class and, most remarkably, full membership was open to women. Rejecting the sites of sociability in which the 'form of woman was always banished', not only was membership open to women, they also participated from the platform, not only from the floor.<sup>115</sup>

111 *Northern Star*, 26 May 1838.

112 *Northern Star*, 26 November 1842.

113 *Northern Star*, 28 March 1846.

114 For more on the fascinating Whittington Club, see Christopher Kent, 'The Whittington Club: A bohemian experiment in middle class social reform', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1974), pp. 31–55; and Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the emergence of the women's rights movement, 1831–51* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 140–70.

115 See, for example, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, 23 January and 16 October 1847; *Whittington Club Gazette*, 4 May 1850. Harriet Martineau lectured there, as well as a Mrs Balfour, on 'celebrated women'.



**Figure 5.2 Great Room, Crown and Anchor Tavern, Whittington Club Soiree. This image is one of the very few surviving images of the Great Room in the historical record.**

*Illustrated London News*, 19 February 1848.

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Despite prolific accounts of the thousands of political assemblies held at the Crown and Anchor over the course of half a century, there are very few descriptions of the physical space itself in the public record. The account of the interior of the building that leads the preceding chapter is drawn largely from the architectural plans and title deeds, which remain in the possession of the original owner, the Duke of Norfolk. For the social historian, few contemporary works describe the building in any detail or record the response of visitors to it, other than the frequent astonishment at the size of the Great Assembly Room or acknowledgement of its notoriety in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Samuel Bamford's fleeting reference to the venue is one of the few responses from a radical perspective. His account belies a simple physical evaluation; there is a reverential tone to the recountal as he describes 'gazing around a large hall', which 'seemed wonderfully grand and silent for a tavern'.<sup>116</sup> This is in sharp contrast with the 'conflicting emotions' he reported

<sup>116</sup> Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, p. 23.

on entering the 'dimly lighted' 'den' of the House of Commons.<sup>117</sup> By the time of Bamford's visit, of course, the Crown and Anchor had become an integral part of a national political culture. That so few descriptions exist in the public record suggests the ultimate form of political shorthand. Perhaps no descriptions were necessary, as to write or speak of the Crown and Anchor was to know it.

Despite Baer's 'deep reading' of the Westminster political dinners, and the multitude of other scholars who detail events occurring on the site, the space of the tavern itself plays little role in any analysis. By so doing, the importance of the venue itself to the development of such rituals and formalities, and to their wider dissemination throughout Britain, has been overlooked. For example, Baer's assessment that the Crown and Anchor was chosen by Burdett and his radical supporters for geographical purposes, rather than adopting the ideological mantle of Charles James Fox, presupposes that the mere location of the venue was the deciding factor. Although the location undoubtedly allowed Burdett 'mastery over the borough',<sup>118</sup> the appropriation of the tavern space provided much more. It was clearly more than just a physical structure within which political groups could assemble. It took on far deeper meaning both within radical culture and in the wider public sphere. The accommodation of a new generation of radicals at the Crown and Anchor attests to the venue's longevity as both a political icon and an outlet for political opposition. It also attests to the vitality and doggedness of those who remained excluded from the franchise after 1832. By providing a 'legitimate' public space for dissenting political expression, the venue enticed many newly (mostly male) politicised followers into the public sphere. It also gave these new followers a radical identity—a rubric under which to associate. In the decades before the encompassing umbrella of 'Chartism', the Crown and Anchor provided a credible public identity to a vast array of (often conflicting) political ideologies and groups in London. Despite its increasingly plebeian patrons and, in particular, its use by more militant Chartist followers, the tavern retained its status as an alternative or rival political forum for those excluded from the formal channels of political power.

As we will see in the following chapters, not all radical spaces had the cultural traditions or political kudos that radicals drew on when assembling at the Crown and Anchor. Nor, however, did they necessarily have the restrictions that such cultural conventions implied. On one hand, the opening of Richard Carlile's Blackfriars Road Rotunda allowed radical London a spatial and ideological demarcation in opposition to the image of moderate and 'respectable' radicalism of the Crown and Anchor in the early 1830s. Yet as we will also see, the Rotunda offered radical London much more than the rough and unrespectable mantle implied by Francis Place.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>118</sup> Baer, 'Political Dinners in Whig, Radical and Tory Westminster', p. 189.