”By the iron hand of oppression”
- The performance of the parliamentary election contest in Nottingham and Middlesex 1802-1803

Author: Alvar Blomgren
Supervisors: Karin Sennefelt & Elaine Chalus
Examiners: Elisabeth Elegán & Karin Dirke
Abstract in English

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how politics was done at the level of the parliamentary constituencies at the time of the treaty of Amiens 1802-1803. This is achieved through two case studies of the elections in Middlesex and Nottingham, which are investigated as social practices. This thesis argues that understandings of masculinity and national identity, as well as questions about the nature of the constitution and citizen rights were central to participants in the extraparliamentary political process. Collective emotions were also highly important in the process of mobilising political support, and this thesis emphasises that participation in these elections was a collective effort; men and women from all levels of society were significant political actors. Moreover, this thesis demonstrates the importance of competences such as knowledge about the organisation of crowds and political violence in the performance of the election.

Abstract in Swedish

Denna uppsats syftar till att undersöka hur politik gjordes i de parlamentariska valkretsarna i England vid tiden för freden vid Amiens 1802–1803. En fallstudie görs av valen i Middlesex och Nottingham, vilka studeras som sociala praktiker med de deltagande aktörernas handlingar i fokus för analysen. Undersökningen visar att föreställningar om maskulinitet och nationell identitet var centrala för deltagarna, liksom frågor kring konstitutionens beskaffenhet och medborgliga rättigheter. Den betonar även vikten av kollektiva känslor för mobiliserande av politiskt stöd och understryker att deltagandet i valen var en kollektiv insats. Män och kvinnor från alla samhällsskikt var betydelsefulla deltagare. Slutligen betonas vikten av politikens materiella förutsättningar och vikten av kompetenser som kunskap om organiseringen av folkmassor och av politiskt våld.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Parliamentary elections in Georgian England involved the community en masse. Women and men alike, and from all levels of society, participated in the carnival-like festivities surrounding these events, and navigated to make their voices heard. Moreover, participation in the social practice of the election was essential to contemporary understandings of masculinity; the election contest was the central stage in Georgian society upon which men brought their gendered political identities to life. Manliness was essential in political life, but politics in this period was also fundamental “to the business of being a man”. Indeed, as Matthew McCormack has asserted, politics and masculinity were inseparable in Georgian society. Thus, in order to gain any understanding of the meanings of political life to Georgian contemporaries, it is necessary to investigate these processes together.

1.1 Aims of thesis

By conducting a case study of two election contests, I wish to explore the social practice of the parliamentary elections and thereby contribute to the cultural history of Georgian politics. More specifically, this thesis aims to investigate the extraparliamentary political process by focusing the performance of the parliamentary elections at the level of the constituencies, the level at which most people experienced politics in this period. Simply put, this is an investigation about how politics was done on the ground. In order to achieve this I have selected two contested elections, Nottingham and Middlesex, which begun with the 1802 general election. This coincided with the treaty of Amiens (1802-1803), the brief hiatus of peace between the French revolutionary wars and the Napoleonic wars, and a time were British politics were in a state of turmoil – at the brink of exhaustion after eight years of unsuccessful warfare. A key concern of this thesis is the interplay between the conditions of political life in the parliamentary constituencies and this wider national context. On the one


3McCormack, Independent man, p. 33.

4 McCormack, Independent man, p. 33.

5 O’Gorman, Voters, p. 67.

hand, Georgian elections were, as asserted by Elaine Chalus, “highly gendered [...] events that were superimposed upon, and had their outcomes shaped by, complex spiderwebs of local circumstances”.\(^7\) On the other, they were part of a wider political system, and a wider political culture, in which common notions of national identity and ideal citizenship, profoundly gendered in the masculine, were emerging towards the end of the eighteenth century.\(^8\) Moreover, it has been argued that the 1802 elections were part of a radical resurgence where calls for political reform became increasingly vocal,\(^9\) and, as Anna Clark has argued, this was also a time in which a new language of class rhetorics, were beginning to challenge traditional deference to local dynasties.\(^10\) This, crucially, was a turbulent period of rapid social and political change. Using the treaty of Amiens as a focal point of this study, thus, makes it possible to investigate how such changes mapped with the performance of the election at a point in history were strong demands were made for a widening of the political nation. In this way, this thesis is also intended as a contribution to the history of emergent democracy.

1.2 Historical background

Britain during the Georgian era (1714–1837) can be described as an oligarchy dominated by a narrow, landed, aristocratic elite, who monopolised the highest political offices and exercised an inordinate influence on state institutions and state decisions. The aristocracy also controlled the upper house of parliament, the House of Lords, and exercised a large influence on the return of MPs to the increasingly important lower house, the House of Commons.\(^11\) However, it is important to note that the dominance of the aristocracy was based on a constitutional government, supported by a parliamentary, electoral system, which involved a large number of the population: between 338 000 and 439 000 persons, or 14-17 % of the adult male population in the late Georgian period.\(^12\) While the ruling aristocracy firmly believed in their right to rule their social inferiors, they also believed that all men were

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\(^7\) Chalus “Gender, place and power”, p. 182.
\(^8\) Kathleen Wilson has argued the late 18\(^{th}\) century saw the development of an ideal citizen who was, male, white and British, see Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture, and imperialism in England, 1715-1785*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), pp. 17-24. McCormack has argued that masculine gender became increasingly important to Georgian notions of citizenship in the latter part of the eighteenth century; citizenship became more gender exclusive, but also more socially inclusive. See McCormack, *Independent Man*, pp. 2-5, 9-10, 202-8. Anna Clark has argued that working class women were excluded from political life during the early 19\(^{th}\) century, see Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), p. 39.
\(^12\) O’Gorman, *Voters*, pp. 2, 178-180.
entitled to certain civil liberties. Liberty of conscience and of worship, equality before the law, and the right of all subjects to petition to the crown all became established principles following the Glorious revolution of 1688. During the eighteenth century, moreover, the freedom of the press increasingly became regarded as a central pillar of British liberties. All these factors were highly important in the creation of a – from a European perspective – uniquely broad, participatory, and vibrant extraparliamentary political culture, which provided a space where the basis of political power, and the boundaries of the political nation could be negotiated.

Visions of a more inclusive parliamentary system were discussed through the Georgian period, though the first step in this direction was not taken until the implementation of the 1832 Reform Act, which extended that franchise to all middle-class men. Particularly important in raising demands for reform was the Wilite movement of the 1760s and 1770s. While the Wilkites failed in their attempts to expand the franchise, they nonetheless managed to initiate a discursive struggle about the meanings of citizenship and political virtue, which would nourish reformers for decades.

In the period leading up to this investigation, the movement for reform again gained momentum, following the French revolution in 1789. During the subsequent 22-year period of war with France, the social and political structure of Britain came under intense pressure due to rapid social and economic changes, accompanied by a number of potent crises of subsistence due to recession and harvest failures. At this time, the British government was led by William Pitt, supported by a broad coalition with a strong Tory backing in parliament, whose followers were referred to as Pittites. The government was most vocally challenged by a group of reformist Whigs led by Charles Fox, whose supporters hence were known as Foxites.

During a 30-year period following the French revolution, British politics would be characterised by a conflict between reformists and loyalists supporting the government. The 1790s saw the establishment of a number of reformist societies, including the influential London Corresponding Society, which was formed by working men and advocated the entrenchment of working-class men. Though loyalist support remained strong, by 1792 the

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13 Dickinson, Politics of the people, p. 5.
14 Wilson, Senses of the people, pp. 3-7 18-24; Dickinson, Politics of the people, 5-7.
activities these societies were beginning to cause serious alarm by the government. Their agendas were seen as an outright threat to position of the elite, prompting the Pittite administration to turn its legislative power against them. In 1794, the Habeus Corpus Act was suspended, meaning that anyone could now be imprisoned indefinitely without a trial. In 1795, mass protests erupted in London against the king and the government, which lead to the implementation of the so called Gagging Acts, which closely restricted the possibility to hold public meetings and extended the definition of treason to include any criticism against the king or government. These measures enabled a crackdown on the reform movement, which was largely forced under ground. Such was the social and political situation at the onset of this investigation.

1.3 Previous research

While there has been a steady interest in the cultural history of the elections, much of the existing literature in this field has not accounted for the integral connection between politics and masculinity. However, cultural historians has done much to revise the descriptions of the voters as thoroughly corrupt and highly deferential towards their superiors, which until the 1980s was prevailing in British historiography. Frank O’Gorman’s work Voter, patrons, parties (1989), was particularly important in undermining this narrative. Here he made a persuasive case arguing that voters were very much aware of their rights and privileges and vigilant in safeguarding these against any attempts of infringement. Thus, power in the Georgian political system did not merely operate top down; the political elite had to consider, and negotiate with, the will of the electorate to maintain their ascendancy.


O’Gorman’s study was immensely important in opening “the teeming underworld of electoral politics” – as he referred to it – for historical research, but is should be noted that he did not use gender as an analytical category, which has been addressed in subsequent research. Much of this has focused on delineating the extent, conditions, and personal experience of women’s involvement in political life. A important conclusion from this research is that women from all levels of society, though formally excluded from most political institutions (like millions of unfranchised men), played an important and socially recognised part in political life. Thus, caution must be exercised to avoid equating political agency with formal political rights, which is highly important in the context of the elections, since they involved much broader groups than the franchised electorate.

Research on politics and masculinity, in contrast, is of more novel brand. While the last decade has seen a surge in the interest of histories of masculinities in the Georgian era, few historians have connected this to the field of politics. There are, however, some notable exceptions, although the emphasis of much of this work has been the Victorian period. Up to this day, there has only been one major study investigating masculinity and Georgian political culture: Mathew McCormack’s The Independent Man. Here McCormack argued that patriarchy was not only fundamental to the organisation of Georgian society, but also crucial to contemporary understandings of citizenship and political virtue. While McCormack has made a monumental contribution to the field of political history by demonstrating the need to connect this field to histories of masculinities, it should be noted that his investigation relies heavily on prescriptive literature. How discourses of citizenship and masculinity informed

24 See, for example: O’Gorman, “Campaign rituals”.
political life at the level of the localities is still largely uncharted territory. In order to achieve this it is necessary to shift the focus from the formation of ideals to the actual doing of politics. In this effort, I will argue, it is highly useful to invest the elections as social practices.

1.4 Theoretical framework
To achieve the aims of this thesis, I use the theoretical framework developed by Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, in *The dynamics of social practice*. The authors argue that in order to understand social change and stability it is essential to focus on social practices. Drawing inspiration from Giddens’s structuration theory, they assert that human activity, and the social structures which shape it, are recursively related. That means, activities are shaped by rules and meanings emanating from social structures, and these structures are, at the same time, reproduced in the flow of human action. Importantly, this flow of human action can neither be reduced to the result of the conscious, voluntary purpose of human actors, nor to the result of determining forces of social structures. Thus, social structures, according to this view, are created and maintained through the repeated actions of human actors.

A social practice, according to Shove, Pantzar and Watson, can be seen as a block or pattern consisting of interdependencies between diverse elements. These include bodily and mental activities, material things and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding and know-how. A practice, thus, exists as a practical conjunction of elements which figures as an entity which can be spoken about and be drawn upon as resource while doing the activities associated with the practice – such as an election. Simultaneously, practices exists as performances. “It is through the performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the ‘pattern’ provided by the practice-as-an-entity is filled out and reproduced”.

Simply put, “practises consists of elements that are bound together through doing”, and, consequently, a practice only exists and endures because of countless recurrent enactments. In order to account for historical stability and change, the authors, thus, make an analytical distinction between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance. This distinction provides

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30 Shove, *Social practice*, p. 3-4
33 Shove, *Social practice* pp. 7. For quotation see p. 40.
a flexible analytical tool, highly useful for this thesis, as it allows me to encompass both enduring features, the structural framework of the parliamentary election, as well as the dynamics of the moment, the doing, the actualisation of these structures in this specific practice.

By performing a practice, the practitioners actively combine the *elements* of which practices are made. These can be collapsed into three categories:

- **Materials**, which includes things, technology, tangible physical entities, and, crucially, the human body itself.
- **Competences**, which includes skills and knowledge about how to use the elements of the practice.
- **Meanings**, which includes symbolic meanings, ideas, and aspirations. This concept is used to denote “the social and symbolic significance of participation [in the practice] at any one moment”.34

Practices emerge, persist, shift, and disappear when *connections* are made between elements of these three types. Certain elements are required to do a certain practice, and if the relationship between these change, so will the practice. This way, elements are mutually shaping; they are interdependent.35

An important advantage to this analytical model, is that it takes seriously the material dimension of practices. As Bruno Latour has forcefully argued, artefacts are not merely “reflecting” society, “as if the “reflected” society existed somewhere else and was made of some other stuff”.36 Material objects are, in fact, a large part of the stuff out of which society is made. Or, to paraphrase Andreas Recwitz: you need a ball in order to play football; certain *material resources* are *indispensable*.37 In sum, what I wish to emphasise here, is the importance of the interaction with the material world in the performance of a practice, and that this interaction, the different ways material objects are employed, profoundly informs its meanings to contemporary practitioners.

While the usefulness of this model, of course, has to be evaluated empirically, it seemingly provides a flexible analytical grid. First, it allows for multiple, co-existing ways of doing a practice depending on the cultural and historical context, at the same time as it

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emphasis the existence of a certain “standardisation” – otherwise it would no longer be possible to speak a practice-as-an-entity (and thus it would no longer exist).\textsuperscript{38} Importantly, this makes it possible to take conflict into consideration. There might be disagreement among different historical actors as to what performing a practice actually entailed, how it should be done, by whom, and what meanings it included. Therefore, focusing on the combination of elements in the election is a way of distinguishing more clearly how this practice was done by the different candidates and where the dividing-lines – if there were any – lay between them.

Second, this model allows for points of connection between different practices. As Shove asserts, different elements circulate between multiple practises. Meanings of masculinity, for example, form part of a vast array of practices, and these points of connections between elements of practices constitutes “a form of connective tissue that holds complex social arrangements in place, and potentially pulls them apart”.\textsuperscript{39} When changes occur in the meanings of masculinity this “sends ripples across the cultural landscape as a whole”, spreading though all points of connection, affecting all practices of which it forms a part.\textsuperscript{40} An additional strength of this model, then, is that it allows for the investigation of a specific practice, while, simultaneously, emphasising that this practice constitutes part of – and affects and is affected by – a complex network of social practices and the social structures to which these are recursively related.

As mentioned above, participation in the parliamentary election was essential to Georgian understandings of masculinity. This thesis aims to explore the performance of the election, a performance which cannot be understood without paying attention to connections with the construction of gender and class. Shove, Pantzar, and Watson argue that practices are crucial in maintaining unequal relations of power. As they put it, practices “generates highly uneven landscapes of opportunity, and vastly unequal patterns of access”.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed, accepting Shoves’ view of the reciprocal relationship between human action and social structures (as I do), by implication, also infers that it is through the performance of social practices, through the flow of human action, that asymmetrical structures, like patriarchy and political power, are maintained. An additional strength of this analytical framework, thus, is the possibility to connect the performance of the election to the workings of unequal power structures in Georgian society.

\textsuperscript{38} Shove, \textit{Social practice}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{39} Shove, \textit{Social practice}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{40} Shove, \textit{Social practice}, pp. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{41} Shove, \textit{Social practice}, p. 135.
1.5 Method

In order to achieve the aims of this thesis, I investigate two parliamentary election contests as social practices, and ask the following questions:

- What strategies were used in the election contest by the competing political factions to recruit followers?
- How did different groups of supporters participate in the election contest? How did this influence the practice of the election?

The first research question is formulated to investigate how different political factions recruited supporters and which strategies they used. It is put, in order to enable me to discuss different ways of doing politics, and which consequences this had to the meanings of the election. Or, using Shove’s conceptual framework, this allows me to compare practices-as-entities to practises-as-performances. The second research question is formulated to enable me to investigate which groups supported the different candidates, and how they displayed their support. This allows me to discuss the significance of supporters and adversaries to the candidates, and the different ways in which these participated in the political process.

In order to investigate the social practice of the election, I use Shove’s analytical distinction between practice-as-entity, and practise-as-performance. To answer questions of how the election was performed I analyse how different actors combined different elements. More specifically I use Shove’s distinction between materials, competences, and meanings, to enable a discussion of the conflicts between different actors about how the election actually should be performed, and what meanings it entailed. The inclusion of materials in this model is particularly helpful as it allows me to include what I will refer to as the hardware of the election into the analysis, viz. the use of political artefacts, the spaces of the city, and, importantly, the bodies of the participants.

Based on Shove’s model of the elements of the election, I create a thematical structure for my investigation, where I discuss the materials, the meanings, and the competences involved in the election contest. On a short note, the contexts of these elections are highly specific, and in order to help the reader I have chosen to discuss these aspects in a different order in each chapter. Moreover, this structure should not be understood as an attempt to sever the ties between the elements of the practice, but rather as a way of analytically shifting the focus between them to help me better answer my research questions.
When discussing recruitment, I will therefore be able to distinguish analytically how materials were used to gain support, how symbolic meanings were used to gain support, and what competences were enacted in this process. When discussing different groups of supporters of the different political factions, this analytical distinction will enable me to discuss how they used the materials of the election, what symbolic meanings participation in the practice evoked for them, and the competences their participation involved. The distinction between recruitment and supporters is intended on a research question level only, in the analysis I investigate both questions simultaneously, in order to encompass the reciprocal relationship between the practitioners of the election.

1.6 Source material

1.6.1 The minutes of evidence

In order to conduct an investigation of the practice of the election contest, I turn my attention to two of the 51 cases of controverted elections in 1802. That is, elections where the result was challenged all the way to the final institution of the Georgian electoral system: the select committee of the House of Commons. In order to prove or disprove accusations of an unlawful election, the rival candidates brought witnesses with them to Westminster to support their cases. A major part of the source material used in this thesis consists of the minutes of evidence from these investigations, which consists of 260 pages from the Middlesex trial and 468 pages from the Nottingham trial.

Since the implementation of the Parliamentary Elections Act 1770, the responsibility for trying controverted elections had been transferred to separate select committees comprised of 15 MPs chosen by the drawing of lots and sworn under oath. The select committee acted both as jury and judges, questioning the witnesses, and – if they found that the freedom of the election had been compromised – could demand a re-run of the election, or even decide to

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42 On controverted elections see O’Gorman, Voters, pp. 164-9. In the 1802 general election 72 out of 245 English constituencies were contested (30 %), see O’Gorman, Voters, p. 109.
43 Philip Lawson, ‘Grenville’s Election Act, 1770’, Historical Research, 53/128 (1980), pp. 218, 228; Sylvester, Douglas Glenbervie, The History of the Controverted Elections part I of IV, (London: 1778), pp. 22-27. 100 MPs were required to be present at the beginning of the selection of the committee. Their names were then written down on pieces of paper, which were put into 6 glasses. The clerk then picked a piece of paper from each glass, consecutively, and delivered this to the Speaker who read them out aloud, until 49 names have been selected. MPs were not allowed to serve on the committee if they had voted in the election, or if they were subject to the petition. The conflicting parties then took turns striking names of the list until the number reached 13. They were then allowed to nominate one MP each from the original list of 49, so that the number of the committee reached 15. From the original 13, who were not nominated by the conflicting parties, the committee then selected a chairman. The merit of the petition was decided by the committee by voting. If the votes were equal, the chairman had the casting vote. See Glenbervie, Controverted Elections, pp. 24-30.
seat the petitioning candidate. Minutes from the committee’s interrogation of the witnesses in the Commons chamber were taken down verbatim by sworn clerks, and included into the printed reports of the committee, containing the result of their investigation. Today, these reports and minutes are stored in the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, which is part of the Parliamentary Archives at Westminster Palace.

Regarding source criticism, there are some circumstances that are important to take into consideration. First, witnesses were called to testify on behalf of the councils of the opposing candidates with the explicit purpose of aiding in proving or disproving accusations of an unlawful election. Second, while the witnesses were interrogated one by one, the councils of the opposing candidates were present in the chamber, and copies of the minutes were given to the candidate’s agents if desired. Lastly, there was a distance in time between the conclusion of the initial election contest and the trial: six months in the case of Nottingham, and two years in the case of Middlesex. Thus, the bias of the individual witnesses, the time aspect, and their position of dependency must be taken into careful consideration when analysing their statements. Nonetheless, as Chalus argued in 2017, persons from all levels of society participated in these trials, and the minutes of their testimonies offers unrivalled access to “the how, where and why of election campaigns”, to the political divisions amongst the inhabitants of the constituencies, and to the gendered power relationships that existed between them. As such, this source material provides a unique possibility to study politics and masculinity at the level of the localities, aspects of Georgian political culture which are poorly understood. Yet this is a source material which has been underused and largely overlooked by historians up to this point.

1.6.2 Selection

In order to achieve the aims of this thesis, I have selected two well documented controverted election cases that began with the 1802 general election, Middlesex and Nottingham. Middlesex is interesting as a London election, conducted close to the political heart of

48Chalus “Gender, place and power”, pp. 190-1, for quotation see p. 191.
Westminster, while Nottingham has been chosen as a contrasting example, as a major provincial town situated in the north, thus adding some geographical spread to this investigation. Thereby I want to enable a discussion about to what extent my results are emanating from the specific local context, and to which extent they might be reflective of larger social and political developments. In the case of Nottingham, I have chosen to follow the contest from its beginning in 1802 until its conclusion in 1802. In the case of Middlesex, I have chosen to delimit this study to the contest during 1802, since there was a two-year hiatus of campaigning activity before the contest resumed in 1804 (due to the renewal of hostilities with France).49

1.6.3 Newspapers

Another valuable source to parliamentary elections is contemporary newspapers, a highly useful material since the press in England was uncensored since the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695.50 Newspapers are important because their coverage of the proceedings of the elections, and they were also an important instrument in the political propaganda. Here candidates and their election committees published addresses to the electors, attempting to sway potential voters and requesting the attendance of their supporters at the hustings (the place of polling). Newspapers were also an important means of communication between the candidate and his supporters, and the time and place of meetings, as well as important developments were advertised here.51 Thus, newspapers can be seen both as sources to the performance of the election contest, as well as an important part of this performance, which underlines the importance of including this type of material into the investigation.

Furthermore, as the reader will notice, certain quotations from the press is written in italics in this investigation. This is because italics were used in the original sources by the authors to indicate the reactions of the crowd to contemporary readers. Due to this attention to the interaction between the candidates and the crowd, I will suggest, newspapers are particularly useful to an investigation of the practice of the election.

As sources to the Middlesex election I rely on London newspapers, digitalised by The Times Digital Archive, and The British Newspaper Archive. For this investigation, I use two of London’s major newspapers The Times and Evening Mail, both with circulations of around 5000 copies a day in the early nineteenth century, which were generally sympathetic to the

49 Fisher, “Middlesex”.
government during this period.\textsuperscript{52} I also use two more oppositional newspapers, the \textit{Morning Post} and the \textit{Morning Chronicle}, which both had a circulation of about 3000 copies a day at this time. \textit{Morning Post} remained oppositional through the 1790s. Though still in favour of parliamentary reform, it became markedly less critical of the government following the invasion scare of 1798, while \textit{Morning Chronicle} remained oppositional through this period.\textsuperscript{53} For the Nottingham election I also rely on the local newspaper the \textit{Nottingham Journal} – stored on microfilm by the British Library – which was sympathetic to the government.\textsuperscript{54} These political alignments, of course, are highly important to take into consideration when analysing newspaper material.

\textit{1.6.4 Images and other printed material}

Other forms of political propaganda have survived as well. The Middlesex election has left a range of visual materials, in the form of etchings which are now stored in the collections of the British Museum. The use of printed materials increased rapidly during the later Georgian period; they were important to the strategies of candidates and their committees, and were designed and produced to achieve specific aims. Images formed an important part of this propaganda effort, and were appreciated by those participating in politics for their efficiency in carrying “simple and succinct” messages to a large audience.\textsuperscript{55} Moreover, satirical images could be used as “offensive weapons” by candidates to discredit their opponents.\textsuperscript{56} As such, the offer valuable insight into the strategies used to recruit followers. In the case of the Nottingham election, the most important source to the political propaganda is \textit{The paper war}. A collection which contains most of the printed materials produced during this contest – nearly 400 pages of addresses, squibs, handbills, and election ballads, which was reprinted and sold by publisher W. & M. Turner – an indication of the public interest this contest attracted.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 52 Barker, \textit{Newspapers}, pp. 32, 111, 182.
\item 53 Barker, \textit{Newspapers}, pp. 32, 70, 190.
\item 56 Blomgren, “Shew yourself as men”, see in particular, pp. 12-3, 15-6.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
1.7 The constituencies:

In this section I will give a brief background on the two selected constituencies. What is important to be aware of when reading this investigation is their respective franchise types, since this governed who were eligible to take part in the election as voters. However, many franchise types operated simultaneously prior to the 1832 reform act, which were influenced by local traditions.\(^{58}\) Therefore, I will provide a short explanation of the franchises operating in Nottingham and Middlesex, as well as a short overview of the cause of events, to aid the reader.

1.7.1 Middlesex

The county of Middlesex, largely absorbed into eastern London due to rapid urbanisation, had an electorate of around 6000 and a county franchise, meaning technically that men in possession of a freehold property worth more than 40 s (£ 2) per annum related to the land tax assessment were entitled to the vote. However, this was traditionally given a broad interpretation to include other sources of income as well.\(^{59}\) In the case of the highly-urbanised Middlesex, this inferred that a large proportion of voters were minor tradesmen, artisans, and merchants, rather than landowners. In 1802, the Tory government supporter Mr. William Mainwaring’s seat in parliament was challenged by Sir Francis Burdett – an oppositional Foxite Whig – who successfully defeated him in a narrow contest.\(^{60}\) However, Mainwaring petitioned to parliament, arguing that the returning officers had unduly admitted votes in Burdett’s favour. The select committee found these accusations warranted, but also found that Mainwaring had been guilty of illegal treating of voters. Therefore, a re-run of the election was ordered in 1804, in which Mainwaring’s son George defeated Burdett by a margin of only five votes.\(^{61}\)

\(^{58}\) On, the franchises types of the Georgian electoral system prior to the 1832 reform act see. O’Gorman, Voters, chapter 2.

\(^{59}\) Fisher, ”Middlesex”. On the county franchise, see O’Gorman, Voters, p. 59.


\(^{61}\) Fisher, ”Middlesex”. 

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1.7.2 Nottingham

Nottingham at the time of this investigation was dominated by commercial and business families, who had become wealthy due to the rise of the town’s textile industries.\(^62\) It had an electorate of about 4000, and a mixed franchise type, entitling 40 s. freeholders, as well as freemen – also called burgesses – of the town. The latter group could be entered through the servitude of an apprenticeship, which meant that many of Nottingham’s textile workers were entitled to the vote. Thus, Nottingham had a broad electorate consisting of both working men and landowners.\(^63\) The town had long been characterised by a political conflict between the Nottingham Whigs, who dominated the corporation, and the Nottingham Tories (known as the True Blues) who were backed by the county aristocracy.\(^64\) In the 1802 election, the government supporter Mr. Daniel Parker Coke was defeated by Mr. Joseph Birch, a Foxite Whig and a wealthy Liverpool merchant. However, Coke petitioned to parliament, arguing that the freedom of election had been destroyed by acts of violence targeted towards his voters, and that the corporation had neglected to secure peace and order. The select committee found these accusations warranted and ordered a re-run of the election, but not before a piece of special legislation called Daniel Parker Coke Act had been passed. This enabled the Tory, county magistrates to override the jurisdiction of the town’s Whig corporation, ostensibly to secure the peace, but as the oppositional politician Charles Fox argued in a House of Commons debate, this also allowed those loyal to the government to better control the outcome of the election. In the 1803 re-election Birch was defeated by Coke by a margin of 200 votes.\(^65\)

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\(^{64}\) Symonds and Thorne, “Nottingham”.

\(^{65}\) Symonds and Thorne, “Nottingham”. 
Chapter 2. The 1802 Middlesex election

2.1 Meanings

In this section I focus the symbolic significance of participation in the 1802 Middlesex election. By turning the attention to the election-as-performance, I suggest that Burdett’s campaign actively sought to link participation in this contest to understandings of patriarchal duties. Middlesex’s electors were urged as independent men to step up against his opponent Mainwaring to protect their dependants, who was under threat from the system of government which he represented. In this project, Cold Bath prison was used as a powerful symbol which enabled a discussion about the consequence of living under an increasingly authoritarian regime. The freeholders supporting Burdett believed that their constitutional rights had been infringed by the government, something they held Mainwaring accountable for, thereby indicating a clear political consciousness. Thus, to Burdett’s supporters this was a contest for the rights of the electors, and the rights of all English people.

2.1.1 The symbols of Cold Bath prison and Mary Rich

Figure 1. A View of the House of Correction in Cold Bath Fields. Illustration to the European Magazine 1798, BM Crace 1878 XXXII.35, ©Trustees of the British Museum. St. Paul’s cathedral can be seen in the background to the right.
Burdett’s campaign in the 1802 Middlesex election was intimately connected to the public controversy surrounding Cold Bath Fields prison (see Figure 1.), one of London’s major political controversies during this period. For this reason, some contextualisation is needed. Burdett had in 1797 made a name for himself as an MP by calling public attention to the
allegedly horrible conditions the prisoners were subject to. His opponent, Mainwaring was directly responsible for its management of the prison as a magistrate and chairman of the quarter sessions, and already prior to this election, Burdett had publicly attacked him for his involvement. In 1797, reports of abuses towards the inmates were beginning to reach public attention, and interest increased further in 1798 when 22 working class reformers from the London Corresponding Society and one of its sub-branches, were imprisoned here for their political beliefs. After the death of a fellow prisoner, these men contacted Burdett, urging him to investigate the conditions of the prison. Burdett visited Cold Bath several times (see Figure 2) before being banned from entry by the duke of Portland. Affected by his first-hand impressions, he joined the efforts to ameliorate the conditions in the prison. He soon became the main figure in this struggle, and raised the tone of the debate further by calling for an independent inquiry in the Commons, and by publishing a pamphlet containing witness reports from the prisoners. This context was highly important to the performance of the 1802 election, and the Cold Bath question would become crucial to the symbolic understandings of participations to those actors involved.

Already prior to the 1802 election there existed a strong local resentment towards the treatment of the prisoners of Cold Bath, something which Burdett must have been aware of since he was instrumental in evoking it. The symbol of the prison and the fate of the inmates were put to use to delineate the principle nature of this contest. In Burdett’s nomination speech at the hustings of Brentford – the county town – in front of crowd consisting of voters as well as a large number of unfanchised persons. According to a reporter from the Evening News he incited “an extraordinary sensation of rage” among “the Populace” when reminding them of the cruelties of the prison. In this speech, he also proposed to bring forward a first-hand witness – to which a “burst” of “general indignation” went through the crowd. This witness was Mr. Rich, the father of Mary Rich.

Among the cases of mistreatment Burdett had exposed in his pamphlet, the case of Mary Rich had caused the strongest resentment. Mary was a 14-year-old who was imprisoned after accusing a lawyer of attempted rape. It was common practice in the English eighteenth century legal system to imprison poor witnesses until the trial, while those actually prosecuted

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69 Evening Mail 14 July 1802.
could remain free if they could afford to post bail. As observed by Christina Parolini, Mary’s appearance in court after one month’s time at Cold Bath caused a sensation. Deathly pale and crippled from starvation, she testified to the jury that she had been fed only water and bread, and that she had been left with scanty bed coverings in a freezing cell without glazed windows or even a fireplace. In response to the accusations of neglect, the Middlesex magistrates had successfully argued, when charged with investigating the conditions of the prison, that Mary – coming from an already poor and destitute family – was already accustomed to the conditions she experienced in the prison. Therefore, her treatment did not constitute neglect. This was also the line of argumentation used by Mainwaring in the following debate in the Commons.

Prior to the nomination ceremony, Burdett’s campaign had distributed pamphlets containing Mary’s story among the crowd, in what appears to have been a carefully organised action to antagonise the inhabitants against Mainwaring. The Mary Rich case was used presumably because Burdett’s campaign believed this would be efficient in securing support for their candidate. Possibly, the reason for this was that Mary’s story played on the elector’s sense of responsibility as independent men, which was fundamentally connected to their status as household patriarchs. As such, it was their obligation to represent and protect their dependents – blood kin and servants alike. As Wilson pointedly has argued, male political subjectivity rested not only on property, and contributions to the state through taxes, but also on property in wives, daughters, and children. In this way, these cases were used to connect participation in this contest to understandings of patriarchal duties. Or, in other words, the symbolic significance of participation – according to Burdett’s campaign – connoted the defence of dependent individuals in need of protection.

2.1 2 The constitution and parliamentary reform

The symbols of Cold Bath and the Rich case were central to Burdett’s election strategy, and appears to have been employed very effectively to mobilise many inhabitants of Middlesex against Mainwaring. But what meanings did these symbols have more specifically? Ann Hone has suggested that Cold Bath prison acted as a symbol of government oppression to London radicals. While this was certainly the case, I will argue there is more to the story than that.

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70 Ignatieff, Measure of pain, p. 133.
71 Parolini, Radical spaces, pp. 53, 78.
72 The Times 14 July 1802.
73 Wilson, Sense of the people, p. 225. See also McCormack, Independent man, p. 19.
Burdett, in an address to the electors, proclaimed: “Gentlemen [...] I assert that secret imprisonment, secret trial, and secret execution are the never failing engines of oppression and tyranny”.75 Moreover, Breton, the freeholder who seconded Burdett’s nomination, compared the victims of the prison to the victims of Robespierre’s rule of terror. The only difference, he claimed, was that while Robespierre’s victims “were publicly and violently put to death” the lives of the inmates of Cold Bath were “exhausted by slow and cruel means, amidst the darkness of the dungeons of that place, in order to afford a pretext for saying they perished by a natural death”.76 In these declarations, the right to a fair and open trial was held as a defining characteristic of British liberties which was now under attack, threatening to turn the country into a tyranny like France. Burdett also criticised the government for the suspension of habeus corpus, which meant that anyone now could be detained indefinitely without trial.77 This, then, I will suggest, was the very thing which the solitary cells of Cold Bath symbolised to Burdett and his followers: tyranny, which was a reality that was about to become true – and to some extent had already become – true due to the government’s crackdown on political opponents.

As Burdett asserted in his victory speech, what was at stake in this election was English liberties – not just those of the electors of Middlesex, but the liberties of everyone in the Kingdom:

My own share in this contest I most cheerfully undergo, assuring you that I shall never think any personal sacrifice of mine too great to assist in restoring our Country to its former freedom [...] I love my family like other men; but if driven to the alternative, I had much rather that my Children and Posterity should be poor, in a free and flourishing country, than rich in an enslaved and improvised kingdom. I love my country well [...] but I had much rather it should be annihilated than enslaved.78

The struggle against Cold Bath – and consequently the entire Middlesex election – in this way, was presented as a struggle against tyranny and for the reinstatement of the constitution rights of all English people. Moreover, on a principal level, this election was a struggle between freedom and slavery, a message which implied a threat to the masculinity of the voters. If Mainwaring won the election they would lose their independence, and – as slaves – be forced to submit to the authority of other men, confining them to the effeminate position of dependency. The emphasis placed on the inferences of the government’s crackdown to the

75 The Times, 30 July 1802.
76 Morning Post, 14 July 1802.
78 The Times, 30 July 1802; Morning Post, 30 July 1802.
masculinity of the voters in the Burdettite propaganda is noteworthy. This should be seen within in a context were the quality of independence was considered inherent in all true Englishmen in an almost racial sense, and was believed to include a unique consciousness of liberty and personal freedom, which the political and legal system upheld. Indeed, Burdett addressed the voters as “Freeholders, country-men and fellow-men”, and urged them, as “honest freeborn Englishmen” to return him to Parliament. On a symbolical level, thus, the struggle for English liberties, against the system of tyranny which Cold Bath represented was actively linked to such contemporary understandings of masculinity.

Burdett’s campaign is also interesting because of the solution proposed to save the country from these “terrible changes” made by the government to the constitution. Burdett, argued, as he was declaring his candidacy to the freeholders in a newspaper address, that this could be achieved by “one means only [...] fair representation of the people in Parliament”. Moreover, he claimed that Middlesex was “more free, informed, and independent, than any other county in England” and asked them to entrust in him “a portion of their present small and inadequate share of [the] representation”. Thus, already at the onset of the election Burdett established himself as an advocator of parliamentary reform. This message was also conveyed to the voters and other members of the community in prints, as seen in Figure 3, where Burdett is seen proclaiming "I'll never desert the Poor nor Parliamentary reform" to the electors. On a principle level this was not only as an election for, or against, Cold Bath, Mainwaring, and the government, but also as an election for or against parliamentary reform. Although it should be observed that exactly what this reform ought to entail is not known. Nonetheless, the sentiment in his declaration of candidacy was clear. The people of Middlesex was not fairly represented in parliament, and this needed to be changed.

Questions about the rights of the English people and of the nature of the constitution also appears to have been highly important to the electors. Burdett was asked to stand candidate for Middlesex in address signed by 19 freeholders, who asserted their sympathies for Burdett’s struggle for prisoners’ rights. As they put it: “As Englishmen, we concur in your abhorrence of the use and management of such a prison as that in Cold Bath Fields”. It is noteworthy that the freeholders not only objected to how the prison was run, but also to how it was used. Although they did not specify what usage they specifically referred to in this

79 McCormack, Independent man, pp. 2-3.
80 *Evening Mail* 14 July 1802.
81 *The Times*, 29 June 1802.
82 *The Times*, 29 June 1802.
address, an important clue might be gathered from the speech of Mr. Breton at the nomination ceremony. According to a reporter from the *Morning Post,* this freeholder caused “a terrible outcry” from Mainwaring’s supporters, and particularly from the magistrates who had positioned themselves near their candidate, when he accused Mainwaring of having supported the government in undermining the liberties of the people by supporting Pitt’s Gagging Acts.\(^83\)

This, then, was the usage Burdett and his ally Mr. Breton referred to: the imprisonment of political opponents, which, they argued, undermined their constitutional rights as Englishmen. The strong symbolic connection made between the prison and the Gagging Acts is noteworthy. This legislation threatened to turn them into felons, threatened to turn them into the horribly abused prisoners confined to the solitary cells of Cold Bath. The gagging acts, in effect, prevented them from acting independently, forcing them to bend to the will of the government, even rendering them helpless to defend themselves and their dependants, and restricted their rights and privileges as freeholders. The gagging acts, in this way, can be seen as an attack on their status as independent men, upon which their claims to manliness were contingent.

O’Gorman has argued that the unreformed electorate was highly vigilant in defending their rights and privileges, and highly assertive in questions concerning the leadership of their local communities. In this way, voters exhibited what he refers to as a strong “informal political conciseness”. Though in most constituencies voters were largely ignorant in questions of national political importance and political philosophy.\(^84\) Conversely, H. T. Dickinson has argued that most voters during the 18th century were primarily concerned with local issues. For most people, local loyalties and local concerns were paramount, and the political elite had no wish to bring national divisions into the election contest.\(^85\) According to these authors, then, all politics in this period was primarily *local politics.* An argument which I will suggest fits poorly with the performance of the 1802 Middlesex election. Clearly, concerns with the conduct of the Middlesex magistrates were of importance, however, there was more at stake than the leadership of the county. Meanings of Englishness, liberty, and masculinity were incorporated into this election by electors supporting Burdett, thereby connecting the fate of those imprisoned at Cold Bath to the fate of the country as a whole. Rather than being merely about local affairs, the Middlesex election was connected to

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\(^83\) *Morning Post,* 14 July 1802.
\(^84\) O’Gorman, *Voters,* p. 224.
\(^85\) Dickinson, *Politics of the people,* p. 49.
questions about parliamentary reform, the rights of the people, and the nature of the constitution. Questions which clearly mattered to the electors.

2.2 Materials

In this section I will investigate how material resources, such as political artefacts, were used by those participating in the social practice of the election. Turning the attention to the election-as-performance – to the actions of the participants – suggest that there existed two distinct ways of doing politics. While Mainwaring sought to create a display of elite support, Burdett eagerly rallied the support of lower-class people, and attempted to construct himself as their champion. In this project material strategies were crucial. By using a range of visual devises, such as prints, banners, and effigies, he sought to demonstrate that his was on their side against their magistrates, who had caused much resentment due to their cruel treatment of the inmates of Cold Bath prison. Conversely, many lower-class people actively chose to support Burdett. By using a range of material resources, notably their own bodies adorned with cockades in Burdett’s dark-blue colours, they protested against their magistrates, and created a massive visual display of support for Burdett. This was important in legitimising Burdett’s political claims, which serves to emphasise the reciprocal relationship between different practitioners of the election.

2.2.1 Making links to Cold Bath

On the morning of the nomination day, 13 of July 1802, Burdett set off from his Piccadilly home in London towards the hustings at Brentford with around fifty carriages filled with his supporters. The election procession on the nomination day was central to the election contest as the ceremonial entry of the candidates into the constituency. It was the culmination of the early part of the election campaign, and candidates regularly pushed their organisations to the limit in order to make an impressive impact on the inhabitants. Using the concepts of practice theory, this was one of the key elements which constituted the practice of the election-as-entity.

In Burdett’s procession, a range of material resources were used to mobilise political support by creating an impressive visual and audial display. Burdett himself was positioned in a post-chaise and four, the horses decorated with dark-blue ribbons in their manes. The coachmen on the carriages in his following were also bedecked in his dark-blue favours, and a

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86 *Morning Post*, 14 July 1802.
87 O’Gorman, “Campaign rituals”, p. 86.
band of music was playing. Three men on horseback carried dark-blue silk flags, on with the words “No Bastille” was inscribed in gold letters. As a reporter from *The Times* observed, the whole procession road was lined with Burdett’s male and female supporters, who chanted “no Bastille” and “no Governor Aris” as the procession moved forward with a gentle trot. *The Bastille* was the local nickname for Cold Bath, and Thomas Aris was the name of its governor, who had earned an infamous reputation due to his brutality towards the inmates. In this way, Burdett used political artefacts to connect his election campaign to his existing struggle for the rights of the prisoners of Cold Bath, which was here joined by many inhabitants of London.

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**Figure 3 Two pair of candidates proposed to the independant electors of Middlesex.** (12 July 1802, hand-coloured etching) BM Satires 9878 ©Trustees of the British Museum.

88 *Morning Post*, 14 July 1802; *Evening Mail* 14 July 1802.
89 *The Times*, 14 July 1802.
90 In particular, Aris caused much suffering among the prisoners by cutting back on their rations, leaving them to subsist on bread and water, and by extensively using solitary confinement as punishment for misbehaviour. See Ignatief, *Measure of pain*, pp. 126-129.
In this project, Burdett’s campaign also used printed images, as seen in Figure 3, an etching titled “Two pair of candidates proposed to the independent electors” which was published on July 12, one day before the formal beginning of the election. Here four men stand on the hustings at Brentford, with four spectators standing below. To the left stand George Byng and Burdett. Byng holds a fragment in each hand, inscribed “[Bas]tile”, from a large “Plan of the Bastile” on which he and Burdett are standing. Burdett holds up a “Motion to Suppress Bastiles and all rigorous treatment”. On the right, placarded as: “a Humane Good Pair” are Mainwaring, sour-looking and plainly dressed, and Aris, depicted as a ruffianly jailor holding two large keys. Mainwaring has his left hand on the governor’s shoulder, thereby physically linking them together, and says: "My Friend Govr Aris Gentlemen". Aris is depicted as extending his clenched left fist towards a thin man in shackles standing to the right, on the steps leading to the hustings. He says: "Pray Governor let me have a bit of Straw to lie on". Aris answers: "You shall have a good flogging you Scoundrel", thereby alluding to his reputation for brutality towards his inmates. Moreover, the man in shackles to the right in is likely intended as reference to the mutineers imprisoned here, since he is wearing a sailor’s dress. This indicates that this group had become a recognisable political symbol, which, in this image was used to attack Mainwaring and Aris for their conduct.

This picture, I argue, illustrates a central plank of the Burdettite propaganda, that Mainwaring was so closely associated with Aris that a vote for the former was essentially the same as voting for the latter. During his campaign, Burdett asserted to the electors that “the ground on which I came forward to oppose Mr. Justice Mainwaring is, his conduct with respect to the Prison”, and if he was elected he promised to “persevere in bringing forward the wickedness practiced in the Bastille”. Indeed, he even claimed that the election was “not a question whether you will support me or Mr. Mainwaring, but whether you will support that scandalous gaol”.

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91 A Foxite Whig who was the other sitting member for Middlesex. However, there was no formal challenger to his seat in this contest, see Fisher “Middlesex”; Moring Post, 14 July, 1802.
92 Evening Mail 14 July 1802.
93 Evening Mail 14 July 1802.
The motif of Mainwaring misusing his magisterial powers was further used by Burdett’s campaign in visual representations (Figure 4). Mainwaring is here depicted dressed in brown leaning from the window of a carriage. He is surrounded on each side by constables holding long staves with decorated tops. Behind the constables to the right are men hurling large stones, mud, and dead cats at the roof of the carriage where Aris sits with his legs framing the window. He holds out a knotted whip and shackles labelled “Bread and Water too good fare for Vagrants and Evidences”. This most likely a reference to the vagrants imprisoned to do hard work. Evidences most likely refers to the destitute witnesses which were imprisoned here, among which Mary Rich was the most well-known. Mainwaring shouts: "Take them up! send them to the Bastile Flog them! starve them out - ". Aris says: "Aye only bring some of those Middlesex Electors to me & I'll warrant You I'll tame them they shall Hollow for Bread if they are able to Hollow at all, You'll support me w'ont you my Friend Inside." The electors

94 See Ignatieff, Measure of pain, p. 131.
besetting his carriage shout “No Bastile, no tortures, no Cruelty and no starvation, dont pretend to defend cruelty and then Sculk away when put to the test.” Thereby Mainwaring was accused of sneaking away when asked to defend his conduct; he is not acting as a man of principle. The ideal of the independent man, as argued by McCormack, promoted a mode of masculinity in which, bluffness, honesty and straightforwardness were emphasised.95 For this reason, not standing for your actions would have been perceived by contemporaries as a grave character fault, and as a very unmanly behaviour. Moreover, this image can be seen as part of a strategy to connect the Middlesex contest to understandings of manly virtue: The male inhabitants of Middlesex have turned to the streets to drive away their cruel magistrate and his prison governor by a volley of missiles.

2.2.2 A drunken disorderly mob

![Figure 5. Elocution at Brentford, or Middlesex comedians. (July 1802). BM Satires 9880 ©Trustees of the British Museum](image)

Printed images were also used by Mainwaring’s campaign to counter Burdett’s attacks on their political legitimacy. In Figure 5, Burdett (on the right) is depicted as stooping, with both

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arms raised and fists clenched, shouting at Mainwaring (to the far left) and governor Aris (holding a bunch of keys). They are drawn as standing together turning away but looking sideways at the Burdett, who is seen declaiming an incoherent smattering of accusations. Burdett’s appearance in this picture merits attention. He is depicted as slim man, fashionably dressed, with tight-fitting breeches, tail-coat, choker cravat, and tasselled Hessians, thereby probably suggesting his character was flawed by presumptuous vanity. In this way, Burdett was attacked for being weak, foolish and vain, characters which was associated with women and the lower sort: people who were deemed incapable of the rationality and steadiness required of virtuous political actors. Burdett, thus, was not a worthy political subject, and his accusations merely the rambles of a lunatic. As Mainwaring asserts: "Mercy on us, how he foams - he certainly ought to be committed." Aris says: "I wish I had you my Lad - in one of my little commodius [sic] appartments - I'd teach you to abuse tender hearted Gentlemen." Rather than being fit to lead, Burdett belongs better with the inmates whose cause he espoused.

The appearance of Mainwaring and Aris, in contrast to Burdett, is striking. They stand with their feet wide apart in resolute posture, not bending to the threats and accusations thrown at them by Burdett. Their dress is plain and old fashioned, like country gentlemen, resembling the national personification figure of John Bull. To Georgian contemporaries, the body was absolutely essential in the performance of citizenship; who was a worthy defender of the constitution could be seen in the speech, the body, the dress and the declamatory style of those engaging in politics. Thus, the corporal rendition of the candidates in this image clearly suggested to the viewer that Mainwaring, and not Burdett, was a worthy political subject.

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Mainwaring’s interest also sought to discredit Burdett by attacking his supporters. *Figure 6* depicts Burdett together with some of the leading espousers of his campaign including Fox (looking startled at the devil) as well as grotesquely dense crowd of his followers, at the hustings at Brentford.\(^98\) The fact that Burdett eagerly espoused, and was eagerly supported by, a large number of lower class people is here turned against him. These group (in front of the hustings) is depicted as a disorderly mob, two men fight with their fists, while others are drinking heavily. Moreover, two men are adorned with liberty caps (left of the No-Bastille flag, and to the right of the staircase, raising the cap above his head). The liberty caps, died in red, with a cockade in red, white and blue, was a symbol of the Jacobins, and a clear manifestation that the wearer was sympathetic to the ideals of the French revolution.\(^99\)

\(^{98}\) For further information on those depicted see George Dorothy, “Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum” (1947), VIII.

This theme of Mainwaring’s propaganda can also be seen in Figure 7, depicting an election dinner for Burdett’s supporters at the Crown and Anchor tavern. On the table is a large punch-bowl, glasses, and many empty bottles, and Burdett, seemingly intoxicated, stands by the left corner of the table, shouts, and waves his hat. On the walls are four busts on brackets, named “Mirabeau” (the former chairman of the Jacobin Club), “Talleyrand (the French foreign minister and diplomat)”, “Buonaparte [sic.]”, “[Arthur] O Conner (a leading figure in the Irish rebellion of 1798) thereby linking Burdett to the French, as well as traitors working with them to undermine the country. By the use of such visual materials, Burdett’s supporters were depicted as a, drunken, disorderly, and even traitorous group, rather than manly defenders of the British constitution. As indicated by these prints, an important way of attacking the political credibility of an opponent, was to attack the legitimacy of his supporters, emphasising the reciprocity of their relationship.
The visual presentation of Burdett in Mainwaring’s propaganda can be contrasted to visual representations by Burdett’s own campaign. As seen in Figure 8, Burdett was depicted as tall, long-legged, and athletic, wearing, hessians, tight fitting trousers, a tail coat and a top-hat adorned with an election cockade. As Karen Harvey has argued, clothing can be seen as an
integral part of the performance of masculinity; it is a key way in which masculinity is projected. Moreover, Harvey asserts that by the end of the 18th century, changes in the way men dressed accrued to men a new public authority, based on an emphasis of the male autonomy and on masculinity as intrinsically embodied. Clothing was immensely important to contemporaries; the variety available in men’s clothing allowed the expression of a multitude of meanings – not only about social status, but also about character traits, and male homosocial bonds. Something which Georgian men were acutely aware of. Particularly, a powerful constellation of meanings connoting to male beauty and power accrued to the male leg, which at this time became increasingly exposed through legwear, creating an increased consciousness of the male form.100 As observed by Anne Hollander the late eighteenth century saw a: “a new genital emphasis”, as reproductive potency came to play an increasingly important role in representations of masculinity.101 Men’s breeches and waistcoats gave the impression of long-leggedness, emphasising the prominence of the genitals.102 This was a fashion with clear political implications as *virtus* comprehended masculine virility as well as public virtue.103

McCormack has argued that citizenship during the 18th century gradually became more socially *inclusive*, but also more gender *exclusive*, and, thus, more identified with maleness itself.104 Citizenship, crucially, became seen as embodied. This image, then, can be seen as a part of a project to construct Burdett as a virtuous politician, who, through his superior social status, manly vigour and attractiveness to women is capable to defend the independence of the citizens of Middlesex. While Burdett, through this bodily representation is depicted as a defender of the rights of the electors, this image also makes clear that he is higher up on the social ladder; he is fighting *for* them, but he is emphatically not one *of* them.

2.2.3 Colours and cockades

Newspaper reports indicated that Burdett was supported by a broader segment of the population. The *Morning Post*, when assessing the strength of the two factions prior to the election concluded that “the populace was almost universally enthusiastic in [...] favour” of Burdett while Mainwaring, in contrast was claimed to be better known among “the

Electors”\textsuperscript{105}. Burdett is, thus, described as having the support of \textit{the populace} which is used in the sense of the unfranchised inhabitants. They are juxtaposed to \textit{the electors}, which the newspaper regarded as more likely to support Mainwaring. Burdett appears to have eagerly espoused the support of this group, while Mainwaring’s campaign appears to have made no such efforts. By turning the attention to the practise-as-performance, I wish to suggest, that Mainwaring’s campaign chose a different strategy to recruit support – they did politics in quite a different way.

Mainwaring’s entry into Brentford at the nomination day was described by the \textit{Morning Post} as, “in nearly the same style as Sir Francis except with the differences [...] that he was received with hisses instead of huzzas” by “the populace”. However, it was also noted that “a considerable number of friends” had gathered and accompanied him to the hustings under great acclamations. Particularly, the reporter notes that there “were a great number of Magistrates, and Gentlemen of property” among his supporters.\textsuperscript{106} As the reporter from \textit{The Times} confirmed, he was created with “the applauses of numbers of respectable people”\textsuperscript{107}

Furthermore, while the clear majority of those who were out on the streets during the election possessions, according to the newspaper reports, were supporting Burdett, it was also noted that “A great number of Gentlemen’s coaches were seen on the road with Mr. Mainwaring’s cockades”.\textsuperscript{108} The ownership of carriages and horses, as F.M.L Thompson has asserted, was emblematic as symbols of the wealth and power of the landed classes, and served as idioms of elite status.\textsuperscript{109} Thus, this use of material resources created a display, which to contemporaries would have indicated a strong backing from elite individuals. The reports of the visual presence of the supporters of the respective candidates, thus, supports the image of Mainwaring as an establishment candidate, which also is supported by studies of the pollbook.\textsuperscript{110}

Burdett, in contrast, appears to have been emphatically favoured among those from the lower end of the social scale. When describing the nomination procession, the reporter for the

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Morning Post}, 14 July 1802.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Morning Post}, 14 July 1802.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Evening Mail} 14 July 1802. See also \textit{The Times}, 14 July 1802.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{The Times}, 14 July 1802.
\textsuperscript{110} Of 77 clergymen, 68 voted for Mainwaring, and 8 for Burdett; of 33 baronets and knights, 29 voted for Mainwaring, and two for Burdett; of 64 prebendaries of Westminster and employees and dependants of the government, 60 voted for Mainwaring and four for Burdett; and of 44 Members of Parliament at the dissolution of 1802, 33 voted for Mainwaring, while 10, all of them Foxite Whigs, voted for Burdett. See Fisher,” Middlesex”. 36
*Morning Post* noted – apparently with some fascination – that “dark-blue cockades, decorated almost every person, while those of the other Candidate[s], light-blue and orange for Mr. Byng, and light blue only for Mr. Mainwaring could scarcely be seen”.111 Election cockades (see *Figure 8*), as observed by Katrina Navickas, were clearly visible, instantly recognisable symbols of political loyalty, which could be easily made and distributed in large numbers. To the inhabitants of the parliamentary constituencies, the act of adorning oneself with an election cockade, enabled non-voters as well as voters to “instantly participate [...] in the extraparliamentary political process”.112 Election committees and their candidates generally attached a huge significance to this visual display, and exerted themselves in promoting such material emblems as widely as possible.113 Election cockades, thus, was highly important material resources in the performance of the election. In Middlesex, the press reports indicate that many lower-class people, through the act of carrying a cockade, chose to make themselves into practitioners of the election contest, and supporters of Burdett’s campaign. As The Times’s reporter sneeringly observed, Burdett’s “cockades, of dark blue, were liberally distributed among the mob; and there was not a jack-ass-driver from Kent-street, or link-boy from the Hundreds of Drury, that did not sport this badge”.114

Interestingly, the press attached significance, not only to the social status of Burdett’s supporters, but also to their gender. A reporter from The Times described the road from Piccadilly to Brentford as lined with Burdett’s supporters, who chanted “no Bastille” and “no Governor Aris”, and noted that they consisted of both males and females.115 Or as the reporter of the *Morning Post* observed, Burdett was greeted by “The maids and servants of the houses [...] all turned out (their masters and mistresses not being up)”. In particular, the reporter emphasised, “the lower classes” and “the women” were “violent in his favour”.116 The reporter from The Times likewise observed that “All the lower orders of people” received him with applauds and loud cries of “No Bastille”.117 Thus, considerable numbers of lower class people – men and women alike – were out on the streets and actively chose to support Burdett and his campaign against the inhumane treatment of the prisoners at Cold Bath.

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111 *Morning Post*, 14 July 1802.
114 *The Times*, 14 July 1802.
115 *The Times*, 14 July 1802.
116 *Morning Post*, 14 July 1802.
117 *The Times*, 14 July 1802, see also *Evening Mail* 14 July 1802.
This group used material elements of the elections, dark-blue cockades, and, importantly, their own bodies, to display their grievances towards Mainwaring *en masse* on the street, as a mass of bodies adorned in blue, thereby creating a massive display of visual support for Burdett. Thus, many members of a group which, in the words of Wilson, has been described as “out-of-doors” of the political nation, excluded from citizenship, were essential in constructing Burdett as the “Vox Populi”, as he was denoted in a medallion hung in laurel decorated festoons across the Strand in central London during his victory parade.\(^{118}\) Moreover, since popular consent was essential in legitimising political claims in Britain, this type of participation might be seen as important in legitimising Burdett as a worthy political subject.\(^{119}\) Conversely, Burdett, through his campaign for prisoners’ right and critique of their magistrates arguably gave some legitimising notion to the participation of lower-class people and their display of their grievances, emphasising the reciprocal relationship between different practitioners of the election.

Women from the higher end of the social scale also had a clear visual presence throughout the contest. *The Times*, in their report of the victory parade, stated that in many of the “most respectable houses […] the windows were filled with beautiful, well-dressed women” who waved handkerchiefs and ribbons in Burdett’s deep blue colours as the procession passed by. Moreover, the reporter commented, “some of the less polished damsels vociferated from their windows – “Burdett for ever, and No Bastille”\(^ {120}\) Also at the hustings there were “Ladies” present, listening to the speeches of the candidates. They were positioned at the stairs leading to the sheriffs both, which would have given them an elevated position, making them visible to the crowd.\(^ {121}\) *The Times* also reported of “Ladies” participating in Burdett’s victory procession, riding in their carriages \(^ {122}\), while the *Morning Post* commented on the many aristocratic women attending the candidates home in celebration of his victory.\(^ {123}\) As McCormack has asserted, an important way of creating a powerful political persona was to be seen in the company of female supporters. This was connected to the emergence of a new code of masculinity in the late Hanoverian period, which placed increased importance on virility as qualification for manliness.\(^ {124}\) These women, then, participated in the extra-

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\(^{118}\) *Morning Post*, 30 July 1802.

\(^{119}\) Wilson, *Sense of the people*, p. 18.

\(^{120}\) *The Times*, 30 July 1802.

\(^{121}\) MM, p. 29.

\(^{122}\) *The Times*, 30 July 1802.

\(^{123}\) *Morning Post*, 31 July 1802. Among these were the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Morphet, Lady Cavendish, and Lady Forster.

parliamentary procession by adorning themselves with Burdett’s dark-blue favours, and by using other material resources like their dress and their carriages to demonstrate their support. Crucially, the quality of their clothing, and their use of carriages, created a visual – sometimes auditable – display of support emanating from respectable individuals from the higher end of the social scale.

2.2.4 Bodies that matter: the Middlesex electoral theatre

Lower-class people also participated in the Middlesex election by performing a variety of other political actions, for which the treatment of the prisoners at Cold Bath served as the major source of inspiration. At the nomination ceremony, two large hand bills were displayed. On one of them was an image representing Burdett “with a pot of porter on a haycock, peace and plenty, &c” (for a print in a similar vein see Figure 9). On the other was a representation of Mainwaring “and all the horrors of the Bastile, flogging men, &c”. These prints “which [...] [were] circulated to the prejudice of Mr. Mainwaring” were put to use in creative ways. One of the witness in the election trial recalled a man in chains with his face painted “to give him the appearance of the emaciation which arises from long confinement”. In front of the hustings, he “put himself in various postures of great distress and [...] with very considerable effect”, while another man, raised on the shoulders of the “mob” flogged the print depicting Mainwaring to pieces with a whip.126

125 Morning Post, 14 July 1802.
126 MM, p. 40.
These displays were kept up through the period of polling in the crowd present in the square in front of the hustings, which consisted of both men and women. On several days, according to another witness, acts were displayed were a man was stripped from the waist up and was mocked whipped as he feigned screams of agony, and simultaneously it was proclaimed that this was the way prisoners were treated at Cold Bath. Mouldy bread on a

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127 MM, p. 179.
pole, and water, were also displayed, while the crowd shouted to Mainwaring to prepare this for the prisoner’s dinner. Most likely a reference to the meagre diet of the prisoners. Women also participated in this electoral theatre, as was observed by a reporter from *The Times* during one of the election processions:

A man appeared at the top of a coach, in chains, attended by a female, who appeared in the greatest agony, lifting up her hands seemingly to implore deliverance for her wretched companion; but on viewing Sir FRANCIS’s flags, on which was written “No Bastille”, his chains dropped off, on which he began to dance, amidst the loud and reiterated plaudits from the motley groupe.

During the nomination ceremony, the reporter from the *Morning Post* observed “The whole horrors of the Bastille were acted in front of the hustings, and with a degree of ability that would have gained applause in a theatre”. One man, dressed as a sailor with his hands chained together affected the agonies of an exhausted prisoners, while the crowds cries of “No Bastille” rung in the air. This was most likely a reference to the mutineers imprisoned at Cold Bath, whose suffering had caused much resentment among the inhabitants of London. Indeed, these lower-class men and women, in their performance of the election combined these elements with a striking creativity. In this way, material objects drawing on the symbolic power of Cold Bath were used in crowd action to discredit Mainwaring as a legitimate political subject.

Clark has argued that the 1790s saw the rise of an increasing humanitarianism following the publication of Paine’s *Rights of Man*, which was used by radical reformers to promote “a wider version of politics based on “humanity,” in the sense of an empathy – derived from the experience of hardship – for the sufferings of others, rather than the condescending pity of bourgeois humanitarian philanthropists”. This version of humanism, thus, was centred around the injustices and hardships of daily life, experienced by those at the lower end of the social scale. In the 1802 Middlesex election, arguably, such an empathy for the situation of the prisoners proved capable of mobilising a large number of people. Indeed, what is noteworthy in the displays of the crowd in Middlesex, is the emphasis which was placed on the physical suffering of the prisoners. What was brought to display is the corporal dimension of the perceived injustices of the system which the prison represented. Based on these observation, I will suggest that these kinds of political actions might be seen as an indication

128 MM, pp. 10-11.
129 *The Times*, 28 July 1802.
130 *Morning Post*, 14 July 1802.
132 Clark, *Struggle*, p. 149.
that the bodies of the prisoners – even those of mutinying sailors – mattered to this group. Arguably, what was central in discredited Mainwaring as a magistrate, and as a worthy political subject, from their perspective, was the physical abuses he (albeit by proxy) subjected the prisoners of Cold Bath to.

O’Gorman, in his investigation of election rituals, has argued that lower-class people were highly active in election contests and “were far from acting the part of political fodder for their social superiors”.133 However, in O’Gorman’s rendition, the primary motivation for the participation of this group was to “enjoy[…] the entertainments”, and to benefit from the many temporary jobs and the boom in local business which elections inferred.134 While there certainly is much truth to O’Gorman’s claim, it nonetheless fits poorly with the observations I have made of the 1802 Middlesex election. Indeed, it would appear clear that lower-class people used this election, not primarily to claim some douceurs for their deference, but to convey a political message. Moreover, as O’Gorman also has asserted, Georgian Britain was “a society which knew enormous inequalities and very considerable suffering and hardship”.135 I would suggest that it is hard to see the participation of lower-class people in this election as anything but a protest against such injustices, which were symbolised by the sufferings of the prisoners. Many of which, such as the sailors, the working-class reformers, and Mary Rich also came from a lowly situation in life. In this way, feelings of empathy and indignation for their situation were evoked, and displayed, through a range of political artefacts, mobilising huge numbers. Indeed, according to newspaper estimates Burdett’s victory was celebrated by some 500 000 people in London, in what the Morning Chronicle described as a “spontaneous and honest expression of indignation against the system of solitary confinement”136 The genuine anger the treatment of the pioneers caused, thus, should not be underestimated.

2.3 Competences
In this section I focus the competences and knowledges involved in the 1802 Middlesex election. I argue that lower-class participants in this contest were well led and organised, and demonstrated a knowledge about how to use crowd action and political artefacts effectively to make their voices heard, and to discredit Mainwaring as a worthy political subject. Women from the higher end of the social scale also contributed with specific competences. They were

133 O’Gorman, “Campaign rituals”, p. 100.
134 O’Gorman, “Campaign rituals”, pp. 100-3, for quotation see p. 100.
135 O’Gorman, Eighteenth century, p. 120.
136 The Times, 30 July 1802; Morning Chronicle, 30 July 1802. See also Ignatieff, Measure of pain, p. 139.
important as canvassers and their demonstrations of loyalty at the hustings and in the election processions contributed in constructing Burdett as desirable, attractive man, and a virtuous politician. I also argue that the participation of lower-class women, with their knowledge of community action, were important in creating a display of communal support for Burdett, thereby legitimising his political claims. Mainwaring, in contrast attacked Burdett by depicting him as a dangerous demagogue, and his supporters as a disorderly and traitorous mob. Thereby the legitimacy of their grievances, as well as the legitimacy of Burdett’s entire campaign was refuted.

2.3.1 In defence of the social order

Burdett’s campaign appears to have been conducted with the purpose of eliciting a massive numeral display of support, and for this reason his campaign is vividly present in the sources. How Mainwaring’s campaign was conducted, on the other hand, is harder to assess, due to the dominance of Burdett in the press and, indeed, of his supporters in the street spaces.

Nonetheless, that Mainwaring’s campaign was – arguably – much less visible, does not infer that it was less successful. The election result, 3207 votes for Burdett and 2936 for Mainwaring serves as a reminder that the support amongst the electors was much more evenly distributed. Furthermore, from studies of the pollbook, it is evident that Mainwaring was emphatically favoured by establishment figures.\textsuperscript{137} Or as the \textit{Morning Post} argued, when assessing the strength of the factions prior to the contest, Mainwaring’s “long connection with the County, his influence with his brother magistrates afford him not only great strength, but facilities of knowing and coming at the Electors, which Sir Francis does not possess”.\textsuperscript{138} Rather, than attempting to evoke popular support for his cause, like Burdett, Mainwaring appears to have done politics in quite a different way: by closely working with the traditional elite of Middlesex and directly with the electors. Thus, investing the Middlesex contest-as-performance make clear that there existed two different ways of doing the election at the same time, emphasising the usefulness of this analytical concept.

Mainwaring’s campaign, arguably, could not compete with Burdett’s in terms of support on the street spaces and on the hustings. Indeed, while Burdett held almost daily speeches on the husting at the closing of the poll, Mainwaring was forced to withdraw early every day due to the amount of abuse which was shouted at him from the assembled crowds. Nonetheless, attempts were made to discredit Burdett as a legitimate political subject, by

\textsuperscript{137} Fisher,” Middlesex”.
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Morning Post}, 14 July 1802.
linking his campaign to dangerous, subversive forces. In an advertisement published in *The Times* by Mainwaring’s election committee, a speech was recited from an election meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern. Mainwaring, according to this address, asserted that he “stood forward […] to give my […] assistance in the defence of the cause of real liberty founded on social order and the true principles of the British Constitution, attacked by turbulent Faction”. Burdett, thus was labelled as a factious disturber of the peace, whose campaign threatened the stability of the entire country.

The threat Burdett was claimed to present to the *social order* is noteworthy, and one might assume that his attempts to appeal to a broader segment of the population, his harsh critique of the government, and call for parliamentary reform, made many government supporters feel uneasy. The existing social order, uphold by the constitution, Mainwaring argued, was now under threat from Burdett, and he was acting as its defender. To most Georgians, the constitution was a perfect political arrangement. Ancient in origin and containing the accumulated wisdom of generations, it was perceived as an embodiment of the independent character of the English nation. Thus, Mainwaring actively connected his campaign to such understandings of Englishness. His campaign was the cause of the constitution, and he called all independent men of Middlesex to join him in its defence, for the good of the entire country. Knowledge about how to use ideas of masculinity and national identity, thus, were important competences in this contest. Moreover, he claimed he was the right man for the job based on his persistence; he did not give in to threats and intimidations but endured even in the face of overwhelming opposition. Burdett’s faction, he asserted, conducted relentless attacks against him, attempting to ruin his characters by personal insults. Even so he endured, not out of personal ambition, but to repel “the progress of tumult and faction which has been so strongly manifested in the course of this Election”.

2.3.2 Putting the Rich case to use

Knowledge about how to use political symbols to evoke an emotional response could also be an important competence in the performance of the election, something which Burdett used industriously to his advantage. In one of his nearly daily speeches at the hustings, he told the crowd about an event which he alleged had taken place a few days before. A 13-year-old girl,

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139 *The Times*, 26 July 1802.
141 *The Times*, 26 July 1802.
142 *The Times*, 26 July 1802.
143 *The Times*, 24 July 1802.
sitting on the shoulders of her father, supposedly threw some mortar on Mainwaring’s carriage as it passed by. For this, she was apprehended from her parents’ house by a party of Bow-street runners, and taken to their office on Bow-street. Had it not been for “a Gentleman” who paid her bail out of “humanity” she could have become confined to Cold Bath and governor Aris. In other words, a new Mary Rich case had only just been avoided. Burdett then called Mainwaring to answer to these accusations. He appears not to have been present at the hustings at this moment however, which Burdett surely would have been aware of. Instead a member of his council, a Mr. Maddox, scaled the elevated platform to debunk these accusations to “loud cries of - Off! Off!” from the crowd.144

Eventually silence was obtained, and Maddox asserted to the crowd that he himself had been present at this event, and confirmed that the girl had been picked up by some of Mainwaring’s supporters because her missile had smashed the window of the candidate’s carriage. Mainwaring, therefore, had thought “it highly improper not to ice such an attack”, and maintained that the action had been necessary “to afford an wholesome example to the mob”. However, the accusation that she was to be committed to prison, he claimed, was utterly false, and her being detained was a mistake. A member of Burdett’s council replied to this statement by asking the crowd to judge if they believed it was “consistent with justice and humanity” to drag away “a poor girl [...] from the house of her parents”.145 It would appear that Burdett, by using the story of a young girl falling victim to the system for whichMainwaring was held responsible, was successful in evoking popular resentment towards his opponent.

This incident was again brought to the fore during an election parade from the Crown and Anchor tavern in support of Burdett. As the procession moved forward the crowd shouted: “Who stole the child!” Answer, “Mainwaring””.146 During his victory procession, moreover, Burdett made a point of stopping and visiting this public house owned by the girl’s father and gave away a but of porter, thereby demonstrating that he was on their side against their superiors who had treated them wrongfully.147 Indeed, as he visited this public house, an effigy of Burdett crowned with laurel was displayed outside – a symbol of leadership alluding to its use in the triumphs of ancient Rome – while an effigy of Mainwaring was hanged.148 By

144 The Times, 24 July 1802.
145 The Times, 24 July 1802.
146 Morning Post, 28 July 1802.
147 Morning Post, 30 July 1802.
148 Morning Post, 30 July 1802. On the symbolic use of laurel, see Narvickas, “Political clothing”, p. 552.
such strategies, thus, an image of the heroic Burdett victoriously smiting the villain Mainwaring was created.

2.3.3 The competences of a representative

The Middlesex election was also a venue in which the competences of both electors and candidates were contested. Burdett was formally asked to stand as a candidate in an address signed by 19 freeholders, requesting his “manly opposition to the establishment in Middlesex”, since they believed a majority of their fellow voters “will agree with us that Sir Francis Burdett is more worthy than Mr. Mainwaring to represent the interest, deliver the sense, and support the rights” of Middlesex. 149 From the perspective of these electors, thus, the election came down to whom of Burdett and Mainwaring that could be said to possess the attributes of a virtuous politician. Burdett was favoured because he was believed to be capable of defending their privileges with manly vigour and act to ensure that their will was heard in parliament. In this way, he was seen as a true independent man, capable of withstanding undue influence and corruption to peruse the public good, the object of citizenship in a free republic. 150

The invitation of these freemen is also interesting because it indicates a clear political assertiveness. Burdett might be an aristocrat, but their voices mattered, and he ought to listen to them. Moreover, this appears to have been something which they felt Mainwaring had neglected, which had disqualified him as a worthy representative in their eyes. At the nomination ceremony. Mr Breton – a freeholder who seconded Burdett’s nomination – openly accused Mainwaring of undermining the rights of the electors and of ignoring their wishes in parliament. 151 This caused great disorder among Mainwaring’s supporters, and the clamour of the crowd made it impossible for the speaker to be heard, until the undersheriff eventually managed to calm the situation. Breton then continued, and proclaimed:

what I say to Mr. Mainwaring I say to his face; he has the opportunity of speaking in his own defence, and I wish to hear what he has to say [...] The opportunity of questioning the conduct of our Representatives occurs, heaven knows [...] only once in six or seven years [...] Gentlemen I did accuse, I was accusing, and I do still accuse Mr. Mainwaring of being a uniform supporter of all the wicked measures, of the late accused Administration which brought the country into intolerable distress [...] suffice it to say, that they proposed the Gagging Act. 152

149 The Times 29 June 1802.
150 McCormack, Independent man, pp. 20, 24.
151 Morning Post, 14 July 1802.
152 Morning Post, 14 July 1802.
This again caused disorder, and Breton was interrupted by Mainwaring’s supporter’s, who shouted at him “Nonsense! Nonsense! What is the Gagging Act?”. However, the speaker pressed on:

I am not to be bullied or brow beat by the manœuvres of a faction; as a simple freeholder possessing an interest of only 50s. a year in the county [...] I address this assembly, and no outcry, however violent, shall prevent me. I ask whether Mr. Mainwaring did vote for the Act for preventing the meeting of freeholders in the usual old and constitutional form? I ask, Gentlemen, whether Mr. Mainwaring did not vote for the Act which renders you liable to be treated as felons, in case of the petitioning [to] Parliament in the manner conformable to the constitution...I ask whether he did not support the Bastille, and whether he did not defend Governor Aris?  

When Breton called for him to defend his actions in front of the assembled electors, he simply answered “It may be the privilege of a Freeholder to ask a Member of Parliament what has been his conduct [...] but I am sure that Member of Parliament would be a simpleton if he answered him [...] the poll shall answer for me”. Mainwaring, thus, clearly differed in option to Burdett as to what competences were required of a virtuous politician. To him, his past conduct did not matter, and he rejected claims from the electors that he was accountable directly to them.

2.3.4 Female competences

Aristocratic women were active as canvassers for Burdett, among them were the Duchess of Devonshire, as well as Sophia, Lady Burdett, Sir Francis’ wife. Also women outside the aristocracy participated in this capacity. The Morning Post emphasised the importance of a Mrs. Reed, who was described as “a very eager and successful canvasser for Sir Francis”. Burdett’s victory procession even passed by her house which she had decorated with wreaths of laurel and deep-blue streamers. As the procession passed by, Reed herself appeared in her window together with her child, and saluted the new MP by waving her handkerchief, a clear marker of her support. As canvassers, these women must have had a highly visible presence on the streets, and direct contact with voters. Their efforts indeed, were praised by Burdett’s election committee. At an election dinner at the Crown and Anchor tavern, the chairman dedicated the last toast of the evening to “the [...] female canvassers who so zealously exerted

153 Morning Post, 14 July 1802.
154 Morning Post, 14 July 1802.
155 Evening Mail 14 July 1802.
156 For Lady Burdett’s canvass see Morning Post, 27 July 1802. For the involvement of the Duchess of Devonshire see Morning Chronicle 20 July 1802.
157 Morning Post, 30 July 1802.
themselves in the cause of liberty”, which was drunk “with three times three [cheers] and the loudest applauds”. Clearly, then, Burdett’s campaign valued the participation of these women, due to their specific competences as canvassers.

Lower-class women also supported Burdett, and participated in the crowds at the hustings in the theatre of the streets. Rogers has observed that newspapers in Hanoverian England tended to note when crowds expressing dissatisfaction with their situation consisted of men and women. Usually though, in contexts where their presence could be expected, such as in bread riots. Rogers also argues that in the Georgian period, plebeian women played an important and active part in community politics, and had few reservations about entering public and political spaces. They were integral to the infrastructure of community action by distributing political propaganda, rallying neighbourhoods, and using their knowledge of local networks to influence crowd actions. Female presence was noted, not because it was seen as something extraordinary, but because to contemporaries it indicated the community based nature of the sense of the crowd and their grievances. In this way, the participation of lower class women in the Middlesex election in support of Burdett informed the meanings of this practice; to contemporaries it would have served as a marker of communal approval.

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158 *Morning Chronicle* 20 July 1802.
159 Rogers, *Crowds*, pp. 222, 227, 231, 247.
Chapter 3. The 1802-1803 Nottingham election

3.1 Materials

In this section I focus the material aspects of the performance of the Nottingham election and suggest the “rules” of the practice of the election could be altered significantly. Integrating the hardware of the election into the analysis makes clear that crucial importance of the spaces of the town. By taking control over some of Nottingham’s key venues through carefully planned crowd actions, a group of working men managed to hijack this contest, using it to advance their own interests. Through clearly material strategies, through attacks on the bodies, clothes and property of Coke and his supporters, these were effectively denied the possibility to access the polling places freely, whereby their possibility to perform their manly duty as independent citizens was denied.

3.1.1 “Cropping and Docking, and Making Spencers”: political violence in Nottingham

Experience from former elections had shown that the exchange building, the traditional polling place in Nottingham, was “an extremely inconvenient and improper Place to go on with an Election in”. Therefore a special polling both was erected near the centre of the market place (see Figure 10), some hundred yards from the exchange, the expense of which was shared equally between the three candidates. This booth was a decently sized wooden structure, 14-15 feet high, with walls and a roof. Voters entered through a doorway on the north side, declared the name of the candidate they wished to elect, which was written down in the pollbooks by the poll clerks, and then exited through a doorway on the south side. The hustings of course, was of paramount importance to the election contest; this was the place in which the contest – at least symbolically – was decided. Therefore, they should be regarded as a key material element of this practice-as-entity. Moreover, in the performance of the contest in Nottingham, the physical design of this place would take on an added importance, since it allowed some of the practitioners to influence the election in crucial ways.

Almost immediately after the polling began, a group of young men and boys, referred to as “the Telegraph”, managed to scale the roof and tore some of the planks off the gable end

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160 REPORT FROM THE SELECT COMMITTEE who were appointed to try and determine the Merits of the Petition of Daniel Parker Coke, Esquire, and also, of the Petitions of the several other Persons: Complaining of an undue Eledion and Return, for the Town and County of the Town of Nottingham: AND MINUTES OF THE EVIDENCE, p. 330. This source will henceforward be referred to as the Nottingham Minutes, and abbreviated as NM.

161 NM, pp. 13, 55, 330.
in order to get a view of the voters transactions inside. One of the witnesses in the House of Commons trial described how they then used this elevated position to call out to the crowd the identity of those voters who had polled for Coke: “if they knew his Name, they gave it [...] if they could not get his Name, they described his Dress, that he had a silk

\[162\] NM, pp. 55, 57, 116-8, 419, 446.
Handkerchief about his Neck, and had such a coloured Coat on”. They then called down to those bellow: “Do him ! “ and “Crop him ! Dock him ! Spencer him !” The person was then abused and held down by a group of men, while another man closed in from behind with a short knife in his hand, which was then used to cut the victim’s coat off. Thomas Low, a master millwright, experienced such a treatment first-hand. To the committee, he described what transpired after he had given his vote:

I went out [...] of the Booth [...] Two Men immediately gave me a Push forward, and [...] began to kick my Shins, and beat me over the Head and Body [...] the People on the Outside of the Booth [...] tore my Coat in Pieces, and slung Part of it up into the Air [...] they tore or cut my Waistcoat up the Back ; and they beat me over the Head, whilst the Blood run down my Face on both Sides, and the Back of my Neck, and Kicked me in the Body in many Places.

From this treatment, another witness stated, “He appeared to be senseless, and half dead; he was all over Blood and Dirt”.

This action performed against a voter was referred to as spencering, and appears to have been a specifically local custom. One of the committee members asked one of the witnesses to clarify: “What is spencering?” whereby the witness replied: “Shortening his Coat [...] by the help of a Knife”. It was also described as “converting [...] [a] Coat into a spencer”. The spencer was a piece of clothing originally intended as a hunting jacket for men, created by removing the tails of coat. However, it soon became adopted as a highly popular women’s fashion on both sides of the Atlantic during, worn like a short jacket or cardigan during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

163 NM, p. 73.
164 NM, p. 74.
165 NM, p. 159.
166 NM, p. 76.
167 NM, p. 80.
Attacks on clothing in early modern England were serious business indeed, and the tearing of clothes constituted a specific type of crime referred to as *vestiary affronts*. This has to be understood within a context where clothing, in crucial ways, stood for the body itself. Clothing functioned as idioms of individual status, and was a key way through which the male body displayed its strength and authority. For this reason, vestiary affronts were perceived as a
grave insult to the male honour of the victim, and in cases were the attackers were social
inferiors, as highly subversive acts.\textsuperscript{169} This was an aspect which certainly was present in
Nottingham were those holding the knives were referred to as a “Mob” consisting “of the
lower Class of People in Nottingham”.\textsuperscript{170}

The items of clothing attacked are also noteworthy – the victim’s coats and waistcoats.
These formed part of the three-piece suit, which since its adaptation in the late seventeenth
century had been the standard dress of male elites. Three-piece suits were essential in
legitimising male superiority over women, and of elite men over subordinate men. Clothing,
crucially, embodied relationships of power; “clothing put power in plain view”, and, indeed,
clothing display was a form of power.\textsuperscript{171} Projection has long been a fundamental principle of
masculinity, and this was what was under attack in Nottingham 1802. The connection of
spencering to the central stage of Georgian masculine display adds an intriguing dimension.
The act of voting was essential to Georgian men’s masculine identities. It was performed by
orally declaring one’s choice in front of other men of the community, and, therefore, seen as
epitomising manly independence.\textsuperscript{172} In this context, I will argue, spencering took on an added
importance. To be held down by other men, and having one’s coat forcibly converted into a
woman’s jacket by knives, while performing the defining act of manly independence, of
citizenship, thus, might be seen a form of political castration. The victims were emasculated,
and – on a symbolical level – disenfranchised.

While spencering had a powerful symbolic dimension, its material effects should not be
underestimated either. A shoemaker named Thomas Barnes testified to having attempted to
lure “the telegraph” by exiting the same way as he entered, but was identified by his blue coat,
and those positioned on the roof called out to the crowd who went around to catch him. “the
seized me by the Collar, took my Hat and threw it right into the Air”\textsuperscript{173}. The forceful removal
of a hat, likewise, was a grave insult to the masculine honour of the victim, emphasised by the
social weight ascribed to the act of doffing – or failing to doff – one’s hat to a social
superior.\textsuperscript{174} However, one feels inclined to believe that the physical pain and damage done to
Barnes’ body was a more urgent concern to him – at least at the time of the incident – than its

\textsuperscript{169} Garthine Walker, \textit{Crime, gender, and social order in early modern England}, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,
\textsuperscript{170} NM, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{171} David Kuchta, \textit{The three-piece suit and modern masculinity: England, 1550-1850}, (Berkeley: University of
\textsuperscript{172} McCormack, \textit{Independent man}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{173} NM, p. 164.
symbolic implications. To the committee, he described how he was grabbed by the hair and had his head knocked against the side of the booth, and “[...] they took my Coat, and wrapped it round my Eyes, as to blindfold me”. He was then repeatedly beaten and kicked by his assailants, who

  took me to a Pump in the Market Place, and pumped Water on my Head [...] Did they wet you? – Yes, very bad ; they then knocked me down in the Channel that ran by the Pump ; they kicked me and knocked me about, and dragged me for Fifty Yards, sometimes by the Hair of my Head, sometimes by my Coat, [...] [then] a Man stepped up to me, and said he thought I had had enough, I got away from them into a Yard. 175

Barnes, was spencered, beaten, and “pumped upon” with his coat wrapped around his head – an act which must have been a highly painful experience. 176 Moreover, it is noteworthy that Barnes and other victims were attacked in body and clothes, in ways that left clear visible markers: bruises, blood, torn clothes and removed hats, as well as drenching someone with water and dragging them in the dirt.

3.1.2 The organisation of the spencerings

The spencering in the 1802 election, I will suggest, can be seen an example of how local customs and experiences, together with the use of the material and the corporal, were incorporated into the performance of the election to achieve specific aims. This custom had first been performed two years earlier at a Common Council election, and its use in this parliamentary election appears to have been carefully planned. 177 According to John Walker, a mason who testified for Coke’s council during the trial, special knives were made particularly to be used in spencering prior to the election. He described these as being hooked a little at the end, resembling pruning knifes, which were made by breaking off an old knife blade, placing it into a short, thick handle, leaving out about “an Inch and a Quarter” of the blade. 178 This way it could be easily concealed in the hand. Walker, moreover, stated that he had seen a number of persons caring such knives some days prior to the election, and asked them what they were for. Their answers was “for cropping and docking, and making Spencers with”. 179 Another witness for Coke’s council even brought one of these knives with him to the Commons to display it before the committee, although it did not look exactly the same, he conceded, since his wife had refitted it with a new handle to allow it to be better used in self-

175 NM, p. 164.
176 NM, p. 107.
177 NM, p. 463.
178 NM, p. 74.
179 NM, p. 84.
defence, because “She was afraid of my coming up here, because they had sworn so much Violence at me.”

According to Walker, the spenceres were organised and led by a group of stocking makers. These were George James, Edward Stevenson, James Hall, James Taylor, Samuel Hudson, and a last one named Gillman. The committee asked Walker, presumably to assess the social status of the ringleaders:

Were those Persons whom you described as the leaders of the Mob, distinguished by a better Dress than the rest of the Mob? – Some of them were a little. None of them, excepting Stevenson, are Men of any Character at all ; one can scarcely tell how they live.

The reason for his high esteem of Stevenson, he told, was due to an incident during the polling. Walker stated to the committee that he had cast his two votes on Coke and Warren, and, thus, was afraid to exit the booth and face the spenceres, which Stevenson noticed. Because he was his neighbour, he then told Walker: “If I go out along with you, nobody will hurt you”, and took hold of his arm, and kept holding it until they both had passed through the crowd unscathed.

This treatment of Coke’s supporters caused much distress among his campaign, who frequently implored the mayor to restore civil order and protect their voters from harm. Due to their pleas, the mayor agreed to send for the military on five occasions to disperse the crowds attacking Coke’s supporters. Nottingham, due to its reputation as nest of radicalism and a site of frequent rioting, had been the first sizeable town to be given its own barracks for the permanent garrisoning of troops, which were largely finished by 1797. The fifth regiment of dragoon guards was stationed in Nottingham in 1802. However, as prescribed by the law, they left the town three days prior to the start of the polling, and did not return to their barracks until three days after its conclusion. Instead, they set up camp some three miles from the city, a distance which, of course took some time to cover once the request for assistance had arrived. The absence of the military, in a society without an organised police force, created an opportunity for the spencers to influence the course of the election. Since the military was not allowed to stay in town for any prolonged time, the spencers only had to wait

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180 NM, p. 266.
181 NM, p. 85.
182 NM, p. 86.
183 NM, p. 86-7.
185 NM, p. 446.
187 NM, pp. 149, 443.
188 NM, pp. 144–5, 148.
for the soldiers to leave again in order to continue their work. Those constables sworn in by
the sheriff to uphold the peace were few in numbers, and proved incapable to stop the assaults
made on Coke’s supporters. Nonetheless, these constables did attempt to clear the roof of the
polling booth on several occasions, but to little effect since the telegraph quickly resumed
their positions after each time. Attempts were also made to repair the crevasse so that the
telegraph could not observe what took place inside, but the carpenters sent for to carry out this
task were driven away by a volley of stones.

On 10 July, in an effort to stop the abuses of Coke’s voters, the polling was moved
inside the Nottingham exchange, to prevent the telegraph men from reporting how the electors
had cast their votes, since it was impossible for the telegraph to eavesdrop on the polling at
this location. The voters entered though the usual staircase, but a second staircase had to be
put up at the backway for them to exit. Two of the leaders of the spenceres, George James and
Samuel Hudson, responded quickly to this attempt to circumscribe their influence: “if there
was no Method of getting in, they were determined to prevent anybody coming out”, and they
ordered their followers to pull the new staircase down.

The crowd also began cutting the joists of the building, which threatened to make it collapse. Thus, the attempt to move the
place of polling had to be abandoned after only a few hours. This incident, again, serves as
a reminder that the Spenceres had an active group of leaders, capable of quickly organising a
response to the measures of the authorities, and, furthermore, illustrates the importance of the
spatial and material dimension of the election.

The place of polling, clearly, was of seminal importance, and those in power of that
venue were in a position to influence the outcome of the entire contest. In this aspect, the
1802 Nottingham election contest became a contest over the control over key venues: the
polling place, the market square and the exchange building. The importance of space was aslo
well known to legislators, who in order to supress the reform movement denied protesters
access to public spaces.

In Nottingham, the market place was crucial to enabling crowd action, since it provided of a large, open, area capable of holding many thousands of people
(see Figure. 11).

In this way, the hardware of the election – the spaces of the city – was

189 NM, p.136.
190 NM, p. 117–8.
191 NM, pp. 88–9.
192 NM, pp. 138–9, 189.
193 Parolin, Radical Spaces, pp. 5-6.
194 See also Becket, “Radical Nottingham”, p. 286.
immensely important to the performance of this practice, which underlines the importance of including the materials of the election into the analysis.

3.1.3 Punch and the ambush on Coke

As has been discussed in the previous section, material resources such as the clothes and bodies of the participants, as well as the spaces of the city, were combined by Birch’s supporters to influence the practice of the election in their favour during daytime. When night fell, the crowd supporting Birch switched strategy, exerting their influence through another custom – also specific to Nottingham – called punch. This action also had a fundamentally material dimension, denoting attacks on the persons of political opponents as well as their private property. One of the witnesses was asked by the committee:

Did you ever hear the Term of Punch made use of at Nottingham? - Yes [...] It is a cant Term, we have, for doing Mischief in the Night” [...] What sort of Mischief [...]? – Destroying Gardens, throwing over Haystacks, some were set on Fire, maiming Cattle, cutting of the Manes and Tails of Horses, Fences broke down, and whole Gardens laid waste.  

Clearly, having one’s property destroyed in such a way could have inferred a considerable financial loss to the victim. Moreover, the concept of punch was also defined as “doing violence in the Night to People”, by another witness, and the committee inquired: “It is well-known in Nottingham? – Yes, some people know it too much.” Several of Coke’s voters, who testified for his council during the trial, claimed that they had been threatened by punch, for refusing to support Birch. One of these, a mason named John Walker, stated he was visited by some of the crowd leaders during the election, who attempted to convince him to support Birch. Walker claimed that he insisted he would vote for Coke “should it cost me my Life”, upon which “they shook their Fist in my Face, and told me they would tell Punch of me”. As indicated by this testimony, Punch was used by the same group of people who lead and organised the Spencerings. Furthermore, the threat of a visit from Punch also appears to have served to prevent intervention from the authorities. During the polling, Walker was sworn as a constable, and ordained to maintain peace and order in the town. When the committee inquired as to why the ringleaders were not apprehended – since their identities were known – he replied: “There would have been some Difficulty in that, some Difficulty in taking the People, and some Difficulty in keeping ones Life after one had done ; there was |

195 NM, p. 89.
196 NM, p. 267.
197 NM, pp. 248, 267.
198 NM, p. 89.
Punch about.”¹⁹⁹ Thus, by incorporating Punch into the practice of the election, the Spencerers also managed to change how the election was performed. Rather than serving to reinforce the ascendancy of local dynasties, as O’Gorman has claimed²⁰⁰, the practice of the election contest in Nottingham was – at least to some extent – hijacked by crowds led by working men, who used it to advance their own purposes.

Not only did the spencers attack Coke’s supporters in a range of creative ways; their violence was also targeted directly against the candidate himself. On 7 July, as Coke was returning to his party HQ at the White Lion tavern from the polling booth together with a group of supporters, a large group of people suddenly approached them. Fearing for their safety, Coke’s group made a hasty retreat inside a nearby shop located in Long Row (see Figure 11), which was instantly surrounded by the crowd, who broke the windows and shouted “Turn him out, Turn him out”.²⁰¹ According to George Cartwright, a member of Warren’s campaign who was standing inside the shop when Coke’s group burst in, “the Body of People that came up was very great; in a short Time there were Two or Three-Hundred.”²⁰² However, the situation was calmed when a troop of dragoons arrived to rescue Coke and his supporters from their confinement, and they were quietly escorted back to the White Lion.²⁰³

On the following day, the situation again turned dangerous for Coke. As he and a group of his supporters were walking towards the market place from their party HQ at the White Lion tavern, he was ambushed by a group of people, who had prepared a supply of pavement stones – which they had concealed under a layer of sand. When Coke appeared, the attackers shouted “No Coke” and pelleted him with these projectiles.²⁰⁴ The candidate was hit in the head, and “was bleeding very much”, but managed to escape inside the polling booth.²⁰⁵ Since the safety of Coke’s person was thought to be in danger, the mayor requested the immediate assistance of the military. Major Henry Teasdale, who acted as a witness for Birch during the trial, was the recipient of this message, and ordered his detachment towards the town. As he entered Nottingham he was urged to proceed with utmost haste if Coke’s life was to be saved. When he arrived at the market place the booth was completely surrounded by a large crowd.

¹⁹⁹ NM, p. 100.
²⁰⁰ O’Gorman, “Campaign rituals”, p. 83
²⁰¹ NM, pp. 17, 121.
²⁰² NM, p. 17.
²⁰³ NM, p. 444.
²⁰⁴ NM, p. 17, 119,135. For quotation see p. 18 and p. 187.
²⁰⁵ NM, p. 119.
However, he asserted, these cleared away quickly when the dragoons charged towards them at a full gallop.206

As is emphasised by my investigation of the 1802 Middlesex election, visual displays were immensely important to candidates and their election committees. In Nottingham, essentially, the crowds supporting Birch manages to take this opportunity, this meaning of the election, away from Coke and his supporters. Something which was achieved by material means: By attacks on their bodies, their clothes, and their property, control was taken over key spaces of the city: the hustings, the market place, and the exchange. By using the mass of their bodies, the crowds supporting Birch managed to prevent Coke’s faction from freely accessing these venues. Consequently, Coke and his supporters were, in important ways, denied the possibility to act independently. Instead they were forced to hide in fear, and were quite literary dragged in the dirt. The meaning of these actions, of course, were highly symbolic, but the effect was achieved through material means. This usage of materials, I suggest, can also be seen as an important competence. This adds an interesting dimension to McCormack’s account on Georgian political culture, which has emphasized the currency of attributes such as honesty, bluffness, and political efficacy.207 Turning the attention to the doing of politics on the ground indicates that knowledge about the use of political violence could be just as an important.

3.2 Meanings

By using the analytical distinction between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance, I suggest that there existed a significant conflict between Coke’s and Birch’s supporters concerning what meanings participation in the election should entail. For many of Birch’s supporters, participation in this contest evoked symbolic understandings of participation in a legitimate revenge on individuals held responsible for earlier abuses on friends and relations for their support of democratic reform. Birch and his supporters also presented this contest as a struggle for the working class of Nottingham. In particular, the use of coercion against workmen by landlords and employers supporting Coke was the cause of much resentment and became powerful political symbols. For Birch’s supporters, this was a struggle for the right of working men to vote according to their conscience. By connecting this contest to questions about working men’s rights, they also connected this contest to a wider discursive struggle about citizenship rights, thereby demonstrating a clear political assertiveness. Coke’s

206 NM, p. 446.
207 McCormack, Independent man, p.2.
supporters, in contrast, refuted such claims, defending coercion and argued instead that working men ought to respect their superiors for the prosperity of the community.

3.2.1 The significance of the ducking

In the previous section I analysed the material aspect of spencering, an action used by a crowd led by working men to attack their political opponents. While Coke’s voters were the primary targets for this action, as one of the witnesses for Coke’s council conceded during the trial, “the Resentment of the Mob appeared to be more incensed against some than others”.208 In particular, individuals known as duckers were targeted.209 This concept referred to an episode in 1794 called the ducking. This year, violent tensions erupted in the city between alleged sympathisers of parliamentary reform and government loyalists. A group of loyalists determined to root out what they saw as the influence of Jacobinism in Nottingham, formed a secret committee to found the hiring of thugs from the gangs of labourers working on cutting the Trent Canal, with the purpose of manhandling opponents to the war.210 On 2 June, riots erupted in Nottingham, which lasted for four days without the intervention of the magistrates. Henry Green, the mayor at that time, even encouraged rioters to conduct violent house searches of the homes of supposed republicans, which were then “ducked” in the Lea and Trent rivers. Furthermore, buildings were set on fire, including the mill of Robert Davison – who was a known opponent to the war and advocator of parliamentary reform.211

The ducking should be understood in a context of acute fears of social upheaval among government loyalists following the French revolution and the outbreak of war with France in 1793. Such outbursts of violence against reformers, moreover, did occur on several occasions in Britain in the early 1790s. Indeed, the ducking’s brings to mind the infamous Priestly riots in Birmingham 1791, where the homes of 27 dissenting radicals were ransacked in three days of rioting by enraged loyalists.212

To those who participated in the spencering of Coke’s voters, the memory of this event served as a focal point and a powerful symbol, uniting them in their cause. According to one of the witnesses for Coke’s council, it was said among the members of the crowd outside the polling booth “that they were determined to remember the ducking”.213 Moreover, there were

208 NM, p. 56.
209 NM, p. 98.
210 Thomis, Politics and society, p. 176.
212 Rogers, Crowds, p. 193.
213 NM, p. 98.
individuals in Nottingham who had a reputation of being duckers, and the hatred towards them – according to a witness for Birch’s council – was such “that had the Booth been surrounded by Ten Thousand Military, they could not have polled without being insulted”.  

To many inhabitants, it would appear, the trauma of the ducking was epitomised by the case of a man named Relphs, who died from the abuse he suffered during this incident. This had not been forgotten in Nottingham. John Lovett, a master framework knitter, told the select committee that as he was on his way to the polling booth he was accused of being a ducker by John Relphs, the brother of the victim. Lovett denied any involvement in this incident, but told the committee that Relphs claimed he was the cause of his brother’s death, and he was accused of being part of the crowd who fetched his brother from his home and carried him to the river. After his run in with Relphs, Lovett went to the polling booth and declared his vote to the clerks. As he went out to the market square he was recognised by the telegraph, and beaten until he was senseless by the crowd. Thus, to those attacking Coke’s voters in 1802, the symbolic significance of participation connoted meanings of revenge on individuals who had wronged members. However, since the victims were attacked for their support of parliamentary reform, this participation was also connected to meanings of a larger, national struggle about citizenship rights.

3.2.2 For the working class of electors

Such connections to demands for a widening of the political nation were also important in Birch’s propaganda. More specifically it was explicitly connected to a struggle for working class rights. Birch’s supporters were urge to persist:

in the arduous contest in which you are engaged [...] relax not one moment; encourage each other; and convince the proud imperious aristocrats, and their stewards, that though you earn your bread by the sweat of your brow, the spirit of Freedom inhabits your bosoms. Never forget that this is the cause of THE WORKING CLASS OF ELECTORS.

The working class of Nottingham, thus was urged to unite together, in the cause of freedom against the aristocracy. Coke, moreover, was depicted as the candidate of the aristocratic oligarchy, whose rule had brought great distress to Nottingham: “From that political system which he has supported have arisen all the privations and miseries which the working class of

214 NM, pp. 169, 417. For quotation see p. 417.
215 NM, p. 77, 168.
216 NM, p. 167-8.
218 Paper War, p. 273-4.
the community have suffered, and which, I fear, will continue to suffer”. Clark has argued, the shared experience of the hardships of life was an important unifying symbol, essential to the formation of the working class in the early nineteenth century. This emotional empathy was also emphasised in Birch’s propaganda, in which gender and class played a crucial part. On a symbolical level, this was a contest for the working-class of Nottingham against Coke, who was accused of forcing tenants to vote against their conscience “by the iron hand of oppression”, thereby turning poor men into the street, leaving them and their families to starve. Thus, Coke, and his supporters, were accused of exploiting working men’s susceptible position in society, thereby, threatening to take away their manly station as family providers. A threat which was explicitly used in the propaganda for Birch:

As Men united by the social tie.
Your Wives and Children claim your tender care;
Your duty do,---a Master’s Threats defy!
Let Conscience be the only foe you fear.
Birch for ever ! ! !

According to this supporter of Birch, it was the duty of a working man to provide for and to protect his family, and, as their male head, he was now called into action in support of Birch. As a man, for his wife and children, he was urged not to give in to the threats of his employees. The emphasis of a shared experience of a life in a particular social position is also noteworthy; the audience of this address are urged to stand up against Nottingham’s masters, not alone, but together, as a group of men. In this way, participation in this election was linked to meanings of solidarity towards other working men, based on common experiences of hardships, an idea which here formed the basis for collective action.

It is, of course, difficult to determine how appeals like this were received by the indented audience. Nonetheless, it may be observed that authors of Birchite propaganda believed that there were electors in Nottingham who regarded themselves as working class. Furthermore, this propaganda actively urged labourers to join together to challenge their social superiors, as working men, drawing on clearly classed and gendered arguments. In other words, these authors sought to link the symbolic meaning of participation in this election contest to a struggle for the working class of Nottingham. E.P Thompson has argued that the 1790s was a crucial decade in the formation of the English working class, were food scarcity and government oppression forced working people, increasingly desirous of political

219 Paper War, p. 276.
220 Clark, Struggle, pp. 148-150.
221 Paper War, p. 303.
222 Paper War, p. 348.
rights, away from traditional society. However, repression failed to crush dreams of a more
democratic society, rather “it dissolved the remaining ties of loyalty between working people
and their masters, so that disaffection spread in a world which the authorities could not
penetrate”. Advocators of working class rights may have been forced underground, yet this
made demands for human rights more widely diffused than ever before, and in places like the
workshops of Nottingham’s framework-knitters, what Thompson has referred to as a “new
democratic consciousness” endured.

This use of working-class symbols in Nottingham should be understood in the context
of an enduring tradition of support for parliamentary reform in this town. Nottingham had a
long tradition of an organised labour force among the textile workers, and during the 1790s,
the Nottingham Corresponding Society (a sub-branch of its London equivalent) was
established, as a working-class body advocating parliamentary reform. It is noteworthy that
this society was openly espoused by the corporation’s senior council members. In 1795, the
NCS convened a public meeting in the town’s market place. Rather than of proscribing it –
which would have been possible due to the Gagging Acts – the mayor and several of the
aldermen instead attended the meeting, which resulted in the passing of a declaration for
parliamentary reform. Thus, the symbolic understandings of participation in the practice of
the election contest in Nottingham can be said to have evoked meanings of participation in a
larger national struggle for a more democratic society.

3.2.3 Meanings of representation

Birch’s supporters argued that Birch had demonstrated that his conduct was highly
commendable. In particular, his commitment to the British constitution, and equal respect for
“the perogatives of the Crown, the privileges of the Peers, [...] [and] the RIGHTS OF THE
PEOPLE” was emphasised. Coke’s past conduct, in contrast, was highly doubtful: “

He supported the late disastrous administration in those measures which brought
famine to the land; and, in order to stifle the crisis and remonstrances of the
oppressed, passed those unconstitutional acts, -the Pitt, and Grenville, or the
gagging bill.”

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223 Thompson, Working class, p. 499.
224 Thompson, Working class, p. 185. For quotation see p. 74. See also Robert Wells, Riot and Political
Disaffection in Nottinghamshire in the Age of Revolutions, 1776-1803, (Nottingham: Nottingham University,
225 Becket, “Radical Nottingham”, p. 293.
227 Becket, “Radical Nottingham”, p. 293.
228 Paper War, p. 18.
229 Paper War, p. 19.
Moreover, Coke was criticised for believing he was not under any obligation to his electors “in matters of national import[sic].” The author asserted:

in other words, Gentlemen, as far as relates to sticking a lamp against a wall, paving a street, or putting down a post, he would attend to your wishes; but, that in cases of national and political importance, he in his unbounded sapience, knows better what is good for you, than your united and collective wisdom can point out to him.

This author, thus, argued that while Coke had payed attention to their wishes in local politics, he had ignored their opinions in national politics. A remark that is noteworthy since it stands in stark contrast to the view of the unreformed electorate promulgated by O’Gorman. He has claimed that while “electors could display considerable interest in local affairs [...] the mass of the electorate remained unaware of formal political philosophy and, in many constituencies, unfamiliar with issues of national significance”. Yet, such questions clearly were highly important in the Nottingham election contest (as they were in Middlesex). Coke, in the Birchite propaganda, stood accused of supporting the government crackdown on the reform movement, by supporting legislation which “openly insulted your legislative rights”, guaranteed by the British constitution. Moreover, Coke was reminded that it was his duty as an MP to defend “the RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE”, a duty which Birch’s supporters felt he had neglected, for which he was accused of being a “a parliamentary traitor”. Indeed, if formal political philosophy really was unimportant to voters, why then, did Birch’s supporters argue that Coke had supported infringement in the constitutional rights of the people, and used questions of conscience and solidarity to mobilise political support?

The emphasis on the importance of the rights of the people in the Birchite propaganda is interesting since it appears to have drawn inspiration from the rhetorics of the Wilkeite movement of the 1760s and 70s. Wilkes – the hero of the early reform movement – conducted a frontal assault on aristocratic oligarchy by arguing that power ought to emanate from the people, rather than percolating down from above. This viewpoint, moreover, inferred that the Wilkeites firmly believed that MPs ought to be guided by the wishes of the voters they represented. In the performance of the Nottingham election contest, thus, older radical discourses were merged with a new language of working-class rhetorics, in order to legitimise

230 Paper War, p. 19.
231 Paper War, p. 19.
232 O’Gorman, Voters, p. 224.
233 Paper War, p. 19.
234 Paper War, p. 276.
235 Brewer, Party ideology, p. 165.
claims of political power for working men. Birch supporters clearly believed that working men had a legitimate say in the nation’s affairs, and that their representatives ought to respect their wishes in such questions. Consequently, they argued that working men, through their rationality, had the required competences to judge for themselves how their constitutional rights best should be used and safeguarded. Coke, in contrast, rejected such accusations and defended his actions as necessary to combat the principles of the French revolution, arguing to the voters that his only crime was his strong support of the king. 236 Thus, while Birch’s supporters argued that an MP was obliged to pay heed to the voice of his voters, Coke rejected such claims and instead argued for the need to demonstrate loyalty towards the monarch and his royal ministry.

3.2.4 Women in white: the meanings of female participation

Another hotly contested issue in the Nottingham election was the meanings of female participation. Birch in his 1802 victory parade, according to the Nottingham Journal, “was preceded by twenty-four damsels, dressed in white, ornamented with wreaths of flowers, and carrying leaves of laurel in their hands; the foremost supporting a standard of the arms of the representatives”, who were accompanied by a large number of his male supporters, adorned in purple, pink and yellow, who sung “patriotic airs and hymns” to a band of music.237 As has been observed by Clark and Thomis, this event was picked up by government propagandist John Bowls in 1803, who promulgated to the press an image of Nottingham as the site of a wild Jacobin orgy. These women were accused of being prostitutes, extremely immodestly dressed, some of them in a state of near nudity, who celebrated the French revolution by singing Jacobin songs, carrying cockades in the French colours as well as a tree of liberty.238

This account, as Thomis argued already in the 1960s, was obviously false, since the Tory friendly Nottingham Journal failed to notice any of this at the time.239 Bowls’ description was also refuted by a witness from Coke’s council: the women had been modestly dressed, and that the tree of liberty, in fact, had been a bough of a birch tree – an allusion to the name of their candidate.240 Nonetheless, this piece of fake news was picked up by Coke’s supporters, and was used industriously during the 1803 campaign.241 Thus, the competences of

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236 Nottingham Journal, 26 March 1803.
237 Nottingham Journal, 17 July 1802.
239 Thomis, Politics and society, p. 165.
240 NM, p. 242.
241 Thomis, Politics and society, p. 165.
these women and the legitimacy of their participation in the election were challenged by attacks on their female virtue – which was believed to be very much contingent on chastity during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{242} Accusing them of being prostitutes was also a clearly classed attack, since this was associated with poor, lower class women.\textsuperscript{243} Moreover, this attack on the respectability of these women was a challenge to the legitimacy of Birch’s entire following; their political claims were debunked as the follies of French inspired, immoral Jacobins. For these reason, they were a dangerous threat to the community. If the Birchite’s won, the social order would be in turmoil; “Democratic Despotism” awaited Nottingham, accompanied with “widow’s tears, the Orphant’s cries [and] the shrieks of Virgin innocence and beauty immolated at the Shrine of Cruelty and Lust”.\textsuperscript{244}

3.3 Competences

Putting symbols to use in order to mobilise political support was an important competence in the performance of the Nottingham election. In particular, the symbol of the ducking were used industriously by both sides in election ballads, poetry and addresses to recruit followers. Birch’s supporters called Nottingham’s men to join the fight against Coke and his murderous supporters. Coke’s supporters, in contrast, defended this action as necessary to curb the influence of the French revolution, and attempted to rally Nottingham’s men in defence of English values now under attack. In this election, like in Middlesex, knowledge about how to use emotions to recruit followers also was an important competence. Birch’s campaign actively appealed to working men’s empathy for other working men’s sufferings and hardship – to their solidarity – and used ideas of collectiveness, to mobilise this group into action against Coke and his aristocratic patrons. In this way, I argue Birch’s campaign actively sought to turn this election into a class based conflict in order to ensure their victory.

3.3.1 Putting the ducking to use

In the previous section I observed that there was a strong local resentment against individuals who had participated in riots targeted towards advocators of parliamentary reform – an episode known locally as the ducking. Birch campaign appears to have been well aware of this inflammatory situation and used this symbol to recruit followers. Since their candidate


\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Paper War}, p. 119.
was a well-known advocator of reform, and since the victims of the ducking were targeted for their supposed reformist views and opposition to the war, it is perhaps of no surprise that Birch would attempt to make himself the champion of their cause. In this project music was used, as in an election ballad titled “Birch triumphant”:

This C--- was quite true to the blue ducking crew
When they murder’d poor RELPS, without doubt;
Then since it is so, shall we vote for him? No!
With a BIRCH of good broom sweep him out.

Thomis, in his rendition of the ducking, has argued that to those who were subjected to these acts of violence, there was no doubt that those responsible for this action was Coke, the Nottingham Tories (whose colour was blue), and their Church and King mob. As indicated by this verse, this clearly was still the case in this election contest. Coke, in the same song, was mocked for his performance in the election, and his early quitting of the contest:

At the hustings he cry’d, I’m not satisfy’d,
They wont let the duckers go free,
They spencer their cloath’es, cry hollo! there he goes!
If I stay they will sure spencer me.

So adieu! my dear friends, pray stop while it ends,
I’m determined to no longer stay,
For the folks are grown wise, they have open’d their eyes
And see they’ve been Cook’d, well-a-day!

Then the duckers did morn to think of such scorn,
The contest they gave up straightway,
And slunk home in the lurch, while brave Joseph Birch
Triumphant was chair’d, boys huzza!

In the narrative constructed here, the Nottingham election was presented as a struggle, championed by Birch, against the duckers. The spencerings, moreover, was praised as a successful move, instrumental in defeating Coke, and as a rightful vengeance on those who murdered Relphs. Furthermore, those who participated in the spencerings were praised as heroes, as “Britons bold”, who defied the enemy “devoid of all fear”, acting because “FREE-MEN they’ll be, or they’ll die”. The spencerings, the violence against Coke and his supporters, to the attackers, was a rightful vengeance on those who had ill-used members of their community, and even – as in the case of John Relphs – members of their own families.

245 For Birch’s stance in Parliament, see, Thomis, “Nottingham election”, p. 95.
246 Paper War, p. 153.
247 Thomis, Politics and society, p. 178.
249 Paper War, p. 154.
As was asserted by one of Birch’s supporters, it was entirely justified “to cut off the skirt of the coat of him who, a few years ago, in the plenitude of party zeal, murdered a father or a brother”. Sympathisers to Birch, thus, were urged to join the cause of their daring leader, and with manly vigour expel the murderous duckers, led by the cowardly Coke.

The use of these symbols also provides an interesting example of how the local and the national mapped in the practice of this election contest. To an extent, the spencering was a local vendetta. At the same time, this vendetta also was connected to wider demands for parliamentary reform, and a national, struggle of who was worthy of full citizenship. In other words, the meanings of participation in this practice involved both that spider web of local circumstances – to use the words of Elaine Chalus – and a wider struggle of political power. In the Nottingham contest this mapping of the local and the national, clearly, created a highly volatile situation, prompting the eruption of a massive use of violence. Thus, like in Middlesex local matters were turned into national symbols.

Coke’s supporters, on the other hand, described the ducking and the spencering quite differently, as in a song titled “A NEW SONG, In favour of Mr. Coke’s election”. In this narrative, Coke’s supporters were praised as “the true Sons of Freedom”, acting “boldly [to] withstand / the united attacks of this Jacobin band”. Birch supporters, furthermore, were described to be “call[ing] out for Liberty and Freedom”, but if this was their aim, the author remarked, “[...] why did they spencer and cut all the coats / Of those who did poll and for COKE gave their votes ?”. Thus, the Birches were accused of hypocrisy and of using violence to circumscribe the freedom of the election, something which Coke also accused his opponents of in an address, published after his humiliating retreat and defeat at Nottingham in 1802. The freedom of election was guaranteed by the British constitution, a document which was believed by most Georgians to be a perfect political arrangement. It was seen as embodying a particular consciousness of independence, freedom and personal liberty, which was thought to be inherent in all true Englishmen, in an almost racial sense. In other words, the practise of the election-as-an-entity, connoted specific meanings English national identity, which was fundamentally gendered in the masculine. Coke’s campaign, thus, used such understandings to their advantage, accusing their opponents, not only of breaking the law, but also, in a sense, of attacking Englishness itself.

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250 *Paper War*, pp. 303-4.
251 *Paper War*, p. 163.
252 *Nottingham Journal*, 26 June 1803, see also *The Times* 16, 19 July 1802.
This propaganda brings to attention a conflict between the two political factions as to how the practice of the election should be performed. Coke’s side clearly felt that the Birchites had deviated too far from their understanding of the practice-as-entity. While many supporting Birch believed it justified to use this election to punish those held responsible for their grievances, Coke’s supporters refuted the legitimacy of this violence. They argued that Britain, the constitution, and even the voter’s identities as English men, was now under threat, and urged sympathisers of Coke to “[...] heed not the threats of the Jacobin Crew / But shew the world that you still are True Blue”. Moreover, the cause of the Nottingham Tories, was linked to a struggle for the nation as a whole:

[...] be true to your King, to Coke, and your Cause,  
Respect your Religion, your Country, and Laws ;  
Be firmly united, and trust what I say :  
Be staunch to a man and you’ll sure win the day.

Coke’s propaganda, in this way, used contemporary notions of masculinity to call sympathisers into action as men, for their own sake, and for the sake of the entire kingdom.

Coke, ostensibly, was abhorred by the use of what he saw as excessive violence. However, it should be noted that there was a difference between what was stated in addresses published and signed with his name, and what was stated in anonymous propaganda pieces. A text titled “HYDROPHOBIA ; OR, THE DREAD OF DUCKING. IN MEASURRED PROSE” written by one of his supporters under the signature “TOBY TRUBLUE” reminisced the “good old days [...] [when] That rascal Paine’s combustible identity, we quickly burned [...] [and] boldly we advanc’d ‘gainst houses and the mill”. Thomas Paine, of course, was the arch villain to many loyalists, due to his emphatically egalitarian and republican rhetoric. The antagonism against Paine was epitomised by the widespread phenomena of effigy burnings of his figure at loyalists’ rallies in the early 1790s. An effigy of Paine was also burned by loyalists in Nottingham in 1793, which is likely what is referred to in this text. Furthermore, the author described how they put the mill on fire and “mark’d its servent progress with delight [...] and mutual health we drank, and sung the King’s salvation” – a reference to the burning of the reformist Robert Davison’s mill. They then sought out other professed friends to peace and parliamentary reform [...] [and] dragg’d the centri-fugitives into the limpid Leen, ‘midst [...] acclamations loud ! How wretched did the Hydrophobics cry, (with perfect sanity of mind, above our rude infliction I

255 Paper War, p. 164.  
256 Paper War, p. 164.  
258 Rogers, Crowds, pp. 202-3.  
259 See Becket,” Radical Nottingham”, p. 292.
confess) they begg’d and pray’d and pray’d and begg’d, till we most loyally
baptiz’d their yielding strength beneath the fluent weave.”

Calling their victims “Hydrophobics”, one might assume, was an expression of grim humour,
mocking them for their reluctance to be put into the river. The death victim was also
mentioned: “And Wrelps, old Wrelps, who oft [...] quaff the sparkling bowl, and talk of
Chatham, Pitt, and Rockingham’s reform, we number’d [him] with the dead: now low the
victim lies without a monumental tomb!” While, the author consented “Now freely we’ll
confess, that Ducking was no pretty thing;”, in the narrative constructed here, this action was
nonetheless praised as a necessary evil to stomp out the threat of disloyal reformists and
proponents of peace. This viewpoint stood in stark contrast to that of Coke’s opponents,
illustrating that the symbols of the ducking and the spencerings, and of participation in this
contest, was hotly disputed, and were used in different ways to mobilise support. In cases like
this, the usefulness of the analytical distinction between practise-as-entity and practice-as-
performance is clear. There exist common standards of what a practice is and what it entails,
but by also turning the attention to the actual doing of the practice, it is possible to make
clearer the conflicts between different human actors.

3.3.2 Class and dependency

Birch’s supporters responded to attempts to depict them as subversive and violent Jacobins,
by reminding Coke that he had done nothing to stop “the ducking and burning system of his
friends” in 1794. Furthermore, Coke’s supporters were accused of coercing their franchised
workmen to support their candidate. In particular William Haynes, known in the city of being
an enthusiastic supporter of Coke, appears to have drawn the ire of the Birchites. One witness
described the crowd reacting “extremely clamorous” when a rumour spread that Haynes was
present in the booth:

they said that not another vote should be taken till Haynes was delivered up to
them [...] Did they express [...] what the Cause of their Indignation against him
was? – I understood it was, they conceived he had influenced some Voters in
Favour of Mr. Coke, and he was obnoxious to them on that Account”.

Fortunately for him, perhaps, Haynes was not present inside at this moment. However, the
fury of the crowd against him did not pass. When Haynes later walked up to the hustings with

261 Paper War, p. 341.
262 Paper War, p. 343.
263 Paper War, p. 301.
264 NM, p. 118.
close to a hundred persons to poll for Coke, most of whom were his own workmen, they were
ambushed and pelleted with stones. Many were hurt, and Haynes and the voters following
him were forced to disperse, preventing them from being able to poll.265

Not only was Haynes targeted by the crowd at the hustings; his home also became a site
of one of the major outburst of violence during the polling in 1802. Robert Rowe, one of
Haynes workmen, was present inside this building and stated that it was assaulted by a group
of 300-400 persons, who threw stones at it and broke its windows. However, together with a
number of his workmen and a group of friends, Haynes managed to successfully keep the
attackers at bay until the military arrived by threatening them that he would fire into the
crowd if they attacked.266

From available source material, it is not possible to determine whether – or to what
extent – Haynes actually used his position as an employer to coerce his workmen into
supporting the candidates he favoured. Rowe, the only one of his employees who testified in
the trial, when questioned by the committee if there was any truth to these accusations,
answered somewhat elusively: “I cannot tell what he may have said in my Absence ; he never
did threaten them in my Presence.”267 Though it should be noted that, given his position of
dependency, this statement obviously cannot be trusted. However, it is worth noticing that
Coke’s faction does not appear to have denied that workmen and tenants were influenced by
their patrons. In his nomination speech at the Nottingham exchange in 1803, Coke even
argued that “it was quite fair [...] that landlords should influence their tenants, and he would
be sorry to see the day when men of property could not use such influence”268 An opinion
which supporters of Birch clearly did not share. Since Birch’s faction claimed that Coke’s
supporters used coercion to influence voters, and since Coke did not deny this, arguing
instead that this was a legitimate action, it is reasonable to assume that this did indeed occur.
Coercion was considered part of the election as-entity by Coke’s faction, and knowledge
about how to influence voters, thus, can be seen as an important competence in the doing of
politics in Nottingham.

3.3.3 Solidarity and collectiveness: putting emotions to use

Life at the lower end of the social scale could be harsh, and where margins were narrow, a
decent into poverty could happen quickly – a reality which posed a particular challenge to

266 NM, pp. 220, 264, 347.
267 NM, p. 219.
268 Morning Chronicle, 2 June 1803.
working men’s masculinities. In the eyes of the elite, the looming threat of poverty made working men susceptible to coercion and bribery, which risked putting them into an effeminate position of dependency, disqualifying them of citizenship rights.269 A difficulty which supporters of Birch clearly was aware of. One of these reminded working-class voters of previous years of hardships which had rendered many men incapable of maintaining their families – regardless of their industry – forcing them to rely on the parish relief. This was an iniquitous situation, and the author asserted that Coke and the Nottingham Tories used this to wrongfully “deny you either political knowledge, or the participation of political rights.”270

This is noteworthy because it indicates a clear political assertiveness; working men, according to this author, had the right and the capacity to participate in political life. At the same time, the author also consented, working men might find themselves in a position where they had to – reluctantly – accept support from the parish. However, this was not because they lacked the required competences to have a say in political affairs, but because they were forced to do so by forces beyond their control. The outrage which the use of coercion by supporters of Coke against their workmen must be understood within this context. Depriving a working man of his employment or home, was not merely a financial threat, but also, in effect, an attempt to deprive him of his political rights as well.

The Birchite propaganda is an interesting source material as it appears to have served as a site were the difficulties facing working class men seeking increased political rights were negotiated. One such difficulty was the financial clout of Coke and his aristocratic patrons, which Birch’s supporters claimed was used to deprive working men of their capacity for independent action. As one of these argued, in reference to the financial backing of Coke, by the Dukes of Newcastle and Portland among others:271

[...] a STOCK PURSE is formed against your independence. The neighbouring Aristocracy, not content with seating whom they please in Parliament for the COUNTY, have now combined by their subscriptions to this fund, to subvert the independence of the TOWN.272

This development was only possible to stop by the assertions of Nottingham’s working men. However, there existed a serious obstacle, which had to be overcome in order to accomplish this “glorious task”, namely, the “coercion of every base and oppressive species” targeted

269 Clark, Struggle, p. 141-4.
270 Paper War, p. 276.
271 Along with the Earl of Chesterfield, the Viscount of Newark, Lord Middleton, Lord Chesterfield, and the Marquess of Tichfield, the Dukes were toasted with “three times three cheers” at Coke’s victory dinner at Thurland Hall, see Paper War, p. 308.
272 Paper War, p. 20.
towards “the working class of electors”. Past experiences had shown that working men had to expect financial threats from their superiors, and in order to combat this the author proposed:

Let them [the working class of electors] associate, and by periodical small subscription, form a fund to which the oppressed may have recourse [...] [and] to which men of the most independent spirit, may apply without exciting one feeling repugnant to the most manly mind.

This suggestion is very interesting indeed, as it is an attempt to navigate the working man’s paradox in his quest for extended political rights: Independence was prerequisite to claims of political legitimacy, yet working men, due to their susceptible position in society, could easily find themselves in a position of dependency, unable to care for themselves and their family. After all, this was a society in which the equality of the male citizen with other men depended on his ability to protect – and dominate – women, children and other males in his own household. How, then, was this paradox to be resolved? By working men joining together, diverting a small share of their income to a joint fund, the existence of which would allow them a means of standing up to the threats of their employers. In this way, this fund represented and idea about solidarity and collectiveness. It would enable working men to avoid their manly independence being compromised, either by having to submit to the threats of other men, or by losing their position as family providers and be forced to rely on poor relief. The importance of this fund being formed collectively should not be underestimated either, since it seemingly provided a means to avoid having to accept the patronage of any individual man. Thus, in effect, the author of this address argued it was possible to accept the help of others without losing the competence of manly independence. Something which was necessary to challenge the power of Nottinghamshire’s aristocracy.

It would appear clear that supporters of Birch believed that working men were capable of political virtue, of acting independently, although the hardships of life might occasionally compromise this capacity. As one supporter argued in an address working class electors: “though you earn your bread by the sweat of your brow, the spirit of Freedom inhabits your bosoms”. This capacity of independence, moreover, was actively linked to English national identity and patriotism; victory for the working class of Nottingham against the Nottinghamshire aristocracy was necessary because the good of the country demanded it.

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273 Paper War, p. 21.
274 Paper War, p. 21.
275 Clark, Struggle, p. 142; McCormack, Independent man, p. 19.
276 Paper War, p. 273-4.
277 Paper War, pp. 21, 277.
According to Birch’s supporters, thus, the cause for the, was fundamentally a *patriotic cause*. A sense of patriotism, in this way, was seen a necessary competence for legitimate political subjectivity, and for their participation in the practice of the election, which speaks against O’Gorman’s argument that parliamentary election were essentially local affairs.²⁷⁸

The Nottingham election contest, according to the Birchite propaganda, was a struggle for the independent electors of Nottingham against the influence county aristocracy. As one supporter of Birch argued in an address to the electors: “No compulsion is refrained from, no threats spared, to deprive you of your elective franchise; the value of which consists alone in bestowing it according to your conscience as Freemen ought to do.”²⁷⁹ What was at stake, according to this author, was “YOUR BIRTHRIGHTS, and the NOBELEST PRIVILIGE an ENGLISHMAN enjoys”.²⁸⁰ In this rendition, the object of conflict was the right to vote *according to one’s conscience*, which was presented as a defining quality of Englishness. By the end of the eighteenth century the concept of independence came to be defined more in terms of inner moral qualities, and became more associated with maleness itself. This, as McCormack has argued, marked a key shift towards a “culture based on emotional authenticity and attachments” which could be potentially accessible to all men.²⁸¹ Within this context, the emphasis placed on the right to vote according to one’s conscience, can be seen as strategy to claim political power for working class voters in Nottingham. Since their vulnerable position in society limited their possibility to claim independence based on fortune and property, they instead legitimised their political subjectivity based on their moral competences. In this way, moral emotions were essential in delineating this contest as classed based conflict, which was used to mobilise political support. Indeed, that “iron hand of oppression” against which the Birchite propaganda urged working class voters to turn, was abhorring because it used their financial situation against them, thereby forcing them to vote against their conscience.²⁸²

These feelings of moral consciousness which were used to unite working men were clearly gendered in the masculine. If voters persisted in the struggle for the right to vote according to one’s consciences, one supporter argued:

You may then walk your *native Town* in the erect attitude of MEN rendered FREE by public virtue. – If you on the other hand you *relax* either in PRINCIPLE OR

²⁷⁹ *Paper War*, p. 32.
²⁸² *Paper War*, p. 303.
ACTIVITY, you will exist only by the sufferance of those, whom you have thereby rendered YOUR MASTERS !!!

To abandon your conscience, thus, was equated to submitting to the will of other men, reducing them to an effeminate position of dependency, thereby disqualifying them as legitimate subject. This competence of moral independence, thus, needed to be constantly acted and defended, or else it would be taken away from them. Importantly, conscience was not merely an individual trait; according to Birch’s propaganda it was something which existed in all working men. It was essentially a collective quality, and as such it was used to mobilise support.

Even though the Birchites claimed that Coke’s faction sought to deprive them of their franchise, it should be emphasised that this is not what is advocated in the propaganda in his interest. What Coke’s supporters objected to was not that working men of Nottingham had the right to vote. Rather, Birch’s supporters were criticised for not showing what they regarded as a necessary deference towards the “grand chain”, arguing that “no workman employed by others can prosper, or accomplish anything better than rags, unless he is honest, industrious, looks up with reverence to superiors, and with due respect to his employers”. Working men had an obligation to act with loyalty towards their superiors for the good of the community.

Such claims were refuted by Birch supporters, who argued that Coke’s understanding of the right to freely exercise one’s franchise meant “nothing more than this – that the tenant should be free do vote as his landlord ordered him; that the servant and the workman should be at liberty to obey the commands of his master or employer”. Instead, they argued:

The obligation [between landlord and tenant] is mutual. Such also is the obligation between master and servant: when the labour is accomplished, and the labourer is paid, the compact is concluded. If in either case, a man’s franchise is disposed of, he is not the tenant, or servant, but the slave. – And it is referred to every tenant, and every working man to determine, to what the purpose it is that the Constitution of his country renders him free, if he cannot exercise that right as he judges proper?

What is emphasised here, in sharp contrast to Coke’s propaganda, is the bilateral nature of the contract between landlords and tenants, and between employers and workmen. While Coke’s side argued that workmen had an obligation to support the candidates of their masters, Birch’s supporters argued that their votes were not part of this contract. Moreover, and this of crucial importance, they asserted that every working man has the

283 Paper War, p. 34.
284 Paper War, p. 158.
285 Paper War, p. 302.
286 Paper War, p. 302.
capacity, the *rationality*, to decide for himself how to cast his votes. As Clark has argued, Paine’s notion of inherent rationality became immensely important to working class reformers; if all men were born rational, all men were equally qualified for citizenship.\textsuperscript{287} Thus, even though a man might be a servant, this author argued, he was not a slave. In other words, being a servant did not infer that a man was less worthy, if he defended his constitutional right to exercise the franchise. This rhetoric is interesting indeed. Effectively, it constituted an attempt to re-negotiate the competences required for political participation, to the benefit of a group whose social position often disqualified them by default, according to the rhetorics of the dominant discourses on citizenship and political virtue. As one supporter asserted, Joseph Brich was “THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE”, and “the man of your choice”.\textsuperscript{288} By choosing him, the electors had proven to “have dared to think for themselves”, thereby demonstrating their capability to withstand the “oppressive influence” of the county aristocracy.\textsuperscript{289} Working men, through their moral consciousness and their rationality, thus, had demonstrated that they too were capable to withstand coercion and corruption; that they were capable of acting independently.

\textsuperscript{287} Clark *Struggle*, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{288} Paper *War*, pp. 31-2.
\textsuperscript{289} Paper *War*, pp. 31-2.
Chapter 4. Conclusion

By placing this investigation at time of the treaty of Amiens – a time of rapid social and political change – I wished to explore how such changes affected how politics was done at the level of the parliamentary constituencies. In order to achieve this, I have investigated the election contest as a social practice, drawing inspiration from the analytical framework developed by Shove, Pantzar, Watson. Access to the practice of the election was gained through the use of a wide range of source materials. Particularly important to this study has been the minutes of evidence from the trial of these elections by the select committee of the House of Commons – a material largely overlooked and underused by historians up to this point. These were used in combination with newspaper reports, and a range of political propaganda such as satirical prints, advertisements, election ballads and squibs, thereby providing detailed insight into the doing of politics at this level.

When investigating the first research question of this thesis – concerning which strategies were used by different political factions to recruit supporters – the analytical distinction between practise-as-entity and practice-as-performance has proved highly illuminating. I have argued that these concepts make clear that the practice of the election could encompass several distinctly different ways of doing politics, and that they allow to identify the lines of conflict between the opposing political factions more clearly. In the case of the Middlesex election, the challenger Burdett sought support from all levels of society, including lower-class people, styling himself as the champion of the rights of the poor and for parliamentary reform. In contrast, his opponent Mainwaring eagerly espoused the support of the elite, cooperated with the establishment of Middlesex, and styled himself as a defender of the social order. In Nottingham, the challenger Birch actively sought to turn this election into a class conflict, a struggle for the poor against the rich, and elicited the support of the town’s politically assertive working-class to ensure his victory. His opponent, Coke, instead allied with the Nottinghamshire aristocracy and championed the cause of deference to local elites.

In this thesis, I have also focused how the opposing candidates and their campaigns combined an amalgam of different elements in their performance of the election, as a way of placing the emphasis on the actual doing of politics. I have argued that the consequences of the government’s repression of political opponents were at the heart of the conflict in both investigated elections. To many supporting the reformists candidates in both Nottingham and Middlesex, this was essentially a struggle against oppression, for a more democratic society.
something which the titled of this thesis alludes to. Both Burdett and Birch challenged a sitting government MP by actively connecting their campaigns to meanings of a wider, national struggle about the nature of the constitution, the rights of the people and about who really had the right to a say in politics.

In Middlesex, Burdett effectively used Cold Bath Fields prison and its solitary cells as a symbol of an authoritarian regime, and constructed himself as the champion of the rights of the inmates – many of whom came from a lowly situation in life. Their sufferings under the harsh prison management, for which Mainwaring was responsible as a magistrate and chairman of the quarter sessions, was the cause of much resentment to many inhabitants of London. By connecting himself and his campaign to these individuals, he made the argument that the rights of all mattered – even prison inmates. Moreover, Cold Bath connoted violations on specific understandings of English liberties. Independent English men, and their dependants – servants and children which it was their duty to protect – could now be locked away indefinitely in its dark cell without a fair trial, thereby depriving them of their constitutional rights, which was a profound threat to the masculine identities of the voters.

In the project of connecting the symbolic understanding of participation in this election to a struggle for the rights of the people material strategies were essential. Burdett’s campaign used a range of political artefacts, including visual devises such as prints, banners, and effigies, drawing on the symbolic power of the prison to discredit his opponent as a worthy representative. Mainwaring too utilised political artefacts in his defence against Burdett, who was depicted as a rambling lunatic, unfit to lead, and his followers were depicted as disorderly, subversive mob, threatening the country and the constitution, which he defended.

In Nottingham, Birch’s campaign actively sought to present this contest as a struggle for the town’s working-class. A particularly powerful symbol was the coercion used by employers and landlords against their workmen and tenants to force them into voting for Coke. This evoked particular meanings of working men’s masculinities, and Coke’s faction was accused of using their susceptible position in society against them, threatening to take away their political rights. On the one hand, to be forced to support a specific candidate was to submit to the will of other men. On the other, if they refused they instead risked losing their employment or home, rendering them incapable of caring for their wives and children. By use of this dual sword, Birch supporters argued, Coke threatened to take away working men’s manly independence, the prerequisite for electoral citizenship. In this context, the right to vote according to one’s conscience – which was eagerly promulgated by Birch’s supporters –
became the symbolic object of struggle, as a way for working men to claim political legitimacy. Through their moral emotions, their rationality, and patriotism, working men had demonstrated that they were in possession of the required competences for political participation.

While Coke and his supporters did not object to working men being entitled to the vote, they argued it was justified for employers and landlords to influence their subordinates; working men ought to show respect their superiors for the good of the community. On this point, thus, opinions clearly differed between the two rival political factions as to how politics should be done and what meanings participation in the election signified. Moreover, Coke’s supporters attacked the competences of Birch female supporters, equating them to prostitutes, inspired by the French revolution. Thereby the legitimacy of Birch and his supporters was challenged through accusations of sexual immodesty. Birch’s campaign was debunked as a wild Jacobin orgy, threatening to turn the social order upside down.

Another advantage of studying the election contest as a practice is the possibility to encompass the actions of different groups of participants into the analysis. Focusing this aspect, the second research question of this thesis, serves to emphasise the reciprocal relationship between the candidates and their followers. McCormack has emphasised the importance of respectable female supporters to male politicians in the late Georgian period, something which was also important in Burdett’s campaign, were the participation of elite women aided the construction of himself as a virtuous, and desirable politician. However, I have also argued that other groups of supporters mattered as well. In Middlesex, many unfranchised, lower-class men and women actively chose to support Burdett’s campaign, taking the opportunity created by the election to protest against their magistrates. By doing so, their actions contributed to legitimising Burdett’s cause. The fact that many lower-class women supported him was also important since this contributed in constructing Burdett as genuinely supported by the sense of the community. Conversely, Burdett through his support of the rights of the poor, can be said to have contributed in legitimising their protests.

The injustices and physical suffering of the prisoners of Cold Bath clearly antagonised many unfranchised, lower-class people. This served as major source of inspiration to several well-organised protests, in which a range of political artefacts were used to discredit Mainwaring as a worthy political subject. Arguably the most important of these materials was their own bodies, through which they created a massive display of visual support on the

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streets of London. It is clear, I argue, that the rights of the prisoners mattered to this group as well, and that they used this election to convey this message to their superiors. In making this observation, I wish to nuance O’Gorman’s assessment of the participation of non-voters in parliamentary election, where the main motivation of this group is described as an attempt to benefit from the many temporary perks brought on by a contest.\textsuperscript{291} Clearly, this cannot sufficiently explain the actions of this group in this case, where the election was used as an opportunity to protest against societal injustices. Conversely, the participation of individuals from the lower end of the social scale proved highly important in Nottingham as well. Through material strategies, through attacks on the bodies, clothes and property of Coke’s supporter’s crowds led by working men sized control over the town’s key venues, thereby influencing the election in favour of Birch, their favoured candidate.

Support from the electors was also highly important to the construction of the candidate as worthy political subjects. In Burdett’s visual propaganda the candidate depicted himself surrounded by respectably dressed gentlemen, while prints from Mainwaring’s supporters instead depicted these as a disorderly mob. Conversely, In Birch’s propaganda Coke’s supporters were described as cold blooded murderers for their participation in the ducking, while Birch voters were attacked for being violent Jacobins. Thus, an important realisation of this thesis is that groups of supporters were essential in constructing candidates as worthy political subjects. Likewise, in their attempts to discredit their opponents, attacking their supporters was an important strategy.

By including different groups of participants into the analysis, I have also wished to focus how these actors combined different elements of the election in order to investigate how they did politics. In Middlesex, those freeholders supporting Burdett appear to have shared his indignation with the usage of Cold Bath. It was connected to a resentment towards Pitt’s Gagging acts, which they argued undermined their constitutional rights. In secrecy and without trial, they could now be confined indefinitely to the solitary cells of this prison, something which was a threat to their identity as English men. What was important in disqualifying Mainwaring as a worthy representative in their eyes, was his support of this legislation in parliament. He had ignored their wishes, and was called to answer for this. Something which Mainwaring refuted he was required to do. In Nottingham too, supporters of Birch expressed their indignation with the Gagging acts. They resented Coke’s conduct in parliament, arguing that he was an unworthy representative because he ignored their wishes in

\textsuperscript{291} O’Gorman, “Campaign rituals”, pp. 100-3.
national political questions, feeling betrayed by his support of the government repression and of the war. Burdett’s and Birch’s supporters here utilised Wilkeite rhetorics, arguing that power ought to emanate from below, to question the position of the oligarchy. To them, thus, participation in the election was connected to a wider struggle against the Pittite repression, which connoted the defence of specific meanings of masculinity and English national identity. Thus, ideas about the nation were highly important also in the extraparliamentary political process.

This observation calls into consideration Frank O’Gorman’s description of the unreformed electorate. Clearly, the voters in Middlesex and Nottingham were concerned with more than just the leadership of their local communities; in both these elections government policies and the nature of the constitution came under intense debate. In a sense, I suggest, these elections became venues were the consequences of living under an authoritarian regime could be discussed, creating an opportunity to challenge the discursive foundation on which the aristocratic oligarchy stood. Though it should be emphasised that this thesis is case study. It is not possible to determine with certainty to which extent the political consciences of the electorate in these constituencies were reflective of broader national developments. Nonetheless, the findings of this thesis suggest that more research in this area is needed to enable a better understanding of the meanings of participation in politics to Georgian contemporaries at this point in time.

When summarizing the result of this investigation, I also wish to emphasise the crucial importance of emotions in these elections, and not just as ideals about individual virtue. Collective feelings were stressed as a unifying factor for all participants, and was used as a means of mobilising people into political action – particularly so for the reformist candidates. In Middlesex, this was expressed as empathy and indignation evoked by the fates of the prisoners, which proved capable of mobilising hundreds of thousands of people. In Nottingham, solidarity and empathy for the situation of other working men, as well as the moral indignation caused by their opponents use of coercion were actively stressed, thereby delineating this election as a primarily class based conflict. Moreover, I have argued that the use of material resources was central in these elections. Certainly, it mattered what was said, but the visual aspect was just as crucial. Male and female supporters openly displaying their support, through clothing, colourful cockades, and their own bodies, as well as a range of other visual devices and even the spaces of the town, were highly important to the ways in which politics was done. As the Nottingham case clearly illustrates, these resources could
become the target of organised attacks, depriving the opponent of such opportunities for visual display.

In this thesis, I have investigated these elections as social practices, as a means of including the actions of different groups into the analysing. This, I argue, has made clear that the candidates, the electors, as well as the unfranchised members of the community, all were active participants, and that they all were important, meaningful, political actors. In making this observation I wish to emphasise that participation in the practice of the election was a collective effort – not something reserved for specific groups. In particular this appears to have been the case for the campaigns of the reformist candidates.

On a final note, I wish to return to McCormack’s study *The independent man*, which served as an important inspiration and starting point of this investigation. While McCormack focused the formation of ideals of citizenship and masculinity, I have turned my attention to the doing of politics at the level of the localities, which has led to some important observations. First, McCormack has emphasized the currency of attributes such as honesty, bluffness, and political efficacy in Georgian political culture. While not disagreeing with this assessment, I have also argued that competences such as knowledge about the use and organisation of crowd action, the use of symbols, political artefacts, and, indeed, political violence, could be just as important. Second, the ideal of the independent man certainly was ever-present as a point of reference also in Nottingham and Middlesex, to candidates, freeholders and working men alike. Nonetheless, while there existed a powerful ideal of independence, in practice, this independent man was in fact dependent on all the other men and women who participated in the extraparliamentary political process.
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Sammanfattning

Tidigare forskning har betonat den intima kopplingen mellan politik och maskulinitet i Georgiansk politisk kultur. Dock saknas kunskap om hur dessa formationer påverkade det politiska livet i de parlamentariska valkretsarna – den nivå på vilken de flesta människor upplevde politiken under denna period. Övergången mellan 1700- och 1800-talet är också en spännande period av stora samhällsomvandlingar då starka krav på ett mer demokratiskt system ställs från grupper utanför den traditionella eliten. Genom att förlägga denna studie vid freden vid Amiens 1802–1803 avser denna uppsats att bidra till en ökad förståelse av hur sådana förändringar påverkade uppträdandet av politiken på valkretsnivå. För att kunna undersöka detta görs en fallstudie av två val som båda var del av det allmänna parlamentsval som utlystes 1802, Nottingham och Middlesex. Dessa fall undersöks med inspiration av det analytiska ramverk som Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar och Matt Watson utvecklat som sociala praktiker. Detta med syftet att skifta fokus från formationen av manlighetsideal i politiken – vilket stått i fokus i tidigare forskning – till själva görandet av politiken för att bättre kunna förstå vad detta faktiskt innebar för de människor som deltog i denna process.

Shoves m.fl. analytiska distinktion mellan practis-as-entity och practice-as-performance ger ett användbart verktyg för att kunna fokusera parlamentsvalens strukturella ramverk likväl som konstruktionen och förhandlande av dessa strukturer i denna specifika praktik. Därtill används Shoves m.fl. definition av en social praktik som en enhet eller ett mönster bestående av olika element som är sammankopplade och ömsesidigt beroende av varandra. Dessa element inkluderar: kroppsliga och mentala aktiviteter, materiella ting och dess användning, bakgrundskunskap i form av förståelser och know-how, vilka sammanfattas med begreppen meanings, materials, och competences. Denna definition är särskilt användbar då den gör det möjligt att inkludera materiella förutsättningarna, likväl som kopplingar till konstruktionen av kön och klass i analysen.


Tillgång till parlamentsvalets praktik möjliggörs av utnyttjandet av ett brett källmaterial. Nottingham och Middlesex är speciellt användbara fall eftersom resultaten överklagades av den förlorande sidan och därmed blev granskade av underhusets särskilda kommittee. Protokollen från denna kommittés vittnesförhör erbjuder en unik inblick i det politiska livet i dessa valkretsar, men det är ett källmaterial som hittills förblivit underutnyttjat i historisk forskning. Detta kombineras med tidningsrapportering, likväl som en mängd annan politisk propaganda som satirteckningar, annonser, sånger och poesi, för att ge en detaljerad inblick i politikens görande.


Ytterligare ett viktigt resultat av denna undersökning är betydelsen av känslor i valkampanjerna. Även i tidigare forskning har betydelsen av känslor i georgiansk politisk kultur framhävts, men då som ideal om individuell dygd. Genom att istället fokusera själva görandet av politiken nyanserar jag denna uppfattning genom att visa på vilken av kollektiva känslor; det var viktigt att alla deltagarna förenades av gemensamma känslor av moralisk indignation. Att inkludera den materiella aspekten av politikens har också visat sig vara ett fruktbart grepp och jag betonar dess centrala betydelse för valets praktik. Det spelade stor roll vad som sades, men betydelsen av vad som syntes skall inte underskattas. Kandidaterna och deras kommittéer fäste stor vikt vid att manliga och kvinnliga supportar öppet visade sin lojalitet genom sina kroppar, kläder och kokarder. Därtill var stadens fysiska platser av central betydelse.

Att undersöka dessa parlamentsval som sociala praktiker har också möjliggjort att inkludera olika grupper av deltagare i analysen. Därigenom visar jag att alla grupper av aktörer, kvinnor, män, inklusive de från samhällets läge skikt var alla betydelsefulla politiska aktörer och deras deltagande hade följder för praktiken som helhet. Därför betonar jag att deltagandet i parlamentsvalets praktik var en kollektiv ansträngning – inte något reserverat för en specifik grupp. Att fokusera deltagarnas handlingar möjliggör också en rörelse bort från formering av politiska ideal, till att vad som faktiskt räknades i praktiken. Tidigare forskning har framhållit vikten av attribut som rättframhet, ärlighet och politisk förmåga i georgiansk politisk kultur. Genom att också undersöka politikens görande visar jag att kompetenser som kunskap om användandet och organisationen av folkmassor, om utnyttjandet av stadens utrymmen, om användandet av symboler och olika artefakter och även om användandet av politiskt våld kunde vara lika viktigt.