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Democracy and disorder: Electoral violence and political modernisation in England and Wales, 1857-1880

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**Democracy and Disorder: Electoral Violence and Political Modernisation in
England and Wales, 1857 – 1880**

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Edith Cowan University, Perth
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Abstract

The thesis analyses mid-nineteenth century electoral violence in England and Wales in order to contribute to our understanding of the character of Victorian electoral politics, and to assess the pace of political modernization as it has recently been defined. Historians have long acknowledged the presence of physical violence, rioting and intimidation during British elections from at least the Middle Ages to the turn of the twentieth-century, and yet the precise nature, frequency and scale of this phenomenon has remained somewhat obscured by a lack of statistical data on the subject. Therefore, by compiling a numerical sample of violence, based on strict definitional parameters, this research corrects the quantitative void in which discussions of English and Welsh election violence have largely been conducted.

This study of election violence provides a means of assessing the pace of political change because coercion, intimidation and partisan conflict represented a visible expression of an older electoral culture; one that stands contrary to interpretations of the changes in electoral politics after 1832. Almost fifty years after the passage of the Great Reform Act, elections in some English and Welsh constituencies continued to turn upon matters of local importance, electoral history, tradition and ritual. Within such a framework the outbreak of violence represented a continued recourse to traditional, pre-reform electoral practices. Historians discuss the rapid development of partisan, principled politics after 1832, yet the picture of mid-Victorian electoral politics that emerges from this study is one in which such phenomena competed – particularly in larger boroughs – with older expressions of political mobilization.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief: incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or contain any defamatory material.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor, Ed Jaggard, without whose encouragement, advice and guidance this thesis would never have been attempted, let alone completed. It was he who first prompted my interest in Victorian politics and who encouraged me into postgraduate study, something I'm sure he questioned at times as I missed every deadline he set for me.

I would also like to thank Iain Brash for his insightful comments on part of the draft, Trevor Lloyd for his suggestions and advice at the very start of this degree, and Professor Geoffrey Bolton for his encouragement and generous words at the proposal stage.

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Chapter I

Introduction

I

Some of the Conservative workmen in Carmarthen felt sorely aggrieved by the treatment they received at the hands of the Radical mob on the previous Tuesday...and accordingly expressed their firm determination not to permit a repetition of such conduct...About two in the afternoon there were signs of a general mêlée...Several small skirmishes occurred, but we are happy to say that nothing serious transpired...The scene, however, afforded a strong argument on the question of democracy, proving that it is dangerous, that its weapon is violence, and that intellect is scorned by a certain section of the people.

Carmarthen Borough Election, November 1868.¹

In many ways the above quote, from the *Carmarthen Journal*, represents a typical contemporary press report of mid-nineteenth century English election violence: conflict is described, here between conservative and radical partisans; the incident gave rise to that most Victorian of fears, the threat of *demos*; and violence is blamed on less educated sections of the populace. Such characteristics were recurring elements in Victorian accounts of violent electioneering – to which most mid-century English and Welsh citizens were well, if not equally, accustomed. Yet to what extent does this isolated anecdote reflect the wider realities of Victorian election violence? The Carmarthen example is in fact relatively atypical: it refers to a small Welsh county town, whereas the majority of this type of violence occurred in large English industrial towns; and although in this instance the scale of violence reached only that of a ‘small skirmish’, most episodes of mid-Victorian election disorder were serious outbursts of crowd violence.

The character of English electoral violence has been the focus of a number of historical studies since the 1960s, yet few reach a consensus regarding the scale,

¹ *Carmarthen Journal*, 27 November 1868, p.3.

frequency and nature of the phenomenon, and fewer still are based on any degree of quantitative research. The lack of a detailed statistical study of this subject has meant that some of the characteristics attributed to electoral violence have been misplaced. These include issues of origin (where did violence occur), scale (the severity of violence) and relevance (what such episodes represented within the context of electoral politics). It is therefore the goal of this thesis, through a quantitative analysis of episodes of violence, to examine and critically reassess the ambiguities that characterise contemporary historical understanding of English and Welsh electoral disorder. Furthermore, by arguing that this phenomenon reflected the priorities of an older electoral culture, this study will use violence as a method of assessing the pace of political modernisation in England and Wales during the mid-Victorian period.

An important characteristic of this period was that while some elements of the political system heralded a new age of modern, democratic mass politics, others remained fixed to an older style of politics that was more traditional and exclusive. In the introduction to her doctoral thesis on the 1857 and 1859 British general elections, Caroline Jackson writes of the relationship between these 'old' and 'new' elements of politics:

This study...reflects the transitional character of the politics of the late 1850s; and it illuminates the paradoxes which flowed from the presence, side by side in the political system, of practices and attitudes some of which looked back to the past, others of which looked forward to the politics of the future.²

Thus in Britain during the mid-Victorian period there emerged a dichotomy between two competing forms of politics. Alongside the development of constituency party organisation, the growth of voter partisanship and the evolution of the modern two-

² Caroline Jackson, "The British General Elections of 1857 and 1859", unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1980, p.2.

party system there existed a continued recourse to an older form of politics. That dichotomy is reflected in the title of this thesis, 'Democracy and Disorder'; terms that describe the relationship between nascent modern features of a democratic system, and the lingering elements of traditional pre-reform politics. Within the context of this study 'democracy' describes the modern features of the British political system: an expanded and more inclusive franchise; the growth of efficient and centralised party organisations; rational political debate; party discipline and the gradual subversion of local, idiosyncratic issues by national party platforms increasingly disseminated by a popular press. The term 'disorder' correspondingly describes the pre-modern or pre-reform features of the system including the politics of deference and influence, consensus politics, local forms of political identity and organisation, the attachment by a portion of the electorate, to corrupt inducements to vote such as money and beer, and the presence of electoral violence. The co-existence of old and new forms of politics reflected a somewhat disjointed process of political modernisation. It is this aspect of nineteenth-century British politics that this study will also explore.

To begin with, however, it is necessary to outline precisely what is being discussed here. The terms *election violence* and *election disorder* are used interchangeably throughout the thesis to describe episodes of crowd violence that occurred during the period set aside for the contesting of a parliamentary election.³ More specifically, election violence is defined here as a wilful disruption to the procedures of an election campaign, through the use of collective violence, whether physical or material, implicit or explicit. The term 'violence' is defined as physical damage to persons or

³ Violence also occurred at by-elections during the period and a number of these are included in the sample.

property, or the threat thereof. Instances of election violence are distinguished from criminal activity and other forms of popular disturbance (such as food, military, labour or political riots), not merely by their occurrence during an election campaign, but also by a direct relationship to the events, personalities and issues that comprised specific electoral contests. This distinction is an important one, as it relates each instance of violence to the electoral/political process. Upon such a predication rests the argument that an analysis of such events can be used to assess the pace of political change.

Episodes of election disorder were often complicated events that owed as much to long-term, localised, political grievances as to short-term provocations. Violence could occur when an unpopular candidate defeated a local favourite, when liberal distributions of free alcohol exacerbated partisan enthusiasm, when organised gangs were hired to intimidate voters, when bands of party supporters encountered each other in the streets, or when campaign events – such as speeches, meetings and processions – ran out of control in an age when public policing was still in its infancy. Election violence was not normally the product of direct political protest, nor did it represent a challenge to the established political system. Rather, it grew out of the fabric of local electoral conflict, either as the product of corrupt practices, violent partisan enthusiasm or as a loss of control by campaign managers of the ritualistic processes that characterised Victorian electioneering. Furthermore, election violence differed from other types of popular disturbance in that it was largely predictable – it only occurred during an election campaign – and in a great many constituencies it formed an expected (though not generally accepted) part of electoral proceedings. Much of the evidence of disorder examined in this thesis is drawn from sustained episodes of violence, however some attention has also been given to the ‘cooping’, or

kidnapping, of voters prior to the polling day. Though not strictly episodes of crowd violence, such actions are of interest because they represented the use of physical force to pervert the electoral process. Furthermore, in many cases the forcible capture of electors was accompanied by, or initiated, more serious outbursts of disorder.

The quantification and analysis of election violence is based on an important assumption: that within the generally tumultuous atmosphere that accompanied Victorian campaigning, instances of violence can be identified as events that exceeded contemporary expectations of acceptable behaviour. Victorian contested elections were often exciting, colourful and rowdy occasions, celebrated more as carnival than as a serious mechanism of electoral politics. Campaign proceedings were infused with strong ritualised elements that emphasised widespread public participation. Furthermore, the established rituals of electoral ceremony (candidates' entry to the constituency, the canvass, the nomination, speeches and processions, the declaration of the poll and, in some cases, the chairing of the member) were not merely about the mechanics of electing an official representative of the constituency. Indeed John Vincent describes how, "Elections were for the England of 1860 what drama, sport and liturgy have been for earlier and later times; there was nothing else which brought an entire population together and demanded they determine their relation to each other".⁴ Elections thus fulfilled more than just a political function. Frank O'Gorman writes that election rituals delivered specific messages to both voters and non-voters, relating to matters of community welfare and local hierarchies of leadership.⁵ And James Vernon argues that the symbolic practices of official politics were used by

⁴ John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857 – 1868* (London, 1966), p.xv.

⁵ Frank O'Gorman, "Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The social meaning of elections in England, 1760 – 1860" *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), p.81.

political elites, and the disenfranchised (those without the right to vote), to contest “exclusive official definitions of the political arena”.⁶ Campaigns were thus highly anticipated events in which an entire community became involved.

Amid the ‘licenced saturnalia’ of a Victorian election, customary expectations of social behaviour were suspended in favour of the values of an electoral culture which encouraged mass participation, enthusiasm and social inversion. During a campaign candidates were often obliged to court the attentions of both voters and non-voters, so that as a result even those normally excluded from the official political arena found themselves, “free of the normal social restraints...[and] able to treat their superiors with scant respect; to interrupt, heckle and insult them”.⁷ Within such an atmosphere of excitement, ritual and spectacle the opportunities for, and likelihood of violence were high. In July 1865 the dissenting journal *Nonconformist* commented on the excesses of the recent general election: “Much allowance is to be made at such a time of popular excitement for the vagaries and licence of an English crowd”.⁸ By the middle of the nineteenth-century British elections were well-established as popular, noisy, demonstrative events, during which normal standards of social conduct did not apply.

However, amidst the commotion that could attend an electoral contest there were still boundaries that governed the limits of acceptable behaviour. Besides causing serious injury and destruction of property, violence could potentially invalidate an election result and trigger a parliamentary inquiry into the constituency. English election law provided for the setting aside of an election result if, “voters were deterred from voting by a prevailing terror, even without violence or a threat

⁶ James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A study in English political culture, c.1815 – 1867* (Cambridge, 1993), p.49.

⁷ O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals”, p.85.

⁸ *Nonconformist*, 26 July 1865, p.603.

thereof being brought to bear upon them personally".⁹ Therefore while a certain degree of license was afforded to election crowds, the outbreak of physical damage to persons or property represented a breach of accepted electoral conduct. Local magistrates were quick to respond to such events, and many constituencies took active preparations to minimise the risk of violence. Such actions – which included the bolstering of local police forces, the swearing in of special constables or the requisitioning of a military presence – reflected the willingness of contemporary authorities to maintain acceptable standards of social behaviour during election campaigns. The outbreak of actual and serious *violence* – defined as physical damage to persons or property – represented an obvious transgression of electoral licence. It is events falling into this category that are the focus of this study.

II

The mid-Victorian period has been chosen for the study of election violence because those years witnessed considerable, and momentous, political change. During this period the second great instalment of parliamentary reform was passed (Reform Act, 1867) and secret voting introduced (Ballot Act, 1872). The franchise was widened and efforts were made to combat electoral corruption (Corrupt Practices Acts 1854, 1883 and Parliamentary Elections Act, 1868). The machinery and growing influence of party organization accelerated and the outline of the modern two-party system was established. In *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* Robert Blake describes the years between 1866 and 1881 as being, "one of the most fascinating periods of modern British political history. The fifteen years in question cover a major extension

⁹ William Leader, *The Franchise: A manual of registration and election law and practice* (London, 1879), p.113.

of the franchise, the creation of the institutional framework of the modern state, and the great duel between Disraeli and Gladstone".¹⁰ Yet despite the obvious significance of the mid-Victorian years they have received comparatively little historical attention. Blake himself bemoaned this fact in 1970: "This period [1846 – 1865] has been less closely studied than the years immediately before and after... There is no book on the period comparable to the studies of Professor Gash for the 1830s and 1840s, or of Professor Hanham for the period 1867 – 1885".¹¹ Indeed, as recently as 1996 John Davis and Duncan Tanner wrote in *Historical Research* that,

The electoral system after 1884 has attracted considerable attention. The system and the electorate before and immediately after 1832 are also much-debated issues. The mid-Victorian period remains in the shadow of the earlier and later periods, although it was in the eighteen seventies and eighties that the legal framework of the Edwardian franchise was established, the party caucus developed and the implications of democracy became clear.¹²

Mid nineteenth-century Britain has not, of course, remained totally devoid of historical attention, and Davis and Tanner highlight the pioneering works of J.R.Vincent, H.J.Hanham, I.G.Jones and K.T.Hoppen in this area.¹³ Indeed since the 1970s a number of studies have been published that have shone light onto various aspects of mid-Victorian politics, albeit to differing degrees and across disparate time periods.¹⁴ Some of the more recent contributions to the period include: Jonathan

¹⁰ Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970), p.97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.284.

¹² John Davis and Duncan Tanner, "The Borough Franchise After 1867" *Historical Research*, 69 (1996), p.306.

¹³ Davis and Tanner highlight the following: H.J.Hanham, *Elections and Party Management* (2nd edn, Harvester, 1978); J.R.Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857 – 1868* (Constable, 1966); I.G.Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1981) and K.T.Hoppen, "The Franchise and Electoral Politics in England and Ireland, 1832 – 1885", *History*, lxx (1985) and *idem*, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832 – 1885* (Oxford, 1984).

¹⁴ A survey of these includes: Derek Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (Leicester, 1976); D.C.Moore, *The Politics of Deference: A study of the mid-nineteenth century English political system* (Hassocks, 1976); Angus Hawkins, "Parliamentary Government and Victorian Political Parties, 1830 – 1880" *English Historical Review*, 104 (July 1989); Richard Shannon, *The Age of Disraeli, 1868 – 1881*

Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (Yale, 1993); Matthew Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832 – 1895* (Clarendon, 1996); Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852 – 1886* (Macmillan, 1998) and K.T.Hoppen's recent survey of mid-century politics and society, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846 – 1886* (Oxford, 1998).

Despite these works nineteenth-century electoral disturbances have not before been the sole subject of sustained analysis, though numerous studies of British political history have discussed them: Cornelius O'Leary and Charles Seymour examine violence within the context of parliamentary and electoral reform;¹⁵ Norman Gash and H.J.Hanham include violence within their discussions of electoral corruption;¹⁶ Donald Richter and John Stevenson incorporate violent electioneering within their studies of popular disturbance;¹⁷ K.T.Hoppen employs violence to compare the electoral cultures of England and Ireland;¹⁸ and James Vernon and Jon Lawrence both discuss violence within their post-modern interpretations of Victorian political culture.¹⁹ However, the lack of a comprehensive study of this phenomenon has resulted in a degree of uncertainty about the exact nature of nineteenth-century

(London, 1992); K.T.Hoppen, "Roads to Democracy: Electioneering and corruption in nineteenth-century England and Ireland" *History*, vol.81, 2 (64) 1996; E.Jaggard, "Small Boroughs and Political Modernisation, 1832 – 1868" *Albion*, vol.29, 4 (Winter 1996); Vernon, *Politics and the People* and Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, language and popular politics in England, 1867 – 1914* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹⁵ Cornelius O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections, 1868 – 1911* (Oxford, 1962). Charles Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales: The development and operation of the parliamentary franchise, 1832 – 1885* (Newton Abbot, 1970).

¹⁶ Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel: A study in the technique of parliamentary representation, 1830 – 1850* (2nd edition, Hassocks, 1977). Hanham, *Elections and Party Management* (1978)

¹⁷ Donald Richter, "Public Order and Popular Disturbances in Great Britain, 1865 – 1914", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 1965. John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700 – 1870* (New York, 1979). See also John Stevenson and Roland Quinalt (eds), *Popular Protest and Public Order: Six studies in British history, 1790 – 1820* (London, 1974).

¹⁸ K.T.Hoppen, "Grammars of Electoral Violence in Nineteenth Century England and Ireland", *English Historical Review*, 109 (June 1994), pp.597 – 620.

¹⁹ Vernon, *Politics and the People*; Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*.

electoral disorder: Donald Richter and H.J.Hanham suggest that English election violence was a feature of small rural towns,²⁰ yet my evidence points to the larger urban boroughs; John Stevenson argues that electoral rioting *on the polling day* declined after the introduction of secret voting – “an obvious comment on the open hustings and centralized voting as a cause for disorder”²¹ – however violence continued after 1872 and remained a feature of the polling day; and Roland Quinalt, in *Popular Protest and Public Order*, describes how parliamentary reform reduced the incidence of violence and that the Second Reform Act “contributed directly to more peaceful electoral conditions”²² – yet the general election of 1868 was the most violent of the period and disorder continued to characterize electioneering in 1874 and 1880.

A survey of several notable contributions to this subject reveals some of the ambiguities involved in developing an understanding of the nature of mid-century election violence. Donald Richter presents such disorder as a combination of electoral corruption and public enthusiasm. In “Public Order and Popular Disturbances in Great Britain, 1865 – 1914” and “The Role of Mob Riot in Victorian Elections, 1865 – 1885”, Richter stresses the continuity of election violence into the mid and late Victorian period. He argues that “All forms of illegal and corrupt practices seemed to increase in direct proportion to the larger number of contested elections and a wider franchise”.²³ Richter acknowledges Norman Gash’s work as

²⁰ Donald Richter, “The Role of Mob Riot in Victorian Elections, 1865 – 1885”, *Victorian Studies* 15, 1 (Sept 1971), p.23; Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.264n.

²¹ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.288.

²² R.Quinalt, “The Warwickshire County Magistracy and Public Order, c.1830 – 1870”, in Stevenson and Quinalt (eds), *Popular Protest*, p.201 – 202.

²³ Richter, “Public Order”, p.170.

having “delineated the rowdy and violent character of politics in the age of Peel”,²⁴ and sets out to examine the implications of election violence between 1865 and 1885.

He found that throughout the nineteenth-century election riots formed, “an acknowledged though routinely deplored aspect of British life”,²⁵ despite the enactment of reform legislation in 1867, 1872 and 1883. He argues that it was in the small towns and rural areas that much of the violence occurred, as it was in such places that effective policing had yet to be established. He suggests that the persistence of election violence, in the face of reform measures, was an indication that “the phenomenon was far less related to the malfunctioning of electoral machinery than were other forms of corruption”.²⁶ Richter thus concedes that “many of the most serious disorders seem entirely extraneous to the campaign and the polling, and were spontaneous outbursts of sheer ebullience”.²⁷ He focuses on election disorder as an expression of the violence of Victorian society: one that he regards as defying easy categorisation because of the spontaneity of its occurrence and the manner of its provocation. In a period starved of mass public amusements Richter suggests that violence represented a form of entertainment, and that it would be wrong to discount “the magnetic attraction of excitement for its own sake”.²⁸ He thus offers a “simple love of disorder” as one reason for the frequency of election violence, and argues that it was, “only one manifestation of that violent society that deserves further attention”.²⁹

In “Grammars of Electoral Violence in Nineteenth Century England and Ireland” K.T.Hoppen stresses an almost umbilical relationship between corrupt

²⁴ Richter, “The Role of Mob Riot”, p.19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

practices and violence, and argues for the decline of electoral rioting by the mid-1870s. His emphasis on the scale of Irish disorder does much to marginalize the scale and frequency of English election violence. Hoppen presents disorder (in England) as sporadic and insignificant, and electoral rioters as either venal, reactive or bored, thus election crowds became violent only when they failed to get what they wanted (bribes or treats), when they were paid to do so, or when they were shrugging off the daily boredom that pervaded their lives. Increased urbanization after 1832 distanced the population from traditional forms of communal protest, consequently rioting "lost its former edge" as it became isolated from its origins in "agrarian patterns of violence". Thus, in the place of a "driving, self-generated popular participation in rioting",³⁰ there was left only an artificial inducement to violence provided by bribery and treating. In addition Hoppen stresses the importance of mass public events in generating scenes of disorder, typified by his introduction to English electoral violence:

Whereas election rioting had once constituted a sub-department, so to speak, of communal violence in general, with the decline of the latter it became isolated and marooned, not perhaps at first shorn of all its ferocity, but in the end little more than an anachronistic and irrelevant aspect of public life. Having lost their violent contextual anchorage, English elections after 1832, when violent at all, tended to fall into disorder chiefly when candidates failed to deliver promised rewards...or when campaign managers lost control of those mass displays of popular participation which, for a time, continued to be part of the public choreography of electoral life.³¹

Hoppen stresses the declining intensity of election violence after 1832, a process he argues was almost complete by 1874 when, "what remained in the way of disorder became more sporadic than ever".³² He goes on to present election violence as often

³⁰ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.606.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.605.

³² *Ibid.*, p.610.

simply a matter of “general disorder”, rarely degenerating into serious rioting, while also pointing out that ‘much’ of the violence of the period was little more than over-enthusiastic campaign excitement, sometimes sponsored by the illegal exertions of wealthy candidates. Yet he concludes by echoing Richter’s suggestion that “letting off steam” might be, “the most accurate description of what went on at the majority of English elections between the First and Second Reform Acts”.³³ Hoppen thus sustains a degree of ambiguity regarding the nature of electoral violence by presenting it as variously: the product of corruption; the outcome of a failure to provide promised rewards; the result of a loss of control during large public displays of popular participation; and as a form of social release.

Jon Lawrence, in *Speaking for the People*, examines late-century election violence within a discussion of the rise of party after 1867. He stresses the importance of understanding the mechanics of control behind the mobilisation of popular enthusiasm, and the ways in which this control helped shape the form and content of party politics in the constituencies. Lawrence argues a ‘purposeful’ use of violence during elections, and he discounts Richter’s “simple love of disorder” and Hoppen’s “irrecoverable personal antagonisms” as explanations for electoral violence. Instead he discusses “the politics of disruption” in which election disorder becomes a “highly controlled and purposive use of physical force”,³⁴ presenting the phenomenon within the context of attempts, “to establish a party’s claim to political legitimacy in a constituency”.³⁵ In his view open public meetings and the physical control of civic space “remained central to the symbolism of political legitimacy for politicians, as

³³ *Ibid.*, p.607.

³⁴ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p.185.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.182.

much as for their supporters".³⁶ Lawrence rejects Hoppen's suggestion that violence became "an anachronistic and irrelevant aspect of public life", arguing instead that it was, "a stylised repertoire...[that] could be used to legitimate genuinely radical and subversive forms of popular politics".³⁷ In response to Hoppen's article he writes,

Rather than dismiss British electoral violence as a 'collusive – even conservative – activity', because of its strong partisanship, and its failure to challenge an elite-dominated political system, we need to understand how politicians were able to mobilise popular enthusiasm at particular moments, and how the demands of popular mobilisation in turn helped to shape both the form and the content of party politics in the constituencies.³⁸

Lawrence's argument that electoral disturbances can be treated as "phenomena which embody the ambiguities inherent in the relationship between 'leaders' and 'led' in the Victorian polity",³⁹ suggests a symbiotic connection between political elites and electoral rioters, in which violence provided the former with a representation of political legitimacy, and the latter with an opportunity to influence the form and content of party politics.

These brief outlines indicate some of the uncertainties that characterise the historiography of English election violence. Hoppen argues that the severity and frequency of electoral disorder began to decline after the First Reform Act, yet John Stevenson, in *Popular Disturbances in England 1700 – 1870*, writes that "elections [remained] as one of the most common sources of popular disturbance in late Victorian England".⁴⁰ Richter locates the majority of election violence in small rural

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.181.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.187.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.185.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.183.

⁴⁰ John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.289.

towns, and Hoppen suggests that a population shift away from such places contributed to the decline of electoral rioting. Both Hoppen and Richter stress the importance of corruption in the outbreak of violence, yet point to boredom as a possible motive for participation in such events. By contrast Jon Lawrence presents electoral disturbances as a pre-meditated use of physical force – more related to the symbolism of political legitimacy than to outbursts of “sheer ebullience”.

Though Hoppen and Lawrence have recently revisited the subject of Victorian electoral violence, much of the work in this field was completed some thirty years ago. And yet with the exception of Richter’s 1965 doctoral thesis, and to a lesser extent Roland Quinalt’s chapter in *Popular Protest and Public Order*, none include any serious attempt to quantify electoral disorder. Comparisons between these limited statistical analyses and the present research are complicated by differences in focus and terminology. For example, Richter records 71 separate incidents of “serious violence” at British elections between 1865 and 1885, whereas Quinalt discusses “serious” and “less serious” riots in the Black Country between 1835 and 1860. The lack of statistical data, and a considerable reliance on anecdotal evidence within the historiography of election violence, brings into question the validity of statements regarding the frequency with which Victorian elections were disrupted by outbreaks of disorder. The quantification of crowd violence poses certain methodological problems (these are examined in Chapter Two), yet it must be undertaken in order for a more meaningful picture of this phenomenon to emerge.

III

This study also questions the extent to which English and Welsh electoral politics reflected the values and characteristics of a modern political system during the mid to late nineteenth-century. It will be argued here that the study of election disorder can provide a means of assessing the pace of political modernisation, because within the context of Victorian electioneering violence represented the visible expression of an older style of politics. Whether disorder was the product of corruption, elite manipulation or partisan enthusiasm the picture of mid-century electioneering that emerges is the same; techniques of manipulation and influence still found expression in a system increasingly turning to modern forms of politics. If violence occurred because of corruption, it represented the politics of persuasion rather than principle. And if violence was the outcome of a 'politics of disruption' it reflected a continued willingness by candidates, agents and partisans to resort to symbolism and ritual in place of organization.

Election violence could erupt due to public excitement or excessive partisan enthusiasm. Yet even then such outbursts were informed by a traditional expectation of what was permissible during an election. Mid-Victorian campaigns, like those of the eighteenth-century, were infused with a degree of spectacle and ritual – elements that promoted public involvement and which heightened the intensity of both partisan activity and popular excitement. Election violence that grew out of popular enthusiasm can thus be viewed as a reflection of older electoral priorities, because the continued importance of symbolism and ritual promoted a degree of disorder. It is therefore argued that mid-Victorian election violence represented much that belonged

to an older political milieu – and that as such its study can be used to draw conclusions about the pace of change in mid to late century England and Wales.

In order to understand how election rioting can help us to assess the pace of political change we must first define the term ‘political modernisation’. The concept of ‘modernisation’ has been employed in a number of ways within the historiography of British electoral politics, yet it is possible to identify certain features that are common to interpretations of the evolution of the British political system. The concern here is not to delineate the historical debate concerning the timing and nature of British political development. Rather this section seeks to identify those features of electoral politics that can be described as recognisably ‘modern’.

In a 1995 article in the *American Historical Review* John Phillips and Charles Wetherell broadly define ‘modern’ political behaviour as featuring allegiance to parties, grounded in national as well as local issues and characterized by rational political debate.⁴¹ Phillips and Wetherell argue that the First Reform Act of 1832 unleashed a wave of political modernisation that “*quickly* [my emphasis] destroyed the political system that had prevailed during the long reign of George III”.⁴² In their view this radical transformation of English politics created “an essentially modern electoral system”. Thus, they contend, in the post-reform era political parties raised national issues, appealed to broad political principles and provoked rational debate. They argue for the *modernizing* influence of the Great Reform Act because in its wake, “political principle defined in national terms by the parties at Westminster took

⁴¹ John Phillips and Charles Wetherell, “The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernisation of England” *American Historical Review*, 100, 2 (April 1995), p.412.

⁴² *Ibid.*

the place of the local, factional and idiosyncratic concerns that had dominated England's unreformed political system".⁴³

Angus Hawkins, in *British Party Politics*, believes that the emergence of a recognisably 'modern' political framework in Britain was a feature of the period between 1867 and 1886. Prior to the Second Reform Act, he writes that "parliament's relations with the constituencies, extra-parliamentary organisations, electors and the nation beyond were loose, sporadic and informal. Parliamentary elections and the rituals of constituency contests were more a function of local dynamics and provincial allegiances than national imperatives".⁴⁴ However, he argues, in the years after 1867 political parties developed extensive constituency organisations, centralised bureaucracies and, "through professional agents, local party-sponsored clubs and formal constituency associations, national parties enlisted a mass membership from among a popular electorate".⁴⁵

Both Hawkins and Phillips and Wetherell interpret 'modernisation' as a process of change whereby traditional forms of politics, characterised by localism and factionalism, were replaced by a new, modern style of politics organised nationally and based on the emergence of party allegiance. The modernisation of British politics – they suggest – was characterised by the growth of professional party associations whose structure and national scope supplanted older methods of political mobilisation. A corollary of this process was that the informal and parochial nature of constituency politics gave way to the strictures of national politics as directed by central party organs. Phillips and Wetherell argue that this process was a feature of the period after the First Reform Act, and they stress the development of a "new view

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1.

of principle and principled behaviour that the parties in Westminster imposed on local politics after 1832".⁴⁶ By contrast Hawkins locates the point of change much later in the century. He argues that "by the 1880s there was emerging a recognisably modern national political framework: the basis of what would be a much-vaunted British party system".⁴⁷

Use of the term 'modernisation' has not, however, gone unchallenged. In "The Dynamics of Urban Politics, 1867 – 1914" Jon Lawrence questions its use to describe long-term changes in political behaviour and political culture. He writes that traditional narratives of the emergence of Labour politics after 1867 embrace, "an essentially sociological model of urban popular politics [that]...assumed a strong causal relationship between structural changes in society and economy, and changes in political partisanship (and in political culture more generally)".⁴⁸ In those accounts, he stresses, the terms 'modernisation', 'secularisation' or 'centralisation' have been used to describe,

A series of overlapping societal changes...said to have transformed political culture, replacing 'traditional', and essentially local, patterns of political allegiance (forged by shared religious affiliations, a sense of shared economic interests, and perhaps by social deference), with new or 'modern', patterns of allegiance shaped by class interest, and hence loyalty to class-based, national political parties.⁴⁹

Lawrence challenges such an approach: "Historians are increasingly rejecting grand explanatory frameworks based on problematic concepts such as the 'modernisation'...of politics".⁵⁰ He questions the assumption that local political elites played a critical role in the development of political allegiance amongst the new

⁴⁶ Phillips and Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act", p.425.

⁴⁷ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.7.

⁴⁸ Jon Lawrence, "The Dynamics of Urban Politics, 1867 – 1914" in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds) *Party, State and Society: Electoral behaviour in Britain since 1920* (Aldershot, 1997), p.80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.96.

electors, that the 'triumph of party' eroded older, more independent traditions of popular participation, and that the rise of class was a central factor in shaping urban popular politics after 1867.⁵¹

However, the concept of 'political modernisation' is not used here to interpret long-term shifts in social or political behaviour. This study is concerned with gauging the extent to which mid-Victorian politics reflected the characteristics of a *modern* electoral system. Between the end of the eighteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth-century, the British political system moved inexorably towards its present form: the modern two-party system and with voting rights freed from property qualifications. That process was broadly characterised – as noted above – by the decline of local, factional and idiosyncratic politics dominated by the strength of traditional influences and interests, and the emergence of a more national-oriented, partisan-based politics, characterised by relatively static party allegiances, grounded in an appreciation of national as well as local issues, and the development of centrally organised and nationally-focused party organisations.

The concept of 'political modernisation' is thus used within a broad sociological context to describe, "the development of key institutions – political parties, parliaments, franchise and secret ballots – which support participatory decision making".⁵² Within such a context the outbreak of violence will be presented as evidence of a slowed pace of modernisation. The continued presence of violence in the system – and what it represented by way of corruption, ritual or partisan enthusiasm – reflected a set of assumptions about the operation of electoral politics that appear distinctly parochial, factional and pre-modern. It will be argued that the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.80 – 81.

⁵² N.Abercombe, S.Hill and B.S.Turner, *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (Harmondsworth, 1988, 2nd edn), p.158.

persistence of violence into the post-reform era demonstrated an awareness, amongst candidates, party agents, campaign managers and even election crowds that notions of partisanship, principle and organisation, however far developed, could still be supplemented by a reliance on the bully and the bribe.

This study, then, aims to contribute to a discussion about the pace of political change in nineteenth-century England and Wales. Since the 1950s there has been considerable historical debate concerning the nature and timing of British political development. The emergence and influence of party organisation, the extent and basis of political allegiance, the continuity and relevance of pre-reform electoral behaviour: these have been much-debated issues. As noted earlier, Phillips and Wetherell contend that the intense debate and two-year agitation over reform in 1832, as well as the structural changes of the Act, created a new electoral environment in which voters became consistent partisans. This new political consistency was also the product of a new sense of political principle directed from Westminster and adopted at the local level by party organisations that “suddenly existed in almost every constituency virtually all year round”.⁵³ Phillips and Wetherell focus on the political realities that emerged after 1832 and they discount negative interpretations of reform that emphasise the continuity of electoral behaviour. They write that,

Admittedly, it is easy enough to discover in some places older forms of electioneering that had little to do with political parties, much less political principles. It is also possible to uncover outright corruption after 1832. *Yet persistent flaws should not obscure the new political realities that emerged in that year* (my emphasis). Not mistaking form for substance, this analysis uses new data and techniques to create an improved perspective that reveals the reform’s fundamental reorientation of English politics.⁵⁴

⁵³ Phillips and Wetherell, “The Great Reform Act”, p.426.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.415.

In broad terms of England's gradual evolution towards a modern democratic electoral system Phillips and Wetherell's argument is undoubtedly accurate. Debate over the popular and participatory nature of Hanoverian politics notwithstanding, the Great Reform Act undoubtedly altered the electoral landscape. However, their view that the post-1832 political system, recently imbued with a sense of political principle and aided by the sudden flowering of constituency party organisation, *rapidly* developed recognisably modern political characteristics, finds challengers within the historiography of British electoral politics.

In "Roads to Democracy" Hoppen suggests that the weakening of proprietorial control in the boroughs after 1832 created a political vacuum that was filled, not by a new politics of principle, but by "another traditional feature of English and Irish electioneering, namely, corruption".⁵⁵ Hoppen stresses that while the First Reform Act undoubtedly created a changed electoral world, it was one that continued to reflect "many traditional priorities". In a challenge to Phillips and Wetherell's model of political modernisation he argues that in England's small to medium sized boroughs, which dominated the political system between 1832 and 1867, elections did not, "suddenly begin to turn upon general principles and high moral argument". Rather, he suggests, by weakening the importance of proprietorial control through changes to the franchise, reform in 1832 created a situation whereby smaller constituencies were at once more amenable and open to the influence of electoral corruption. He writes that in a system still weighted against large, urban centres – where a form of independent politics had a chance to flourish – elections in the smaller constituencies became an obvious target for those candidates willing to

⁵⁵ The following paragraph quotes from K.T.Hoppen, "Roads to Democracy", p.558.

purchase a seat in parliament. The result, Hoppen argues, “was a spreading intensity of corruption in post-reform electioneering”.

Phillips and Wetherell contend that political parties became ‘permanent fixtures’ in the constituencies after 1832, yet other historians have questioned the development of party organisation so early in the century. Indeed traditional narratives of the rise of party in modern British history have focussed on the period between the First and Second Reform Acts. In *Elections and Party Management* H.J.Hanham highlights the lack of organised and disciplined party representation in the counties as late as 1868. He writes that in 1874 there were, “Conservative associations in only forty-four of the eighty-two English county divisions”.⁵⁶ Likewise John Vincent’s study of the Liberal Party between 1857 and 1868 found little evidence of widespread political organisation much before the middle of the nineteenth-century. Vincent writes that “in the 1860s there was political life everywhere, adequate political organisation in very few places”.⁵⁷ He stresses that the development of party loyalties preceded the emergence of party organisation by almost a generation and that it was in the 1860s that “a rapid and massive development of party loyalties”⁵⁸ emerged. Vincent contends that several factors conspired to impede the spread of constituency party organisation: despite advances in organisational techniques, the growth of the electorate and changes in election procedure meant that “the electorate in general never became any more organised”; local and voluntary associations could not maintain the level of ‘constant administrative activity’ of the central party offices; and a widespread antipathy

⁵⁶ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.20.

⁵⁷ Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Party*, p.92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.86.

towards the concept of party politics obstructed the creation of a national organisational framework.⁵⁹

According to Frank O’Gorman the emergence of a culture of political parties was a feature of the mid-nineteenth century. It was then, he contends, that the British political system, “began to fashion itself on the ideals of democracy, liberty and reform”.⁶⁰ An outcome of this process, he argues, was the weakening of traditional electoral cultures in the face of improvements in literacy, the growth of party organisation and the “increasing respectability of the 1832 electorate”.⁶¹ O’Gorman stresses the decline of a vibrant, popular and inclusive electoral culture after 1860 as party organisations rapidly developed new means of generating mass support in the constituencies. Whereas traditional election rituals had been at the heart of constituency politics before the mid-nineteenth century, the emergent forms of national party politics thereafter began to replace the use of local symbols to define and express political loyalties. The new political and religious organs of Liberalism and Conservatism thus subverted the functions of traditional electoral culture. O’Gorman concludes that after 1860, “the loyalty of voters and non-voters alike could be won and maintained by more purely political methods, not least by election manifestos and by promises of executive action at local as well as parliamentary level”.⁶²

In a recent post-structuralist interpretation of English political culture James Vernon challenges the significance of party in the popular experience of electoral politics between 1832 and 1867. He concludes that despite the presence of party organisation in the five constituencies he studies, “national party politics were often

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁶⁰ O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals”, p.115.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.114.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.115

undercut or mediated by local political allegiances and identities".⁶³ Vernon argues the disabling effect of modernisation and contends that English politics between the First and Second Reform Acts became "progressively less democratic...as political subjectivities and the public political sphere were defined in increasingly restrictive and exclusive fashions".⁶⁴ He contests the orthodox assumption that the period between the first two reform acts witnessed the birth of the modern party system, and points instead to the weakness of Westminster's national party identities in the experience of popular politics. In contrast to Phillips and Wetherell's contention that after 1832, "local affairs, even those of long standing, gave way to national issues and a politics of principle",⁶⁵ Vernon argues a popular antipathy towards party expressed through the continued importance of local colours, symbols and identities to "define local political cleavages". He stresses that reform in 1832 led to an increasing restriction of the popular experience of politics, and he echoes Frank O'Gorman in arguing that a culture of national party politics was a feature of the 1860s.⁶⁶

In *Speaking for the People* Jon Lawrence challenges conventional accounts of the 'triumph of party' in British politics by questioning the completeness of party control in the years after 1867. Whereas Frank O'Gorman argues the decline of a traditional English electoral culture in the 1860s, Lawrence suggests that the weakness of party reflected the continued strength of a popular political culture. He writes that "throughout this period party elites were obliged to engage with, and adapt to, aspects of popular culture but dimly understood, and in some measure feared".⁶⁷ Lawrence argues that the political parties were unable to manage popular politics to

⁶³ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.181.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁶⁵ Phillips and Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act", p.434.

⁶⁶ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.181.

⁶⁷ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p.178.

the extent attributed to them because of the ambiguities inherent in their relations with the electorate and the wider community. As a result, he argues “the relationship between ‘party’ and ‘public’ remained highly ambiguous down to 1914, and that partly in consequence democracy remained widely mistrusted and even feared”.⁶⁸

Miles Taylor similarly questions the centrality of ‘party’ in the experience of constituency politics before the Second Reform Act. In “Interests, Parties and the State”⁶⁹ he argues that the work of pollbook analysis needs to be balanced by an account of electoral behaviour more sensitive to contemporary perceptions of ‘party’. He challenges the conclusions of O’Gorman and Phillips, who use pollbook evidence to argue a growing tendency towards partisan voting in the decades after 1832,⁷⁰ pointing out that their conclusions stand at odds with several studies of political parties during that period.⁷¹ He argues that in the years following the First Reform Act local party associations were largely dormant between elections, and that it was not until after 1867 that “the main parties [could] offer a nationally coordinated message”.⁷² Taylor writes that O’Gorman and Phillips’ reinterpretation of electoral behaviour followed the work of historians like T.J.Nossiter and John Vincent. They argue that Victorian elections were dominated by parochial issues, and that before the turn of the century, “there was little evidence that Westminster based parties or

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁶⁹ Miles Taylor, “Interests, Parties and the State: The urban electorate in England, c.1820 – 1872” in Lawrence and Taylor (eds), *Party State and Society*, pp.50 - 78

⁷⁰ Frank O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The unreformed electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734 – 1832* (Oxford, 1989), and J.Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English electoral behaviour 1818 – 1841* (Oxford, 1992).

⁷¹ Taylor refers to: Peter Fraser, “Party Voting in the House of Commons, 1812 – 1827” *English Historical Review*, 98 (1983), pp.763 – 84; Gary W.Cox, *The Efficient Secret: The cabinet and the development of political parties in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 1987); Ian Newbould, *Whiggery and Reform, 1830 – 1841: The politics of Government* (London, 1990); James Vernon, *Politics and the People*; and Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847 – 1860* (Oxford, 1995).

⁷² Taylor, “Interests”, p.53.

national, regional or class based political issues had penetrated into 'small-town politics'".⁷³

In a synthesis of recent research Angus Hawkins locates the profound change in British politics much later in the century than Phillips and Wetherell. He argues instead that it was between 1852 and 1886 that the framework of the modern party system superseded the structure of mid-Victorian parliamentary government. Hawkins writes that it was between the Second and Third Reform Acts that political parties developed the "extensive constituency organisation and centralised party bureaucracies"⁷⁴ that enabled them to cultivate a mass membership from within a popular electorate. He locates the emergence of a recognisably *modern* national political framework in the 1880s. The development of a modern system, he writes, was characterised by an increasingly inclusive franchise, the development of party organisations promising "strong and stable government defined by principle or programme", and the transferral of political legitimacy from parliament to the parties, and ultimately to the constituencies.⁷⁵

In a 1996 study of Cornish small borough politics Ed Jaggard challenges Phillips and Wetherell's conclusions about the modernisation of English politics after 1832. Jaggard attempts to reconcile Phillips and Wetherell's statements regarding the emergence of a new politics of principle after 1832, with the historiography of electoral politics and the realities of electioneering in Cornwall's small boroughs. He cautions against their over-reliance on evidence drawn from England's large industrial centres as these constituted the least numerous category of boroughs between the First and Second Reform Acts. Thus between 1832 and 1868 only 72 boroughs in England

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁷⁴ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.1 - 8.

and Wales could boast more than 1,000 voters, compared with 131 boroughs with less than that number.⁷⁶ Furthermore, evidence from Cornwall's small boroughs suggests the importance of factors other than party-induced principle in the formation of voter preferences. Jaggard concludes that the continuing influence of "electoral history, the power of patrons and local circumstances"⁷⁷ exercised a retarding influence upon the pace of political change in England after 1832.

The goal of this thesis is to contribute to our understanding of the nature of mid-Victorian electioneering. In "Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies" Frank O'Gorman writes, "The substance of election rituals and, if sensitively interpreted, their symbolic meanings and social implications, can extend our conception of electoral politics".⁷⁸ In his study of English electoral culture he questions the extent, spontaneity and subversive nature of popular participation in electoral events and contends that "Such questions take us down to the very street corner of the political and electoral processes of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries".⁷⁹ Likewise a close study of the causes and processes of election violence allows a grass roots view of Victorian electoral culture, and provides a window into the operation of politics at the constituency level. It will be argued here that electoral violence provides evidence of a slow pace of English political change after 1832: that the frequency of disorder between 1857 and 1880 reflected the persistence of pre-reform electoral traditions that properly belonged to an older electoral culture.

⁷⁶ Ed Jaggard, "Small Boroughs and Political Modernisation, 1832 – 1868: A Cornwall case study" *Albion*, 29, 4 (Winter 1997), p.625.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.642.

⁷⁸ O'Gorman, "Campaign Rituals", p.81

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.82

IV

The methodology to be employed involves the following: the quantification of crowd violence at English and Welsh elections between 1857 and 1880; an analysis of the nature and frequency of violence and of any changes in the pattern of its occurrence; and an assessment of the operation of electoral politics during the period as an outcome of the evidence uncovered. The chapters that follow provide an explanation of the terms and concepts used in studying election violence, necessary for a discussion of mid-century electioneering, a detailed and statistically-based analysis of the phenomenon of electoral disorder, four case studies of elections and electoral violence; and a concluding analysis of both the nature and instance of violence, and modernisation, during the period.

Chapter II (*Elements of Disorder*) introduces the terms and concepts employed in the thesis. This will include an explanation of the terminology employed in referring to instances of electoral disorder, as well as an outline of the historiography of popular disturbance (to contextualise the analysis of crowd violence). Chapter III (*The Structure of Politics, 1857 – 1880*) establishes the contextual framework of election violence through an examination of the structures and processes of Victorian electioneering. The chapter will outline the changing fabric of electoral politics, with a particular focus on the constituencies, the electorate, elections and electoral procedure, party politics and electoral contests. Chapter IV (*Mid-Victorian Electoral Disorder*) incorporates a statistical analysis of the subject, including a study of violence during each general election of the period. This chapter includes explanations of the pattern of violence including its timing, distribution, participants and origins. Chapter V (*Constituency Case Studies*) provides four detailed analyses

of electoral violence from a local perspective. The constituency case-studies include Kidderminster (1857), Lincoln (1862, 1865 and 1868), Bradford (1867 and 1868) and Carmarthenshire (1868). Finally, Chapter VI (*Electoral Violence and Political Modernisation*) will draw on the evidence presented in Chapter V to make judgements about the nature of mid-century electoral violence, and the pace of political modernisation in the post-reform era.

The 23 years between 1857 and 1880 have been chosen because, not only do they cover the passage of two major pieces of electoral legislation (Second Reform Act, Secret Ballot), but the six general elections that occurred during that period are separated equally by the passage of the Second Reform Act of 1867. This division allows comparisons to be drawn between the character of elections and electoral politics in the post-1832 and post-1867 periods. The period thus overlaps the extensive franchise and constituency redistribution changes wrought by the Second Reform Act of 1867, and the significant alteration to electoral procedure that was introduced with secret voting in 1872. The general election of 1857 provides an appropriate starting point for the study – the elections of the late 1850s, Caroline Jackson argues, reflected the character of a system that accommodated both modern political features and the continued practices of pre-reform politics.⁸⁰ The study ends with a focus on the general election of 1880, the last general election before the reforms of 1883 – 1885 restructured the appearance and operation of the political system.

⁸⁰ Jackson, "General Elections", p.i

Chapter II

Understanding Election Violence: Theory and Terminology

I

In the first place, English election mobs tended more and more to consist in whole or part of toughs hired for the day at so much an hour – a kind of induced violence.

K.T.Hoppen, 1994¹

It is clear that the use of physical force remained a central, and widely tolerated, element of popular politics down to the First World War... The physical control of civic space – of public squares, meeting halls, factory gates or polling day crowds – remained central to the symbolism of political legitimacy for politicians, as much as for their supporters.

Jon Lawrence, 1998²

It is an aim of this thesis to analyse mid-Victorian English and Welsh electoral violence within the context of a discussion of the pace of political change. As noted in Chapter I conclusions about the scale and frequency of violence can be qualitatively linked to the progress of political modernization: when interpreted as the physical manifestation of efforts to influence the electoral process (or as the end result of attempts to manipulate popular politics), the nature and *frequency* of violence can be employed as a barometer of the strength of traditional or pre-modern electoral practices. This study therefore relies upon the assumption that moments of election violence can be quantified. This chapter will explore the theoretical basis for studying instances of crowd violence, and will define the terminology employed in the classification of disorder.

The study of election disorder falls within the field of popular disturbance and draws on a long tradition of enquiry into episodes of crowd violence. As a major

¹ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.604.

² Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p.181.

strand of social history the study of disturbances has provided a means for understanding the nature of popular movements and for unlocking the voice of 'inarticulate' sections of society. E.P.Thompson viewed crowd violence as revealing the underlying assumptions of what he described as 'plebeian culture'.³ And in his introduction to *Rioting in America* Paul A.Gilje suggests, "Riots are moments when people in the street – le menu people ('the little people') – make themselves heard and reveal how they interact with others in society".⁴ Indeed moments of collective violence have been shown to embody popular social and political aspirations and were "far from being the negative, instinctive and anarchic reactions of the 'rude multitude' or 'many headed monster'".⁵ Thus John Stevenson writes in *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700 – 1832*, "historians have increasingly been making sense of what have often been regarded as aimless incidents".⁶ In particular the study of popular disturbances has formed part of a "fundamental revision of the assumptions that underlie traditional accounts of the development of modern Britain".⁷ This approach has stressed the variety of public order disturbances in Britain since the industrial revolution, and by interpreting such events as more than mere mindless outburst, has brought violent protest out from the shadows of historical condescension.

In the 1950s and 1960s a number of studies traced the role of violent protest in the evolution of British social and political institutions. These include works by G.Rudé, E.J.Hobsbawm and E.P.Thompson.⁸ Their work, and that of others, contributed to a reassessment of British political history in which violent protest

³ John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700 – 1832* (2nd edn, New York, 1992), p.3.

⁴ Paul A.Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington, 1996), p.6.

⁵ Paul Slack (ed), *Rebellion, Popular Protest and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1984), p.6.

⁶ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.3.

⁷ Stevenson and Quinault (eds), *Popular Protest*, p.15.

⁸ G.Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964); E.J.Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Manchester, 1959); E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

formed a constituent element in the process of change. In addition they established a basis for interpreting instances of crowd violence as more than formless social outbursts devoid of any meaning. Rather they presented popular disturbances within a framework of communal protest and as the organised, disciplined and often highly ritualised expression of social and political grievances. Thus by analysing riots and assigning them significance within a model of political change I am drawing on a historical tradition that stretches from Lefebvre and Le Bon to Thompson, Stevenson and beyond.

The first attempts to understand the nature of crowd psychology were pioneered by sociologists at the beginning of the twentieth-century. These included Gustave Le Bon (*Psychologie des foules*, 1895), G.Tarde (*L'opinion et la foule*, 1901) and R.E.Park (*Masse and Publikim*, 1904).⁹ However it was in the period between 1930 and 1960 that a number of studies focusing on 'mob' violence, particularly during the French Revolution, advanced the study of crowd violence and of the role of riots within a social and political context. These included G.Lefebvre's *Foules Revolutionnaires* (1934), E.J.Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels* (1959) and G.Rudé's *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959). These studies suggested a greater degree of purpose than had previously been attributed to episodes of popular riot. Hobsbawm placed protest movements in pre-industrial Italy within the context of "traditional concepts about the 'just King'", and the violence of the English Luddites as part of a process of "collective bargaining by riot".¹⁰ Rudé's work established the 'mob' as an

⁹ In the introduction to *Popular Disturbances* John Stevenson provides a comprehensive historiography of the study of crowd violence, popular protest and public order, pp.1-4.

¹⁰ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.3 See E.J.Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* and "The Machine Breakers" in *Labouring Men: Studies in the history of labour* (London, 1968), pp.5 – 22.

agent of political agitation and showed the French crowds to be "something more than spasmodic and irrational phenomena".¹¹

During the 1960s and 1970s a number of influential studies of popular movements were completed. Among others C.S.L.Davies and M.E.James, who examine popular risings in Tudor England, raised important questions about the origin and purpose of such movements.¹² In his seminal article "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" E.P.Thompson showed how popular protest revealed patterns of popular belief and custom.¹³ His work on food riots, and that of Natalie Zemon Davis on French religious riots, focused "attention first to popular ideology and to the profound sense of legitimacy which motivated protesters, and secondly to the structures, customs and rituals which shaped the actions of a crowd".¹⁴ In the 1970s the study of popular disturbance broadened to include an analysis of 'order' and 'disorder' and the processes by which these are negotiated, this predominantly sociological approach including works by Victor Bailey (*The Dangerous Classes in Late Victorian England*, 1975), D.Hay (*Property, Authority and the Criminal Law*, 1975) and R.S.Storch (*The Policeman as Domestic Missionary*, 1976).¹⁵

Thus the historiography of popular protest establishes a basis for analysing episodes of collective violence within the context of social and political change. The danger in such studies, however, lies in assigning moments of violent crowd action greater importance than perhaps they warrant. John Stevenson cautions against

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹² C.S.L.Davies, "The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered", *Past and Present*, 41 (December 1968); and M.E.James, "Obedience and Dissent in Henrican England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion, 1536", *Past and Present*, 48 (August 1970). See Paul Slack (ed), *Rebellion, Popular Protest* (Cambridge 1984) for a discussion of their contribution to the study of popular protest.

¹³ E.P.Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth-Century", *Past and Present*, 50 (1971) pp.76-136.

¹⁴ Slack, *Rebellion, Popular Protest*, p.1.

¹⁵ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.5.

“investing incidents with too much significance”¹⁶ and highlights the inadequacies of many source documents in shedding light on the causes of popular disturbances. Episodes of popular violence often had myriad causes and those who participated in them a corresponding variety of motivations. In addition such events frequently provided an opportunity for entertainment as much as they offered a chance to agitate for social or political change. Paul Slack writes that riots and disturbances permitted “the ventilation of high spirits, often in malicious, sometimes in comic form”.¹⁷ Care is therefore required in assessing the causes and relevant significance of crowd violence, hence the first step in such a direction is an adequate definition of this important phenomenon.

Few historians of nineteenth-century British disturbances provide an explicit definition of ‘election violence’, a fact that reflects the subject’s position as a subset of the broader topic of popular protest. In his chapter on election violence in *Politics in the Age of Peel* Norman Gash describes only “forcible means to help ensure success”.¹⁸ D.Philips discusses election riots in his study of public order in the Black Country between 1835 and 1860. R.Quinault in “The Warwickshire County Magistracy and Public Order, 1830 – 1870” describes “riots during parliamentary elections”.¹⁹ And in his 1994 article, “Grammars of Electoral Violence”, K.T.Hoppen provides no definition of his subject matter beyond the use of broad terms such as ‘violence’ and ‘rioting’.²⁰ To a large extent this has been because the subject has normally formed a sub-section of broader studies of popular disturbance.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁷ Slack, *Rebellion, Popular Protest*, p.11.

¹⁸ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.137.

¹⁹ Quinault, “The Warwickshire County Magistracy”, pp.181 – 214.

²⁰ Hoppen, “Grammars”, pp.597 – 620.

Furthermore, where quantification of violence has *not* been attempted less importance is likely to have been placed on the precise definition of terms. However this ambiguity is also related to the confusion surrounding the nature of election violence.

Modern studies of English popular disturbance have largely struggled to reconcile two views of election disorder: as a product of electoral malpractice, or as part of a wider Victorian tendency to indulge in violent behaviour. Norman Gash establishes violent electioneering as a form of coercion or intimidation and details the various forms of each. However, he goes on to stress that violence was “endemic among the lower classes and election time provided merely the provocation and the opportunity”.²¹ Likewise Cornelius O’Leary describes election violence as a common law offence and refers to it as a form of undue influence. Yet he also writes that physical violence and intimidation “tended to be accepted as part of the normal behaviour of a rude and inhuman age”.²² Donald Richter writes that physical violence during an election was a legal offence and yet was “expected and commonly accepted as an inalienable heritage of British electoral life”.²³ He goes on to stress that “many of the most serious disorders seem entirely extraneous to the campaign and the polling, and were spontaneous outbursts of sheer ebullience”.²⁴ More recently Hoppen has presented English election violence as both a product of “direct bribery” and as “participation in enjoyable circuses”.²⁵ These views suggest a blurring of the line between election disorder as a culturally tolerated phenomenon – and therefore of limited political significance - and as the product of illegal attempts to influence an

²¹ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.152.

²² O’Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.3.

²³ Richter, “Public Order”, p.169.

²⁴ Richter, “The Role of Mob Riot”, p.25.

²⁵ Hoppen, “Grammars”, p.607.

election result. Yet if we are to employ violence as a measure of political change this line needs to be brought into focus.

To begin with it is clear that in discussing 'election disorder' we are focussing on events that represented a degree of disruption to the peace during an election campaign. After all the term 'disorder' can refer variously to confusion, an absence of 'order' or a disturbance. However given that mid-century English elections routinely displayed any or all of these symptoms some further explanation is necessary. What, for example, distinguishes the kind of events described in this thesis from the types of popular protest examined by Hobsbawm, Thompson and Rudé? Electoral riots were qualitatively different from other forms of popular disturbance in that they were, in a sense, both predictable and artificial. Violence during an election was predictable because it occurred within an established time frame and at a specific location. Furthermore the potential for disorder during an election was a well-established fact and the authorities often took precautions against its occurrence. This is not to argue that there was no element of spontaneity involved in the outbreak of election violence. But as the product of tensions and aspirations generated within a proscribed period of time, election riots were more readily anticipated than, for example, food or labour riots.

In *Riots and Community Politics* John Bohstedt recognises a difference between political violence – under which he classifies 'Church and King' riots, illuminations and election riots – and food, labour and military disturbances. He writes of the former that "rather than mobilizing a community against an external threat, they typically split a community internally along vertical fissures".²⁶ Bohstedt thus suggests that political riots were different from food, labour or military riots

²⁶ Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, p.24.

because they generally did not involve community opposition to an external threat. However he concedes that election violence could involve "defence of local interests against outsiders".²⁷ Rudé, in *The Crowd in History*, also distinguishes between election violence and other forms of popular protest. In describing the 'raising of a mob' during a Middlesex contest in 1768 he writes, "it has nothing to do with the sort of popular movement we are here discussing".²⁸

Election violence has been described as more contrived than other forms of public disorder. Philips presents election riots as "'artificial' and less directly connected with social and industrial conditions".²⁹ Likewise Hoppen writes that violent electioneering was "quite artificial, paid for by cash on the nail and, as such, part of the great business of electoral corruption".³⁰ Election disorder that grew out of corrupt practices could be regarded as artificial in the sense that it did not reflect popular dissent. Yet not all election violence was generated through the payment of bribes. Party enthusiasm alone was a potent source of disorder, as was the militant parochialism that many boroughs displayed throughout the period: in many cases strangers were targeted by election crowds, particularly if the former had been vocal in their support of an unpopular party or candidate. Electoral riots were certainly less related to social, economic or industrial conditions than either food or labour disturbances, although such factors could contribute to a general atmosphere of disorder during a campaign. Election violence did not usually represent a challenge to the official structure of the political system: these were not events designed to achieve, for example, greater political participation for the unenfranchised. Electoral

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A study of popular disturbances in France and England, 1730 – 1848* (New York, 1964), p.217.

²⁹ D. Philips, "Riots and Public Order in the Black Country, 1835 – 1860" in Stevenson and Quinault (eds) *Popular Protest*, p.149.

³⁰ Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.257.

riots did not generally embody attempts to voice communal grievances, they were more 'popular outburst' than 'popular protest'.

Given that election riots were structurally different from other forms of popular disturbance it follows that general definitions of the latter will be inadequate in describing the former. However there are obviously features common to both. In *Popular Disturbances in England* John Stevenson discards the general definition of 'disturbance' as "any interruption of tranquillity by tumult or uproar"³¹ in favour of a more specific approach that stresses the importance of numbers and violence. He borrows elements from the law of riotous offences which defined the basic offence of unlawful assembly as,

Any gathering of three or more persons, on public or private property, with common intent to commit either a lawful or unlawful act in such a way as to give any person of reasonable courage and firmness fear of a breach of the peace.³²

Thus the law recognised three elements in the definition of public order offences: alarm, mutual intent, and numbers. The first involved at least one person of normal courage fearing a breach of the peace. The second established that the crowd was united in its pursuit of some common goal or purpose. Finally, by common law the involvement of three or more people constituted a disturbance whereas by statute the Riot Act required the involvement of 12 or more persons. Stevenson writes that the social sciences have largely discredited the notion that rioters share a common goal,

³¹ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.5.

³² *Ibid.*, p.6.

or that they even intend participating in such events before they begin.³³ As such he discards the concept of 'mutual intent'. Stevenson thus defines 'disturbance' as an event involving three or more persons and violence, which he classifies as "physical damage to persons or property".³⁴ In addition he allows for those incidents that "bordered upon explicit violence".³⁵

In his 1965 thesis "Public Order and Popular Disturbances in Great Britain, 1865 – 1914" Donald Richter provides a rare definition of election violence. He describes "public disorder at elections" as "mob action of a terrorist nature aimed at the voters and supporters of an opposite political faction".³⁶ His definition finds parallels in Stevenson's approach and establishes several key concepts: that election violence involved *mob action*; that it was of a *terrorist nature*; that it was *aimed*, suggesting a degree of purpose; and that it was directed towards an *opposite political faction*. Richter thus presents election disorder as an event involving a large number of people, creating a degree of public terror and organised for the purpose of intimidating political opponents. By law public disturbances were recognised as offences that could invalidate an election result. Electoral law established that "when stones are thrown and shots fired among the persons going to record their votes, they are not bound again to imperil their lives, but may claim that the election be declared void".³⁷ The requirements for such a case were that voters were prevented from exercising their franchise by intimidation or a fear of violence, "even without violence or a threat thereof being brought to bear upon them personally".³⁸

³³ *Ibid.*, p.9 Stevenson refers to E.L.Faris (ed), *The Handbook of Modern Sociology* (Chicago, 1966) and R.H.Turner and L.M.Killian, *Collective Behaviour* (Englewood Cliffs, 1987).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Richter, "Public Order", p.171.

³⁷ Leader, *The Franchise*, p.113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The definition to be adopted in this thesis will be a synthesis of the above approaches. As a form of popular disturbance the focus must be on episodes of violence involving groups of people who commit acts, or threaten acts, of physical damage to persons or property. And, as a study of electioneering, the focus must be broadened to encompass events that interfered with the electoral process. As such the term 'electoral disorder' will refer to the wilful disruption of the procedures of an election campaign through the use of collective violence, whether physical or material, implicit or explicit. This definition establishes several important points: firstly that 'disorder' describes episodes of violence; secondly that such episodes often represented wilful or purposeful attempts to interfere with the electoral process, either as the product of corruption or as part of the symbolism of mass participation; and thirdly that the study is limited to cases of violence that could be directly linked to the events, personalities and issues of specific election campaigns. A discussion of the terminology used in describing electoral disorder will follow later. Firstly we must explore the distinction between 'normal' expectations of election excess and the outbreak of 'disorder'.

This study recognises that while popular participation and exuberance were well established features of English electioneering, the outbreak of violence represented an extracurricular event that exceeded the accepted bounds of electoral behaviour. The former constituted part of the ritualistic fabric of constituency politics, while the latter represented a breach of electoral law and public order. Throughout the period English elections, as a matter of course, generated a degree of popular 'disorder'. In part this was because the formal and informal rituals of Victorian electioneering invited a measure of social disruption. Peter Bailey writes that mid-Victorian elections were

“celebrated as popular holidays cum licensed brawls”.³⁹ Election rituals contributed to an element of disorder because they put people on the streets in large numbers, encouraged partisan enthusiasm and indulged a tradition of social inversion. Thus traditional expectations of political courtship, bribery and treating meant that voters and non-voters could look forward to elections as a period of unregulated revelry and social inversion. Indeed Frank O’Gorman describes a contemporary fascination with election rituals in which participation, “must primarily have been experienced by those involved as a form of entertainment”.⁴⁰ Within such an atmosphere loud, effusive and ebullient behaviour was not only accepted, it was even encouraged.

There is no doubt that within the ‘licensed saturnalia’ of a contested election a certain degree of disorder was expected. Serjeant Cox, a contemporary election observer, urged campaign managers to prepare their candidates for what awaited them during a contest.

The motley crowd at the hustings is either funny or furious. It must at all events be noisy. If you are popular it will cheer you as much as you please; if unpopular it will hoot you...If your candidate is a novice in elections, prepare him for this sort of reception. Tell him not to be angry or frightened, but to fall in, as it were, with the fun of the moment.⁴¹

Displays of popular participation were, however, tolerated only in so far as they served a particular purpose. O’Gorman argues that election rituals were designed to encourage mass participation and to deliver certain messages to the community. These messages were aimed at voters and non-voters and related to issues such as local welfare and leadership. James Vernon writes that the symbolic practices of

³⁹ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control* (London, 1978), p.87.

⁴⁰ O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals”, p.79.

⁴¹ H.J.Hanham (Ed), *Charles R.Dod: Electoral Facts from 1832 to 1853 Impartially Stated* (Hassocks, 1972), p.xli.

'official politics' represented an attempt by authorities to, "convey and reaffirm the legitimacy of governing in thousands of unspoken ways".⁴² Thus election ritual was designed to promote participation in a controlled and regulated manner. Within such a context *violence* represented a loss of control and a challenge to authority. Ritual did not promote riot, instead violence was an unwelcome by-product of attempts to direct mass participation. Electoral rituals reinforced notions of community, power and legitimacy not subversion, disorder and mayhem. As a result O'Gorman writes that the challenge for electoral managers was to "promote lavish displays of popular participation in the election campaign, while containing and controlling the sentiments thus excited".⁴³

Contemporary educated opinion recognised election disorder as an undesirable and unacceptable feature of the political system. Indeed Richter writes that election rioting was an acknowledged and "routinely deplored aspect of British life".⁴⁴ The turbulence of English electioneering was criticised in newspapers and journals and lampooned in fiction by writers such as Dickens, Disraeli, Trollope and Eliot. In Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* the title character, Samuel Pickwick, finds himself caught up in a campaign disturbance during a 'spirited contest' for the borough of Eatanswill.

Mr Pickwick's hat was knocked over his eyes, nose and mouth, by one poke of a Buff flag-staff, very early in the proceedings. He describes himself as being surrounded on every side, when he could catch a glimpse of the scene, by angry and ferocious countenances, by a vast cloud of dust, and by a dense crowd of combatants. He represents himself as being forced from the carriage by some unseen power, and being personally engaged in a pugilistic encounter.⁴⁵

⁴² Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.48.

⁴³ O'Gorman, "Campaign Rituals", p.103.

⁴⁴ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.19.

⁴⁵ Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers* (London, 1907), p.173.

Dickens' fictional account differs little from many newspaper reports of election riots. The contemporary press treated such scenes as sensational, though deplorable, events. Editorial comments, however, were surprisingly rare during the period. In most cases journalists confined themselves to reporting the fact of violence and little else. So in November 1868 the *Manchester Guardian* reported of the borough election in York, "After the declaration of the poll...several disgraceful disturbances took place in various parts of the city".⁴⁶ And in Stafford during the same general election, "A great number of Liberals disgraced themselves by acts of personal violence".⁴⁷ A journal like the *Nonconformist*, with its evangelistic creed, was more likely to adopt a high moral tone in describing electoral disturbances, particularly when a political point could be made. In July 1865 it commented, "The great triumph of Liberal opinion at the General Election as been greatly tarnished by the senseless and disgraceful scenes which have been witnessed in various parts of the United Kingdom...the appeal to the people ought not to be turned into a saturnalia of rowdyism".⁴⁸ Indeed the tone of editorial comments often revealed the none-too-subtle sympathies of the newspaper involved. For example the Liberal *Bristol Daily Post* reported in November 1868,

If any evidence could have been required to show the evil of introducing that always dangerous element, mob violence, into our election contests, it has been afforded, we should say, by the proceedings at our police court during the week. When in April last the Tories supplemented the ruffianism of Bristol by the hiring of a regular army...to spread terror amongst the peaceably disposed citizens, we ventured to prophesy that the seed they had sown would, if nurtured, bring forth bitter fruits, and so it has proved.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1868, p.3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1868, p.5.

⁴⁸ *Nonconformist*, 26 July 1865, p.603.

⁴⁹ *Bristol Daily Post*, 24 November 1868, p.2.

Within parliament electoral disorder was condemned as a product of corruption and as a stumbling block to the 'tranquillity, purity and freedom' of elections. Electoral reforms during the period were routinely directed towards achieving more peaceful and orderly elections. In his motion for a parliamentary inquiry into electoral procedure in March 1869 H.A.Bruce, the Home Secretary, referred the Commons to, "those scenes of rioting and violence which so frequently characterise a contested election".⁵⁰ The inquiry that was established sat for 12 months, collected 500 pages of evidence on parliamentary and municipal elections and led to the tabling of the Parliamentary Elections Bill in May 1870.

During the first reading of that abortive legislation the inquiry's chairman, Lord Hartington, described the disorder that attended public nominations as tending to, "disgust the most peaceable and intelligent portion of the constituency with everything connected with elections".⁵¹ Arguments in favour of the Ballot often referred to the peace it would bring to electioneering. Thus when W.E.Forster, the Liberal minister for education, tabled a revised Elections (Parliamentary and Municipal) Bill in February 1871 he informed the House that "the advantages of peace, order and quietness in voting are much in favour of the Ballot, and this is an argument that applies with greater force as we increase the number of electors."⁵² Ultimately secret voting was not introduced until 1872, five years after the Second Reform Act had expanded the size of the electorate. The massive increase in the number of voters after 1867 led to the realization that open voting was no longer

⁵⁰ *Hansard* 3, Vol.194, 4 March 1869, p.653 (Motion for a select committee inquiry).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol.201, 9 May 1870, p.432 (First reading of Parliamentary Elections Bill).

⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol.204, 20 February 1871, p.530 (First Reading of Elections [Parliamentary and Municipal] Bill).

practical, and that many of the new voters were proving, "highly vulnerable to the temptations of bribery and [the] victimization of coercion".⁵³

The willingness of local authorities to take steps to prevent or limit violence reveals it to have been a little tolerated aspect of electioneering. Throughout the period election preparations routinely included the bolstering of constituency police forces with county reinforcements, the swearing-in of 'special' constables and, if necessary, requests for a military presence. In February 1862 the 29 officers of the Lincoln City police were joined by 100 men from the county force in anticipation of a contested by-election in the borough. Given Lincoln's history of violent contests it is little wonder that the Mayor petitioned the Home Office for, "the attendance of a detachment of the Military or of an efficient body of Police Constables...to preserve order on the day appointed for the Election".⁵⁴ The popular attraction of campaign events ensured that election crowds frequently outnumbered local police forces. The swearing-in of 'specials' was therefore common. Their effectiveness, though, was questionable. Quinault writes that "in most cases of serious disorder special constables -- however numerous -- were insufficiently trained and equipped to quell a riot although they might retard its growth".⁵⁵ In Nottingham during the 1865 election several hundred 'specials' and the borough force were unable to maintain order and the military were required to attend.⁵⁶

The use of soldiers to restore order was in most cases a last resort. More commonly troops were quartered nearby to be called on by the magistrates if they were needed. In November 1857 the Chief Constable of Staffordshire informed the

⁵³ B.L.Kinzer, *The Ballot Question in Nineteenth Century English Politics* (New York, 1982), p.101.

⁵⁴ Home Office Disturbance Papers, [P]ublic [R]ecord [O]ffice Class HO 45/7319, "Letter from John Torry, Mayor of Lincoln to Home Office, 9 February 1862".

⁵⁵ Quinault, "The Warwickshire County Magistracy", p.202.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 13 July 1865, p.9.

Home Office that "the excitement in the locality is such as to require precautionary measures...The Officers commanding the Pensioners and Yoemanry and the Chief Constables of Wolverhampton are on the alert".⁵⁷ And in Dorset as late as 1880 the military were requested to be present during an election. The *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* reported that during the Dorchester election, "So serious was the aspect of affairs that the Mayor summoned a detachment of the 39th Regiment, under Colonel Henning, CB, and also the aid of the Royal Horse Artillery, both of which bodies were stationed on Cornhill with drawn bayonets".⁵⁸ Such precautionary measures highlight the seriousness with which local authorities viewed election violence. There were, therefore, recognised limits to what was acceptable during the chaos and excitement of a constituency election. This is an important distinction: election disorder as described here constituted an event beyond the normally tolerated excesses of campaigning.

Beyond the boundaries of what constituted 'accepted' electoral excess, disorder often represented the outworking of corrupt attempts to influence the polling. Election violence was recognised by law as a form of intimidation. The 1854 Corrupt Practices Act made 'undue influence' a statutory offence and thus punishable as a misdemeanour. The Act regarded, "Personal violence [as]...clearly an infraction of the law, and if done by or with the consent or authority of a candidate, or his agent, with a view of influencing the vote for or against, would render the election void".⁵⁹ In addition the Act provided penalties for those found guilty of such acts. Offenders could face a £50 fine, be struck from the voting register and rendered incapable of

⁵⁷ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class HO 45/6378, "Letter from Gilbert Hogg, Chief Constable of Staffordshire to Home Office, 18 November 1857".

⁵⁸ *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 3 April 1880, p.6.

⁵⁹ Leader, *The Franchise*, p.127.

holding public office for seven years. Three kinds of undue influence were defined in the Act and they included,

(1) Any force, violence, restraint or threat thereof, (2) Any injury, damage, harm or loss inflicted, or threat thereof, or other intimidation, (3) Any abduction, duress, or any fraudulent device or contrivance which might impede the proper enjoyment of the franchise.⁶⁰

The use of such means to influence an election result had become, by the middle of the nineteenth century, an established feature of electoral malpractice. Indeed this aspect of English electioneering had increased since the eighteenth-century, driven by a greater frequency of contests and a growing electorate. Thomson writes that after the First Reform Act, "elections consequently became often more disorderly than before, for larger numbers of voters were involved".⁶¹ In addition, as party conflict intensified so too did corrupt efforts to manipulate election results. Indeed John Stevenson suggests that "it was the increasing bitterness of party strife after 1689 which underlay the frequency of election riots".⁶² The intimidation of voters could take non-violent forms such as threats to employment, tenancy or patronage. Yet as Norman Gash writes, "with so much, financially as well as politically, at stake in elections, parties and politicians in many constituencies were apt to use more forcible means to help ensure success".⁶³ These 'forcible means' included personal assault, crowd violence and even kidnapping. A survey of contemporary sources provides numerous examples of corruptly engineered electoral violence.

The kidnapping or 'cooping' of electors continued well into the late Victorian period. Voters could be kidnapped to prevent them from voting, or to keep them in a

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ D. Thomson, *England in the nineteenth century, 1815 – 1914*, (Harmondsworth, 1950), p.122.

⁶² Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.25.

⁶³ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.137.

state of pacific inebriation prior to casting a controlled vote. Dickens satirised this element of electioneering in *Pickwick Papers*. On the eve of the poll in Eatanswill Mr. Pickwick was informed by Samuel Slumkey's agent that 33 voters had been locked up in the White Hart.

'They keep 'em locked up there till they want 'em,' resumed the little man. 'The effect of that is, you see, to prevent our getting at them; and even if we could, it would be of no use, for they keep them very drunk on purpose. Smart fellow Fizkin's agent – very smart fellow indeed'.⁶⁴

Elections in Carlisle in Cumberland frequently witnessed such scenes: in 1865 a number of Blue (Liberal) and Yellow (Conservatives) partisans fought in the street when the former caught the latter attempting to kidnap several voters⁶⁵; and during the 1868 borough election, "a lengthened siege was laid to public houses [by a Conservative crowd] in which 'bottled' electors were supposed to have been stored away".⁶⁶ In 1880 a petition against the return of Richard Dyott (Conservative) for Lichfield concluded that "his election and return were and are wholly null and void, on the grounds of abduction by the Respondent's agents of voters, whereby they were prevented from voting at such election".⁶⁷ The hiring of crowds to intimidate voters or to disrupt an opponent's political meetings was also commonplace. Cornelius O'Leary writes that in the decades after 1832, "in most of the large urban constituencies the more genteel electors were sometimes terrorized on polling day by gangs of hired bullies and deterred from voting".⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, p.163.

⁶⁵ *Carlisle Examiner*, 11 July 1865, p.1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid (Supplement)*, 15 July 1868 (not numbered).

⁶⁷ [H]ouse of [L]ords [R]ecord [O]ffice, Journals of the House of Commons, 1880 (Vol.135), Lichfield Borough Petition, p.313.

⁶⁸ O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.15 – 16.

Election petitions frequently cited undue influence as a grievance. An investigation into a Dudley election petition of May 1874 declared the contest void, "in consequence of large tumultuous assemblages of persons armed, of serious riots, and grave assaults upon individuals, a large number of voters were intimidated, and deterred from exercising the franchise".⁶⁹ The Nottingham borough election of 1865 was similarly set aside after, "men armed with sticks, and others on behalf of Sir Robert Jukes Clifton (Liberal-Conservative), by committing serious outrages on the property and persons of the inhabitants, created an alarm which was not without its influence on the result of the election".⁷⁰ The Bristol election of 1868 witnessed the organisation of a virtual army of Liberal working men to protect themselves against the threats of a Tory 'mob'. At a Liberal election meeting days before the polling a body of "true-blues and drunken roughs" - said to number almost 1,000 - attempted to disrupt the proceedings. The meeting continued despite fighting at the doors and fireworks being thrown at the windows.⁷¹

A further cause of disorder was provided by clashes between rival groups of partisans. During the excitement and tension of a contest the practice of parading party colours, accompanied by bands of music, was a ready provocation to crowds of enthusiastic supporters. At Dukinfield in 1868, during the Stalybridge borough election, a serious riot followed an encounter between Liberal and Conservative 'roughs'. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that "A large body of Liberals, wearing red ribbons, came into collision in Oxford Road with a large body of Conservatives. A free fight, in which sticks and clogs were used with the utmost freedom ensued".⁷² In the Forest of Dean during the Gloucestershire county election of 1868 the

⁶⁹ HLRO, Journals of the House of Commons, 1874 (129), Dudley Borough Petition, p.123.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Journals of the House of Commons, 1866 - 1878-9, Nottingham Borough Petition, p.591.

⁷¹ *Bristol Daily Post*, 6 November 1868, p.3.

⁷² *Manchester Guardian*, 5 February 1874, p.8.

Conservatives were accused of promoting such violence. The *Gloucester Journal* commented that they had “injudiciously introduced a number of fighting men from Monmouth...who obtruded their political colours often in a very offensive manner upon the Yellow Foresters...[and] blows were freely exchanged by the contending mobs”.⁷³ In some cases crowd violence was paid for in cash, and in others alcohol provided both the incentive and the impetus to riot. In Monmouth during the 1868 election rioting was blamed on ‘tory hirelings’ who were alleged to have been paid 7s 6d a day for their services.⁷⁴ And in Shanklin on the Isle of Wight a Liberal election meeting in 1880 was disrupted after, “a gang of about forty navvies...most of them the worse for drink...smashed the furniture and fittings, and a fight between them and the townspeople took place”.⁷⁵

The liberal distribution of free alcohol was often the cause of election riots, though it is often difficult to discern where traditional expectations of largesse gave way to corrupt payments. The customary practice of opening public houses on the polling day merely contributed to the potential for disorder. Candidates were expected to be generous towards their constituents during a campaign and violence might reflect the voters’ sense of grievance at being ignored. Thus Hoppen writes that election riots could occur, “when candidates failed to deliver promised rewards (bribes, free drinks, and the like)”.⁷⁶ More often candidates went out of their way to ensure that their supporters were adequately ‘refreshed’. At Bradford in 1868 Henry Ripley spent more than £7,000 at 115 public houses for “any who enrolled themselves as ‘committee men’”.⁷⁷ Similarly, Dickens’ fictional agent Perker described his

⁷³ *Gloucester Journal*, 28 November 1868, p.6.

⁷⁴ *Bristol Daily Post*, 17 November 1868, p.3.

⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1880, p.6.

⁷⁶ K.T.Hoppen, “Grammars”, p.605.

⁷⁷ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.263.

electoral strategy in Eatanswill, "We have opened all the public-houses in the place, and left our adversary nothing but the beer-shops – masterly stroke of policy that".⁷⁸

A clear distinction can therefore be drawn between 'disorder', defined here as a violent interruption to the electoral process, and the normally tolerated excesses of Victorian electioneering. There was an established limit to what authorities would allow during a campaign, and the occasion of violence – defined as physical damage to persons or property – normally formed the point at which tolerance gave way to suppression. Philips quotes an article from the *Staffordshire Advertiser* in July 1835 in which counsel prosecuting a number of election rioters described their actions as going beyond, "the normally tolerated excesses of a contested election, and [they] so far forgot themselves as to injure people and destroy property".⁷⁹ Likewise during the Lewes nomination in 1865 the borough police did not act against a disturbance, "until a few ruffians *so far forgot themselves* [my emphasis] as to throw rotten eggs at the ladies seated on the balcony of the hotel opposite the hustings".⁸⁰ While the second incident perhaps better illustrates an intolerance for attacks on gentlewomen, the wording of both reports suggests a known limit to electoral excess.

I have argued here that disorder was frequently motivated by a corrupt desire to influence an election result. However we must be careful not to lose sight of the fact that violence could occur in the absence of corruption. Politics constituted a popular pastime for Victorians and disorder could reflect the over-enthusiastic outburst of an excited populace. According to John Vincent, "there was a popular political culture as there was a popular musical culture...very high polls, very strict

⁷⁸ Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, p.163.

⁷⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 July 1865, footnote in Philips, "Riots and Public Order", p.175.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 13 July 1865, p.9.

voting...and broken windows bear witness to the consciously political intent of the electorate".⁸¹ The generations-old political struggle between Whig and Tory could generate partisan enthusiasm that was independent of pecuniary considerations and the highly charged ritualistic atmosphere of a contested election. Norman Gash writes that England was often able to provide, "the dissolute, the lawless, the unemployed, the professional bully to carry out the will of anyone with money and influence in the licensed saturnalia of the parliamentary election".⁸² It was also undoubtedly able to provide the loyal Tory, the fervent Whig, the energetic Liberal and the zealous Radical, who could be relied upon to take a hands-on approach to electioneering for no other incentive than party enthusiasm and a sense of being part of a great political struggle.

II

Throughout the mid-Victorian period campaign violence remained a destructive and highly visible reminder of an older era of electioneering. Certainly the scenes of violence that accompanied elections in the 1860s differed little in substance from those of a century earlier. William Hogarth's famous illustrations of the saturnalia that attended the Oxfordshire election of 1754 could as equally apply to contests in the 1850s and 1870s. And when Joseph Grego introduced his book *A History of Parliamentary Elections and Electioneering in the Old Days* – published in 1886 – he wrote: "With the modifying influence of progress...the time may come when the narrative of the robustious (*sic*) scenes of canvassing, polling, chairing, and election-feasting, with their attendant incidents of all-prevailing bribery, turbulence and

⁸¹ John Vincent, *Pollbooks: How Victorians Voted* (London, 1967), p.12.

⁸² Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.142.

intrigue, may be regarded with incredulity as fictions of an impossible age",⁸³ he was obviously conscious of writing at a time when such scenes were still familiar to his readers.

The continuation of violence and corruption into the post-reform era has long been acknowledged. In *The Making of Modern British Politics* Martin Pugh writes that "Victorian reformers who hoped that judicious expansion of the electorate would foster a mature and informed debate on political issues in place of corruption and influence invariably lived to be disillusioned".⁸⁴ The general elections of 1868 and 1885 were characterised by violence and intimidation, and both took place immediately after the introduction of reform acts that greatly increased the size of the electorate. Similarly the advent of secret voting in 1872 failed to remove the factor of violence from elections – as evidenced by the scale of disorder that attended the 1880 General Election.

Indeed two of the seminal studies of British political history highlight the presence of such practices beyond both the First and Second Reform Acts. In *Politics in the Age of Peel* Norman Gash stresses the failure of reform in 1832 to eradicate electoral intimidation and violence from English electioneering. He argues the continued influence of corrupt practices over the electoral process and writes that "it is not easy to judge among the illicit influences brought to bear upon the electorate whether bribery or coercion was the major factor in impelling it towards a decision".⁸⁵ Gash distinguishes between two forms of electoral coercion: "familiar and genteel tactics" included threats of dismissal from employment, eviction, loss of patronage and exclusive dealing; while "more direct and forcible methods" incorporated the

⁸³ Joseph Grego, *A History of Parliamentary Elections and Electioneering in the Old Days* (London, 1886), p.vi.

⁸⁴ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867 – 1939* (Oxford, 1982), p.11.

⁸⁵ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.137.

'cooping' or kidnapping of voters, and the threat or employment of personal violence.⁸⁶ In *Elections and Party Management* H.J.Hanham highlights a continuity of electoral behaviour across the reform period. He argues that the elimination of violence and electoral corruption was a process still incomplete by the end of the nineteenth-century. Hanham identifies at least 64 English boroughs at which "undoubted cases of corruption occurred" between 1865 and 1884, and writes that,

Whatever figure one accepts as accurate it is certain that corrupt practices occurred in between one-third and one-half of the English boroughs on sufficient scale for them to be noticed...Bribery could take place in the market place without a finger being lifted to prevent it, while riots often occurred simply because there was no one to stop them[my emphasis].⁸⁷

Historians from Gash and Hanham to Richter and Hoppen have written of the nature of election violence during the mid-Victorian generation. Yet few of those studies provide a sustained quantitative analysis of disorder. In addition, those who have described the scale of the phenomenon have largely done so without reference to a detailed statistical survey. The absence of such an analysis is particularly noticeable in discussions of trends in the pattern of violence. For example Thomson argues that elections became *more* disorderly after the First Reform Act⁸⁸, and Hoppen argues that English election violence *declined* after 1832 and by 1874 was, "more sporadic than ever".⁸⁹ However there is little attempt by either to quantify such conclusions. Furthermore where some degree of analysis has been completed comparisons are often hampered by statistics that utilise different terminology and cover disparate time periods. Bohstedt records 617 riots between 1790 and 1810, of which 63 or 10%

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁸⁷ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.263 – 4.

⁸⁸ See page 48 for quote by Thomson.

⁸⁹ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.610.

were classed as 'political'.⁹⁰ Richter's sample of English disturbances between 1865 and 1885 includes 253 riots, of which 71 or 30% occurred during elections.⁹¹ Yet drawing comparisons between these figures is difficult even considering the differences in time periods. As previously noted Bohstedt's sample of political violence incorporates more than just election violence, and though Richter's sample focuses exclusively on electoral disorder he fails to define 'riot' and how he classifies disturbances as 'serious'. The student of electoral disturbance is thus left with little understanding of the actual scope of disorder during the mid to late Victorian era.

Given the considerable statistical vacuum in which previous discussions of election violence have been conducted, a quantitative analysis of rioting must precede any assessment of the operation of electoral politics. Bohstedt highlights the importance of such an approach. He challenges the prevailing myth of the feminine food riot, "on the basis of a more complete analysis of some statistical profiles of protest".⁹² His argument that female leadership of food riots has been exaggerated due to the rarity of their appearance in other forms of protest, is based on a large sample of English riots. He writes that "the traditional method of analysing riots by compiling anecdotes may simply confirm preconceived assumptions. Since even a dozen incidents are fewer than 2 per cent of riots in this period, *impressionistic selection is no substitute for counting* [my emphasis]".⁹³ Conclusions about the pace of political modernisation will therefore be made within the context of a careful study of the nature and frequency of disorder. In his study of Black Country disturbances between 1835 and 1860 D.Philips establishes the general methodological problems

⁹⁰ Bohstedt, "Gender, Household", p.91.

⁹¹ Richter, "Public Order", p.275 (Appendix B).

⁹² Bohstedt, "Gender, Household", p.89.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.91

associated with studying riots, namely definition and quantification.⁹⁴ The first refers to the problem of labelling episodes of disorder, while the second concerns the classification of violence according to size, seriousness and relative importance. The following discussion will outline the methodology used to define incidents of crowd violence, and the terminology employed to describe incidents of varying size and severity.

Stevenson and Quinault argue that "the words 'protest', 'riot' and 'disturbance' are not always very easy to define precisely, but they must be defined if quantification is to be undertaken".⁹⁵ The basic model for defining and quantifying moments of collective violence is provided by the law of public order offences. We have already noted in section I that the law distinguished between popular protest and individual assault on the basis of numbers (at least 3 persons), mutual intent (united in pursuit of some common goal), violence (physical damage to persons or property) and public alarm (at least one person of reasonable courage feared a breach of the peace). Thus the basic offence of unlawful assembly described an event in which 3 persons or more gathered in pursuit of some common purpose, and acted in such a manner as to create a degree of public alarm. The more serious offence of riot was defined as,

A tumultuous disturbance of the peace by three persons or more, who assemble together of their own authority, with an intent mutually to assist one another against anyone who shall oppose them in the execution of an enterprise of a private nature, and afterwards actually to execute the enterprise, in a violent and turbulent manner, to the terror of the people, whether the act intended were lawful or unlawful.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Philips, "Riots and Public Order in the Black Country", p.145.

⁹⁵ Stevenson and Quinault (eds), *Popular Protest*, p.29.

⁹⁶ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.6.

The criteria established by the law for determining the severity of a disturbance was thus an increase in the number of participants. At common law a riot was regarded as a cooperative action involving 3 or more persons, was a misdemeanour and could be punished by a fine or imprisonment. In such a case the authorities were allowed to use 'reasonable means' to effect the restoration of order. However by statute a state of riot existed if 12 or more persons remained riotously assembled one hour after the reading of the Riot Act proclamation. Those who ignored the warning were guilty of a felony and the authorities were legally justified in the use of deadly force to restore order. The legal definition of riot therefore established both the severity of the incident and proscribed the degree of response permitted to the authorities.

However the use of this legal model of definition presents difficulties to the historian. Acceptance of contemporary labels of violence is dangerous given the subjective nature of the classification process. The degree of seriousness attributed to a disturbance, and therefore the label employed to describe it, depended on the attitudes and perceptions of the authorities who were present at the time. An essential element in the legal definition of disorder was therefore the subjective test of how the authorities, present at the time, perceived the threat in front of them. Philips writes that the crucial factor in defining a riot was, "the attitude and reaction of the authorities to the assembled crowd; and the test the law applied was the essentially subjective one of what the peace officer on the spot at the time, felt the situation to be".⁹⁷ Therefore the potential exists for variations across the country and over time as to what constituted a recognisable threat to public order. And if, as Stevenson suggests, Victorians were becoming less sensitive to the threat of disorder during the

⁹⁷ Philips, "Riots in the Black Country", p.145.

middle decades of the nineteenth-century, then inconsistencies in the classification of crowd violence would undoubtedly have occurred.

The historian is also faced with an evidential problem. Primary and secondary source materials largely fail to provide the necessary details with which to classify episodes of violence according to strict legal definitions. Newspaper reports, election petition findings and government correspondence routinely refer to 'crowds' and 'mobs' rather than to estimates of the number of participants. Indeed, crowd sizes were often only provided when an incident achieved some considerable notoriety or resulted in a specific number of indictments. Therefore, any attempt to categorise episodes of violence according to precise numbers of participants is problematic because of the limitations of the source material, and to do so would result in a sample skewed towards the most serious episodes of crowd violence. The historiography of popular protest provides little direction for approaching the quantification of violence, and while John Stevenson provides a comprehensive analysis of the issues relating to definition, he ultimately relies on a catholic approach which allows him to, "embrace a broader field than that covered by the legal term 'riot'".⁹⁸

Neither Hoppen nor Richter provide a framework for establishing the severity of electoral violence. Bohstedt does, however, provide some direction. He cites physical attack, damage or coercion as distinguishing riot from mere protest. Bohstedt defines 'riot' as, "an incident in which a crowd of fifty or more people damaged or seized property, assaulted someone or forced a victim to perform some action".⁹⁹ He discards the legal use of the term 'riot' in favour of an interpretation based on, "the way contemporaries routinely used the word". In contrast Philips relies on the official legal definition of riot, and restricts his focus to those incidents in

⁹⁸ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.12.

⁹⁹ Bohstedt, "Gender, Household", p.90.

which the authorities clashed with rioters and prosecutions resulted. He argues that the official reaction to disorder played a critical role in the development of riotous situations. Therefore his categorisation of violence is based on how the authorities labelled each incident, and the level of response it generated. In categorising the scale of violence Philips resorts to what he describes as a crude and simple distinction: he recognises both serious, and less serious, episodes of disturbance.

It is clear that considerable variation in terminology (and focus) exists within the historiography of popular protest. What then is an appropriate starting point for defining the types of violence examined here? Within the context of this study precise distinctions between gradations of violence are less important than the fact of disorder itself. The sample of election disturbances has been compiled to inform our understanding of the operation of constituency politics. As such a restrictive definitional approach may obscure more than it reveals of mid-century electioneering. Quinault writes that "exclusive attention on major disturbances gives us an exaggerated view of the involvement of the national government in the maintenance of public order".¹⁰⁰ Likewise too rigid an approach to defining disorder may eliminate from view a considerable amount of disorderly activity. Furthermore the categorisation of violence according to precise limits of size and severity is problematic given the limitations of the source material available. The number of participants involved in disturbances was rarely given and legal terms such as riot were often employed by contemporary observers to describe incidents of varying scale and seriousness. For these reasons I have discounted a narrow and exclusive approach to the classification of violence in favour of an approach that will develop a

¹⁰⁰ Quinault, "The Warwickshire County Magistracy", p.183.

cumulative picture of disorder across the period. This is not to argue for a catch-all approach to classification in which every incident involving a harsh word or thrown stone is included in the sample. Rather it is a recognition of the dangers of limiting the sample to episodes of violence that meet exacting standards of qualification. Given the limits of the available evidence a sample proscribed by precise limits of participation and destruction could produce a pattern of sporadic outbursts of serious mob violence, separated by periods of relative calm, order and civility.

The classifications of disturbance employed in this study are therefore based on an appreciation of the complexities involved in studying moments of collective violence. I have avoided any categorisation based on the number of people involved, as a more workable distinction lies in the character of an event and the scale of the official response to its outbreak. The inconsistencies of contemporary reporting have been taken into consideration, and where a lack of detail prevents easy categorisation of an episode of violence it has been discarded or downgraded in terms of severity. The sample relies on a three-tier approach to the quantification of violence. The terms 'riot' and 'disturbance' are used to describe the more serious types of disorder: with the former more severe than the latter. The term 'incident' has been chosen to describe those disturbances that, while not serious enough to warrant a substantial magisterial response, represented an interruption to normal expectations of electoral procedure.

A 'riot' is thus defined as a serious and sustained outbreak of collective violence, involving the implicit or explicit use of force, intimidation or coercion, and which resulted in physical damage to persons or property – or the immediate fear that such would occur. Riots commonly evoked a magisterial response such as the reading of the Riot Act proclamation and/or the forcible restoration of the peace by police

officers or the military. A report of the Bristol borough election of 1868 provides an example of a mid-century electoral riot:

The destruction of property was very great. The windows of chapels, schools, and private residences were smashed without respect to party. Public houses were forced open, and the mob helped themselves to wine, spirits and beer, cigars, biscuits...Mr.Morley [Liberal] was...an object of attack, but his assailants did not succeed in their attempts. A boy was dangerously injured, and nine persons were taken to the Hospital to have their wounds dressed.¹⁰¹

A 'disturbance' is classified as a less serious breach of the peace than a riot, and involved episodic outbursts of crowd violence rather than the type of *sustained* disorder characteristic of a riot. A disturbance generated a degree of public alarm and elicited some measure of official response. In July 1865 the *Hull and Lincolnshire Times* reported various cases of disturbance in connection with elections in Leicestershire:

Disturbances broke out on Monday...so serious in their character that the polling had to be completed on Tuesday. At Ashby-de-la-Zouch a scene of wild uproar ensued which resulted seriously, and threatened more disaster than actually occurred. About nine or ten of the constables were severely wounded, generally in the head by stones.¹⁰²

An 'incident' is defined as a noisy or demonstrative action by a crowd of people that interferes with, or disrupts, the proceedings of an election campaign. An incident was a relatively short lived event that involved little overt violence, and invoked a limited official response. Though less serious than a riot or a disturbance, an incident nevertheless represented an interruption to electoral procedure. The distinction between the above classifications is thus made on the basis of duration and scale of response, and by the fact that all three disrupted campaign proceedings.

¹⁰¹ *Gloucester Journal*, 21 November 1868, p.7.

¹⁰² *Hull and Lincolnshire Times*, 29 July 1865, p.3.

Within this study conclusions about mid-Victorian electioneering are based on a sample of election violence. Evidence of disorder has been gathered from a variety of sources and quantified according to the above definitions. Episodes of electoral violence were collated from a survey of newspaper and journal reports, election petition findings, official government correspondence and parliamentary reports. Contemporary newspapers and journals provided the richest source of material. A total of 35 provincial newspapers, one national journal (*Nonconformist*) and one national newspaper (*The Times*) were surveyed across the general election years of 1857, 1859, 1865, 1868, 1874 and 1880. There are obvious dangers in an over-reliance on one source type. However, the lack of material found in other sources necessitated a dependence on newspaper articles.

Election petitions provided some evidence of disorder but were more useful in providing additional details to accounts already furnished in newspaper reports. Official correspondence between local authorities and central government offices proved to be of limited use. During the period the Home Office encouraged provincial authorities to deal with matters of public order themselves; in Quinault's words, "in most cases local disorders were controlled by the local justices...the maintenance of public order was largely a local responsibility".¹⁰³ As such, requests to the Home Office for military assistance during elections are relatively sparse. Parliamentary reports, particularly those dealing with corrupt practices or reform of electoral procedure, contained some evidence of disorder. In addition, examples of violence were drawn from a number of secondary sources including works by Richter, Gash, Hanham, O'Leary, Quinault, and J.F.Hill.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Quinault, "The Warwickshire County Magistracy", p.183.

¹⁰⁴ J.W.F.Hill, *Victorian Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1974). Episodes of disorder that were collated from secondary sources have been referenced accordingly in Appendix I.

Reports of electoral violence have been included in the sample (Appendix I) only where the following could be ascertained: county of origin; town or borough in which the event occurred; date of incident; type of election it related to (county or borough, parliamentary or municipal); scale of the event; timing (during the canvass, nomination, declaration, polling day or election meeting); and an identifiable source. These seven criteria ensured that only those incidents that could be properly quantified were included in the sample. All but the timing of the event were compulsory criteria. In cases where the location of an episode of violence was unknown, the event was discarded. Examples of by-election violence are included on an ad hoc basis: to compile detailed statistics on such elections would require an exhaustive search of contemporary newspapers. Where *duplicate* entries of disorder are included in the sample they reflect the occurrence of violence at different stages during a particular campaign – for example if violence broke out during an election meeting and then again several days later during the polling day. Duplicate entries are included because they reveal the extent to which disorder was part of the general temper of Victorian electioneering.¹⁰⁵ The sample of violence provides the statistical basis for conclusions about the character of mid-Victorian politics. However, an analysis of the mid-Victorian political system will precede a discussion of the sample of violence.

¹⁰⁵ Duplicate entries are not, however, included in some of the statistical data related to the sample. The reasons for this are explained in Chapter IV.

Chapter III

The Structure of English and Welsh Electoral Politics, 1857 – 1880

I

I shall say exactly what I think...If you want venality, if you want drunkenness, and facility for being intimidated; or if, on the other hand, you want impulsive, unreflecting, and violent people, where do you look for them?...Do you go to the top or to the bottom?...The effect [of the bill] will manifestly be to add a large number of persons to our constituencies of the class from which if there is to be anything wrong going on we may naturally expect to find it.

Robert Lowe, March 1866¹

When Robert Lowe delivered these often-quoted words to the Commons in relation to Gladstone's Reform Bill of 1866 he was no doubt voicing the concerns of many on both sides of the House. However he was also speaking directly from his own personal experience. He held the unhappy honour of having been at the centre of two serious election riots at consecutive general elections.² In 1857 his re-election for the borough of Kidderminster precipitated a riot that almost claimed his life. He was forced to spend a week convalescing in the town after stones thrown during a violent post-election riot fractured his skull. Two years later Lowe abandoned Kidderminster after a canvass there revealed he had lost crucial Conservative support. In 1859, with the support of his patron the Marquess of Landsdowne, he stood for the small borough of Calne in Wiltshire. However his victory there over a popular local candidate so infuriated the local mob that they smashed his agent's windows, attacked the police and "kept the town in terror until a very late hour at night".³ Lowe's comments in 1866 reflected his fear that an extension of the franchise 'downwards' would inevitably lead to a rise in both venality and violence. Yet to what extent were his

¹ *Hansard*, clxxxii, 13 March 1866, p.147 – 8.

² Perhaps even three! Cornelius O'Leary provides an account of "a violent physical attack" made on Lowe during his canvass at Kidderminster in 1859. See O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.68.

³ *The Bridlington Free Press*, 7 May 1859, p.3.

concerns based on the realities of contemporary electioneering, and to what extent were they exaggerated by his own, painful, experiences? Did electoral reform, either in 1832 or 1867, increase the frequency of election violence?

It is crucial to an understanding of the nature of election violence that the context within which it occurred is first explored. Accordingly, this chapter will outline the electoral framework of British politics between the years 1857 and 1880. This is not, however, merely an attempt to contextualise the discussion of disorderly electioneering. Rather, the changing pattern of electoral violence is explicable only in the light of those changes to the electoral system that took place at various times before and during the Victorian period. The English and Welsh electoral landscape did not remain static during these years. Instead it was continually altered by reform acts and various anti-corruption measures. As such the structures and procedures that invited or prevented election disorder underwent both profound and subtle changes. It is the task of this chapter to delineate those changes and to assess their impact on the nature and frequency of electoral violence.

During the mid-Victorian period the basic outline of the British electoral system remained essentially unaltered. In the House of Commons at Westminster 658 members represented a little over 400 constituencies across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Political representation was divided between county, borough and university constituencies. In addition the franchise – or the right to vote – continued to be restricted to a fraction of the adult male population. However this structural continuity masks a significant period of transition. It was during the middle decades of the nineteenth-century, against a wider background of social and economic

change, that the fabric of British politics was profoundly altered. During this period the apparatus of a modern political system was established. The growth of the electorate, in 1832 and 1867, heralded the approach of a new style of politics in which party organization assumed increasing significance. The growth of local party associations and pressure groups, and of their links to central party organs, signalled the development of a national political framework. Constituency elections increasingly began to bear the imprint of national rather than local issues, and the formation of governments became less a product of parliamentary influence and more the outcome of electoral mandate. It was also during this period that politics became increasingly delineated along class lines rather than those of interest and religion. There were changes, too, in electoral procedure: the duration of the poll was reduced, public nominations were eventually abolished, and whereas at the beginning of the period electors stood in the open to exercise their franchise, at its close they cast their votes *in camera* – shielded by the Ballot Act of 1872.

However, this process of modernization was neither uniform nor monolithic: not only did various elements of modern and pre-modern politics continue to coexist throughout the period, but the pace of change also varied across the system due to the myriad constituency types – and thus electoral cultures – that existed in England and Wales. New political realities were undoubtedly emerging between 1857 and 1880, yet they did so in the shadow of older political traditions. As noted in Chapter I it is possible to characterise the British political system during this period as being positioned on a fault line between two competing forms of politics. James Vernon describes this dichotomy in his study of English political culture between 1815 and 1867,

As we shall see, it is difficult to talk of one, singular, exclusive official definition of a male propertied political arena. The official political structure was a curious mixture of the old and the new, the local and the national, combining the remnants of a medieval political system with that created by nineteenth-century reforms.⁴

The coexistence of old and new features of politics owed much to the atomisation of the system into individual electoral units – each with their own distinct cultures and political heritage. According to Hoppen, Victorian constituencies, “ranged along a lengthy continuum from comparatively straightforward deference communities to provincial capitals sustaining something close to the free exercise of political judgment”.⁵ Comparatively similar traditions of influence and patronage existed in the agricultural counties and the small boroughs. In the former loyalty to the Church of England and to aristocratic influence sustained a tradition of predominantly Conservative politics. In the latter the strength of electoral tradition and patron influence stifled the development of democratic politics. In the larger urban boroughs a measure of political freedom was possible and the first stirrings of a modern style of politics were to be found. There a tradition of nonconformity and opposition to privilege in church and state gave Liberalism and Radicalism the ascendancy. The pace of political change across these constituencies varied according to the strength of local electoral traditions and the extent of social and economic changes brought about by industrial and urban growth.

The mid-Victorian political system was characterized by the simultaneous operation of both progressive features of modern politics and the retardant elements of a more traditional, pre-reform outlook.. Thus the development of centrally directed party organization was hampered by a leadership lack of faith, and a continuing recourse to private correspondence rather than the emerging channels of official party

⁴ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.15.

⁵ Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.254.

machinery. Elections continued to be influenced by local concerns and provincial allegiances, and campaigning remained infused with a strong sense of carnival and ritual. And despite the formalization of politics after 1867, which further limited the participation of the unenfranchised and attempted to make the process of constituency politics more respectable, the machinery of electioneering continued to provide opportunities for the exercise of corruption and the outbreak of violence.

Violent electioneering in Britain may date from the late Middle Ages⁶ but it was not until the end of the seventeenth-century, during the 'rage of party', that the 'great age of electoral rioting' began.⁷ It was then that an expanded electorate and greater frequency of contested elections – a product of the Triennial Act of 1694 – contributed to the strength of political activity and to the potential for conflict. The 20 years between 1695 and 1715 experienced no fewer than 10 general elections,⁸ during which between one-third and one-half of all elections were contested.⁹ Ian Gilmour writes of elections during this period,

Polling was concentrated in space and extended in time. A constituency usually had only one polling place, and polling went on for days, sometimes weeks. Excitement inevitably grew, as did the consumption of drink. In addition, to ensure the freedom of elections soldiers were removed from the towns where they were held. Their presence would probably have provoked violence; their absence did nothing to prevent it.¹⁰

English and Welsh elections continued to occasion sporadic violence throughout the eighteenth century, yet fewer contests meant fewer opportunities for disorder. Frank

⁶ See Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England 1603 – 1658* (London, 1986).

⁷ Ian Gilmour, *Riot, Risings and Revolution* (London, 1992), p.207.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734 – 1832* (Oxford, 1989), p.107.

¹⁰ Gilmour, *Riot, Risings*, p.208 – 209.

O'Gorman's table of contests between 1701 and 1831 illustrates the decline in electoral activity: between 1701 and 1734 the average percentage of English and Welsh elections that were contested was 40.2%; whereas between 1741 and 1831 this percentage dropped to 27%.¹¹ The frequency of electoral violence declined after 1715 as the Septennial Act reduced the opportunity for disorder by increasing the time between elections. In addition, a corresponding decline in the number of electoral contests sapped the source of violence. By 1747 just 7.5% of English counties went to the polls compared to 65% in 1705.¹² William Hogarth's satiric print of the corrupt Oxfordshire election of 1754, *Chairing the Member* (1758), presents a picture of undoubted bacchanalian chaos and disorder. Yet by the middle of the eighteenth-century the frequency of electoral rioting had largely begun to decline. John Stevenson writes that "with the growing security of the Hanoverian succession and the increasingly oligarchic tendency of electoral control, the occasions of open political violence became more limited".¹³

Comparing the frequency of violence in the eighteenth-century with that of the nineteenth-century is difficult given the absence of quantitative surveys for the latter. Where figures of electoral riots are available, comparisons are hampered by disparate emphases and contrasting terminology. Bohstedt records a total of 617 riots in England between 1790 and 1810 – of which he classes 63 as 'political'.¹⁴ By contrast Richter records 452 riots in England, Wales and Scotland between 1865 and 1885, of which 71 occurred at elections.¹⁵ As a crude indication of the gradual 'transition to order' of British society these figures are enlightening: Richter found less violence in

¹¹ O'Gorman, *Voters*, p.108.

¹² Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances* (1st edn, 1979), p.27.

¹³ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances* (2nd edn, 1992), p.30.

¹⁴ Bohstedt, "Gender, Household", p.91.

¹⁵ Richter, "Public Order", p.275 and 172.

the later nineteenth-century despite a wider frame of reference than Bohstedt. However it is difficult to use such figures to trace the pattern of electoral disorder between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bohstedt's sample of political violence also includes 'Church and King' riots and illumination disorders: neither of which are the focus of this study. In addition he provides no distribution figures to indicate when the riots occurred. Likewise Richter includes no details as to the timing of disorder. Bohstedt defines a 'riot' as, "an incident in which a crowd of fifty or more people damaged or seized property, assaulted someone or forced a victim to perform some action".¹⁶ For his part Richter describes only, "separate instances of serious electoral rioting".¹⁷ However, given that Bohstedt's figure of 63 'political' riots included other categories of disturbance, and Richter's sample of 71 riots included *only* election violence, it seems likely that the later period (1865 – 1885) included slightly more cases of electoral disorder. Such a conclusion fits comfortably with my own evidence, which suggests that Richter's figures underestimate the scale of mid-century electoral violence.

Yet what of the period between 1810 and 1857? The lack of any statistical evidence on electoral violence during that period ensures that conclusions about post-1832 disorder are necessarily speculative. Elections undoubtedly continued to be marred by violence in the early nineteenth-century, and John Stevenson suggests that "there was little evidence either immediately before or after 1832 that the more tumultuous traditions of the eighteenth century had been left behind".¹⁸ Given the strong correlation between election contests and the frequency of violence some conclusions can, however, be drawn. It seems likely that the phenomenon of electoral

¹⁶ Bohstedt, "Gender, Household", p.90.

¹⁷ Richter, "Public Order", p.172.

¹⁸ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances* (1st edn), p.286.

violence peaked in the years immediately after the First Reform Act of 1832. During that period the growth of the electorate, a greater number of contested elections and increased partisanship – all products of reform – would have contributed to the frequency of violence. Thereafter the scale of disorder declined as the rate of contests diminished. The dislocation of party politics in the 1840s contributed to a decline in electoral activity, further reducing the likelihood of contested elections and thus the opportunities for disorder. Hoppen argues a post-1832 decrease in electoral violence and suggests, “Bloody electioneering had been common in the period before the First Reform Act of 1832. Thereafter it declined, at first slowly and then rapidly”.¹⁹ By 1874, he writes, “the press was reporting that in England ‘mobs, processions, favours, free fights and punch drinking have become for the most part things of the past’”.²⁰ Hoppen’s contention that the frequency of electoral rioting was decreasing after 1832 is undoubtedly accurate. Yet his argument about the *pace* at which that decline occurred during the mid-nineteenth century is likely over-estimated. The sample of evidence presented here suggests a steady increase in instances of violence from 1857 to 1868.

For the period between 1857 and 1880, including general and by-elections, I have identified a total of 191 episodes of election violence. This figure includes 25 duplicate cases of disorder – where more than one separate instance of violence occurred in a constituency during a single campaign. The sample of 194 instances of violence compares with Bohstedt’s figure of 63 riots and Richter’s 71 riots.²¹ A detailed analysis of the sample of violence is provided in Chapter IV. However I have

¹⁹ Hoppen, “Grammars”, p.605.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The figures quoted for Bohstedt and Richter include only those *riots* they identified as occurring during elections. The sample of 191 includes three classifications of disorder including *riots*, *disturbances* and *incidents*.

included a brief survey of the figures here to provide some context to the present discussion. Table 1 below reveals the distribution, timing and location of election violence during the period. Undoubtedly more than 13 cases of these occurred during the period. Yet an attempt to identify all such instances would require an exhaustive search of newspaper archives.

Table 1.Figures of Election Violence in England and Wales, 1857 - 1880

| Total Cases of Violence - 191 | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| General Elections | By Elections | Total rough Violence | Scale of Violence | Timing of Violence |
| 1857 - 12 | 1860 - 2 | 132 | Riot - 63 | Pre-poll - 43 |
| 1859 - 11 | 1861 - 1 | | | |
| 1865 - 29 | 1862 - 2 | Total County Violence | Disturbance - 77 | Polling day - 96 |
| 1868 - 71 | 1867 - 2 | | | |
| 1874 - 32 | 1869 - 1 | 59 | Incident - 51 | Post-poll - 27 |
| 1880 - 26 | 1871 - 1 | | | |
| | 1877 - 1 | | | Unknown - 25 |
| 181 | 10 | | | |

Table 1 demonstrates the steady increase in electoral violence between 1857 and 1868.²² Thereafter reported cases of disorder decreased, yet remained higher than the pre-1867 period. This weakens any argument that after the introduction of secret voting in 1872 the potential for violence largely disappeared. The definitions employed to describe the scale of electoral violence are outlined in Chapter 3. Given that both ‘riots’ and ‘disturbances’ are classed as serious cases of violence, Table 1 illustrates the overwhelmingly serious nature of mid-century disorder. Electoral violence is shown to have occurred predominantly on the polling day; a feature that continued even after the introduction of secret voting. A considerable amount of disorder also took place prior to the polling day, with much of that occurring during

²² This table, which includes duplicate entries, collates data from several tables which may be found in Chapter IV.

the nomination ceremony. 'Post-poll' violence records those episodes of disorder that took place during the declaration of the result – itself a potent source of violence. The pattern and distribution of electoral violence revealed in Table 1 can be understood through an analysis of the structure and operation of the political system.

II

The structure of British politics between 1857 and 1880 may be divided by the Second Reform Act of 1867. In that year the extension of the franchise and a substantial redistribution of constituencies refashioned the electoral landscape created 35 years previously. And whereas in the decade after the Second Reform Act the character of politics was determined by the alterations of Disraeli's 'leap in the dark', the electoral system prior to 1867 operated under the provisions of the First Reform Act of 1832. The latter Act addressed some of the most obvious imbalances of the unreformed electoral system. As well as extending the franchise to a portion of the middle class, the distribution of seats attempted to rectify the over-representation of the south by increasing the representation of the new centres of economic and population growth. Many smaller boroughs, those with few voters and characterized as habitually corrupt, were either partially disfranchised or totally removed from the system. By introducing a system of voter registration, and thereby stimulating – in the long-term – the growth of party organisation and partisan conflict, the First Reform Act contributed indirectly to the frequency of mid-Victorian electoral disorder. This is not to argue that violence increased inexorably after 1832, yet the evidence reveals a definite rise in the incidence of electoral disorder during the mid-Victorian period. In the years between 1857 and 1867 I have recorded 59 episodes of

election violence, compared to a total of 132 between 1868 and 1880.²³ As already noted the lack of disorder in the earlier period reflected the relative weakness of party conflict and a low incidence of electoral contests.

One of the more recent accounts of the passage of the Great Reform Act comments that "when the dust had settled, the political landscape looked much as it had done before."²⁴ Structurally speaking, at least, this was largely true. Notwithstanding the long-term effects of Reform on the development of the British political system, the Act of 1832 left the outline of electoral politics only slightly altered. In the final count the overall size of the electoral system increased from 379 to 401 constituencies, though the number of members returned to the Commons remained at 658. Through disfranchisement, enfranchisement and redistribution the boroughs experienced a net loss of 7 constituencies and 66 members, compared to a net gain for the counties of 24 constituencies and 65 members. In the unreformed system a total of 114 counties had returned 188 members to parliament, 262 boroughs had returned 465 members and the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Dublin provided the remaining 5 members. After 1832 university representation was increased to six, with Dublin gaining an extra member. A total of 143 counties returned 253 members and 255 boroughs returned 399 members.

The redistribution of seats in 1832 abolished or partially disfranchised a number of small boroughs – generally those with fewer than 500 voters. English boroughs accounted for 61% of the total number of seats in the unreformed House of

²³ These figures include duplicate entries and 10 episodes of disorder that occurred at by-elections. For more detail on the statistics of disorder during the period see Chapter IV.

²⁴ E.A. Smith, *Reform or Revolution? A Diary of Reform in England, 1830 – 2* (Stroud, 1992), p.141.

Commons, of which 55% had fewer than 300 voters.²⁵ Indeed in 1830 only 43 English boroughs could claim an electorate of more than 1,000. In 1832, in an attack on nomination and patronage boroughs, a large number of these small constituencies were completely disfranchised. Schedule A of the Act abolished 56 of the smallest and most corrupt boroughs including such colourful and decayed constituencies as Wootton Bassett, Old Sarum and Gatton, which by 1832 had just 2 voters! A further 30 boroughs listed in Schedule B lost a single member each. In England and Wales the redistribution of seats saw 22 large towns gain 2 members each, and an additional 21 medium-sized towns gain a single member.

These changes increased the representation of the industrial north at the expense of the over-represented south. From a total of 22 new boroughs each returning 2 members each, 14 were industrial towns of the north and midlands. These new constituencies, each with a population in excess of 40,000, included such cotton and fabric manufacturing towns as Bolton, Stockport, Manchester and Bradford.²⁶ In England 26 counties were divided: 7 were granted a single member; Yorkshire gained an extra 2 seats and the Isle of Wight gained a single member. In Wales the representation of the counties was increased by 3, the district of Swansea was established and the iron-manufacturing town of Merthyr Tydfil was granted separate representation. Scotland gained 8 new seats in the burghs and in Ireland 4 large towns gained an extra member.²⁷ The table below outlines the structure of British politics between the First and Second Reform Acts.

²⁵ Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London, 1973), p.19 – 20.

²⁶ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.65.

²⁷ Charles Seymour, *Electoral Reform*, p.538.

Table 2. United Kingdom Electoral System, 1832 - 1867

| | England | MP's | Wales | MP's | Scotland | MP's | Ireland | MP's | Total Constituency | Total MP's |
|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Counties | 68 | 142 | 13 | 17 | 30 | 30 | 32 | 64 | 143 | 253 |
| Boroughs | 186 | 322 | 15 | 15 | 21 | 23 | 33 | 39 | 255 | 399 |
| University | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Total | 256 | 468 | 28 | 32 | 51 | 53 | 66 | 105 | 401 | 658 |

England and Wales remained the electoral powerhouse of the system. Between them they provided the House of Commons with 500, or 75%, of its members. In contrast Scotland returned 53 members and Ireland provided 105 members. England dominated the partnership with a total of 256 constituencies and 468 members. Boroughs continued to outnumber county constituencies in the post-reform period. After 1832 a total of 255 boroughs across the United Kingdom returned a total of 399 members, whereas 143 counties provided Parliament with 253 members.

Despite the reallocation of seats in 1832 anomalies in the scale of representation continued to characterise the system. Borough representation was concentrated in the south and south-west of England, where 100 boroughs returned 176 members, compared to the 144 members drawn from 84 northern boroughs.²⁸ Structurally the small boroughs retained their electoral dominance and the industrial districts of England remained inadequately represented. The scale of the inequity was in some cases quite glaring. Before the Second Reform Act the small rural borough of Thetford with 224 voters, the sprawling county seat of East Suffolk with 6,679 voters, and the large industrial borough of Manchester with 21,542 voters, each returned two members to parliament. Indeed on the eve of the Second Reform Act a total of 60

²⁸ These figures were derived by sorting the English boroughs into 10 categories (Northern, North Western, York, North Midland, West Midland and South Western, South Eastern, South Midland, Eastern and London). These divisions were employed in the 1871 British census and are used extensively in Chapter IV (See p.168 [fn.121] for details of the counties in each division).

English and Welsh boroughs had fewer than 500 voters yet returned 87 members to the Commons. Table 2 below demonstrates the continued, though diminishing, presence of small boroughs in England and Wales during the period.²⁹

Table 3. English and Welsh Borough Sizes, 1857 - 1880

| Borough Electorate | 1857 | MP's | 1859 | MP's | 1865 | MP's | 1868 | MP's | 1874 | MP's | 1880 | MP's |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 2,000+ | 43 | 86 | 44 | 88 | 51 | 97 | 116 | 200 | 119 | 205 | 129 | 221 |
| 1,000 - 2,000 | 41 | 70 | 41 | 70 | 42 | 70 | 50 | 67 | 52 | 65 | 45 | 52 |
| 500 - 999 | 53 | 86 | 55 | 89 | 47 | 80 | 34 | 34 | 27 | 27 | 24 | 24 |
| 0 - 499 | 62 | 92 | 59 | 86 | 60 | 87 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Prior to the Second Reform Act the term 'small' refers to those boroughs with fewer than 1,000 voters and a population of less than 10,000. After 1867, when the size of the electorate was greatly increased, the term describes boroughs with less than 2,000 voters and fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. Conversely the term 'large' borough refers to those with more than 1,000 voters before 1867, and with more than 2,000 voters after 1867. Table 2 reveals the relative significance of the smaller boroughs throughout the period. Before 1867 more than half of all English and Welsh boroughs had fewer than 1,000 voters, with between 59 and 62 having fewer than 500 voters. Between 1857 and 1867 the small boroughs accounted for about 50% of the total English and Welsh borough membership – returning between 167 and 178 members to the Commons. Therefore just prior to the Second Reform Act more than one-quarter of Commons members represented a small English or Welsh borough.

The continued electoral importance of the smaller boroughs reflected an early Victorian ideal that members should represent a wide variety of influences, and not merely appeal to the 'mercenary' wishes of a mass electorate. The small boroughs

²⁹ Figures for Table 2 drawn from J. Vincent and M. Stenton (eds), *McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections, 1832 - 1918* (Brighton, 1971) and F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1832 - 1885* (London, 1977).

were thus viewed as a safeguard against the tyranny of numbers. During the framing of the Second Reform Act, the Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, based his opposition to equalising electoral distribution, "upon the traditional dislike and fear of granting power to the numerical majority".³⁰ Due to their size, however, such constituencies were also perceived as being able to provide a relatively easy entry to the Commons for a candidate willing to spend a little money in bribes and treats. Consequently the small boroughs have often been characterised as tidal pools left in the wake of a receding sea of electoral tradition, corruption and influence. An editorial comment in the *Nonconformist* in April 1859 reflected contemporary opinion of the politics of the small boroughs,

In the large towns for the most part, the arts of corruption will avail but little. Public opinion, and the vigilance of non-electors, will do much to thwart the 'gentlemen in green spectacles and dark wigs'. But in the small constituencies of less than 500 voters, corruption, drunkenness and vice of every hue will during the next few days hold their carnival.³¹

However, despite their colourful reputation as reservoirs of electoral malpractice, the small boroughs proved largely free of election violence throughout the mid-Victorian period. This finding runs contrary to that of Donald Richter, who writes that "It was in the small towns and rural areas that the great majority of election disturbances occurred, and it was there that the absence as yet of any effective policing was most conspicuous".³² Yet my evidence from England and Wales reveals that it was in the larger urban boroughs that most of the violence occurred - a factor both of the increasing number of larger boroughs in the system (see Table 2), and of the low

³⁰ Seymour, *Electoral Reform*, p.330.

³¹ *Nonconformist*, 27 April 1859, p.331.

³² Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot, p.23.

number of contested elections in the smaller boroughs.³³ Electoral violence was a feature of the large urban constituencies because it was there that a measure of political freedom encouraged the development of party conflict – and thus of the root causes of disorder: partisan enthusiasm and electoral malpractice.

The absence of contests in the small boroughs, and thus of violence, was related to the stability of politics there. Such constituencies tended to be controlled either by a patron or family, and were places where electoral traditions were likely to survive for generations. Jaggard writes of these constituencies, "Because of their long history and slowly growing populations, many small boroughs were also towns where in some instances political traditions comfortably spanned the first and sometimes the second Reform Acts".³⁴ The strength of such traditions, whether motivated by patron control, party allegiance or bribery, weakened the likelihood of sustained partisan rivalry – an essential ingredient of contested elections and of violence. Jaggard highlights more than 100 small patronage, corporation, venal or proprietary boroughs identified by O'Gorman in *Voters, Patrons and Parties* and comments, "Political activity was absent in almost all".³⁵ My own analysis confirms the stability of politics in the small boroughs. I have identified 69 English and Welsh boroughs with consistently small electorates throughout the period 1857 to 1880.³⁶ 31 of those boroughs returned the same party preferences at 4 or more successive elections – 19 of which returned same-party candidates at all 6 general elections of the period.³⁷ A

³³ For a detailed analysis of election violence in small and large boroughs see Chapter IV.

³⁴ Jaggard, "Small Boroughs", p.626.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ These are boroughs with electorates below 1,000 before 1867, and below 2,000 for the entire period 1857 – 1880.

³⁷ By 'same party preference' I am referring to the choice of party: in single member constituencies this meant the same party was successful at successive elections; in double member constituencies the same pattern of choice was consistent, whether that be the same party or a split between the two parties. For example both the Welsh borough of Radnor (which elected a single Liberal at all elections during the

further 26 boroughs returned same-party candidates for at least 3 successive elections. Thus 57 of 69 small boroughs showed a considerable degree of continuity in their politics throughout the period. Party strengths in these boroughs were evenly matched. Of the 19 boroughs that returned the same preference at all elections of the period, 10 were safe Liberal seats and 9 were safe Conservative seats. Of the 31 boroughs that returned the same preference at four or more elections, 15 were Liberal, 14 were Conservative and 2 split between the parties. In such an environment the likelihood of violence was quite remote. Not only were contests quite infrequent in such constituencies, but also the degree of partisan rivalry required for the outbreak of disorder was equally absent.

The First Reform Act greatly increased the total size of the British electorate. After 1832 a total of 813,726 individuals were enfranchised, a figure that represented just 1 in 7 adult males in the United Kingdom.³⁸ Debate continues over the precise extent of the increase in 1832 due to the difficulty of estimating the size of the unreformed electorate. The issue is further clouded by arguments over the extent to which the *potential*, as opposed to the *actual*, electorate should be taken into account: the former being those who were qualified to vote but failed to do so; the latter being those who actually registered and exercised their franchise.³⁹ Indeed one recent account has suggested that "Attempts at careful calculation of the size of the qualified electorate before 1832 have no great value. Most of the electorate was a stage army, never or

period) and the borough of Warwick (which elected a Conservative and a Liberal at all elections from 1865 to 1880) are included in the initial figure of 31 boroughs mentioned above.

³⁸ E.A. Smith, *Reform or Revolution*, p. 141.

³⁹ See Derek Beales, "The Electorate Before and After 1832: The right to vote, and the opportunity" *Parliamentary History*, 11, 1 (1992), pp. 139 – 150 and Frank O'Gorman, "The Electorate Before and After 1832 [Reply]," *Parliamentary History*, 12, 2 (1993), pp. 171 – 183.

rarely voting".⁴⁰ In "The Electorate Before and After 1832" Derek Beales draws a distinction between those who were *entitled* to vote and those *who actually voted*. He suggests that whereas the Act increased the number of enfranchised voters in the United Kingdom from 495,200 to 813,726, the number who actually voted rose rather more impressively from 91,092 to 482,022 – an increase of 81%.⁴¹ In England and Wales alone the franchise alterations increased the eligible electorate from about 440,000 to 650,000, while the number who actually voted leapt from 74,638 to 390,700.⁴²

The figures of the *actual* voting population, as opposed to the *potential* electorate, have important implications for the study of electoral violence. The First Reform Act obviously increased the size of the United Kingdom electorate. Yet Beales' figures suggest that not only were more people enfranchised after 1832, but the number who actually voted was also substantially increased. Indeed Beales records that between 1831 and 1832 the percentage of the United Kingdom electorate *who actually voted* rose from 18.4% to 59.2%. As Phillips and Wetherell write, "The reformed electorate not only outnumbered its predecessor, it also tended to vote more often and in greater proportion".⁴³ The more active post-1832 electorate reflected the increasing number of contested elections – the natural precursor to electoral violence. This trend did not, however, continue exponentially. Beales is careful to point out that in 1835 the percentage of the population who voted dropped to 42.1%.⁴⁴ This decrease reflected the steady decline in contested elections that continued from 1835

⁴⁰ Beales, "The Electorate", p.149.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.147 – 8 (Beales records that between 1831 and 1832 the number of people voting in English and Welsh boroughs rose from 42,254 to 188,738 – compared to an increase in the number of county voters from 30,934 to 201,962).

⁴³ Phillips and Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act", p.414.

⁴⁴ Beales, "The Electorate", p.149.

until 1859 (with the exception of 1837 when contests increased)⁴⁵, and which contributed to the relatively few cases of electoral violence in the early Victorian period.⁴⁶

The new franchises of the First Reform Act not only increased the size of the electorate, they also altered its composition. In the counties this transformation was less pronounced than in the boroughs, where a new franchise and residence requirement disfranchised large portions of the unreformed electorate. The county electorate remained largely unchanged as a result of the 1832 Act. County seats were viewed as more prestigious than borough seats and separate franchise requirements between the two were designed to ensure their social distinctiveness. In the counties the Act added the £10 copyhold, and the £10 and £50 leasehold qualifications to the long enfranchised 40s freeholders. The Act also introduced a new occupancy qualification in the counties. This new rental franchise was available to tenants who paid a yearly rent of not less than £50.

The new borough franchise in 1832 was the £10 occupancy qualification. This conferred the right to vote on anyone who occupied property worth an annual sum of not less than £10 for more than 12 months as owner or occupier. After 1832 this franchise qualified the majority of the borough electorate, and the newly introduced residence requirement, "wiped out nearly half of the old voters".⁴⁷ Indeed between half and two-thirds of the reformed borough electorate were enfranchised by the new £10 qualification.⁴⁸ The loss of many older voters tended only to improve the moral condition of some boroughs. Ancient right franchises qualified voters under a

⁴⁵ See Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, Appendix E, pp.440 – 441.

⁴⁶ More detail on election contests and violence can be found below and in Chapter IV.

⁴⁷ Seymour, *Electoral Reform*, p.87.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.83.

variety of arcane conditions, few of which were based on ownership of property or the payment of rates. Seymour writes that "In many cases the electors qualified by these franchises came from the lowest class".⁴⁹ These franchises included scot and lot voters, burgage voters, potwalloper's, the voting rights of some municipal corporations and freeman voters. Scot and lot voters were occupiers of property who paid the poor rate; the burgage franchise depended upon the ownership of particular pieces of property to which the right to vote was attached; a potwalloper could be a householder or a lodger, and was enfranchised through his ability to cook a meal in a room that he had sole control over; the freeman franchise could be conferred by the municipal corporation, inherited from a relative, obtained through marriage or by apprenticeship to another freeman for seven years.⁵⁰

Those voters enfranchised under these ancient rights were allowed to continue voting for the remainder of their lifetime. And in the case of the freeman voters, the largest category of ancient right voters, they could be found in significant numbers in some boroughs after 1832.⁵¹ Indeed as late as 1865 they could be found in large numbers in 91 English and Welsh boroughs and in 25 they held the balance of power.⁵² The freeman voters were notorious for their willingness to accept bribes during elections, and such habits did not disappear after 1832. Following the Barnstaple election of 1857 allegations of bribery were proven against a number of freemen,

There is a petty squabble in this corrupt borough amongst the freemen, some being highly offended that they only received £2, while others were favoured with £5 for their independent votes for the successful

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.25 – 27 and also O'Gorman, *Voters*, pp.28-32.

⁵¹ After 1832 ancient right voters in the boroughs numbered 108,000 (Seymour, *Electoral Reform*, p.84n).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.86.

candidates. No doubt existed at two o'clock on the day of the election as to the system being pursued – although some difficulty was felt as to legal evidence to establish the fact. This now no longer exists. Several dissatisfied freemen have volunteered to prove bribery.⁵³

The venality of these electors may be an acknowledged fact but their involvement in electoral violence is much harder to determine. Indeed it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which the changed social or economic composition of the reformed electorate influenced the nature or frequency of election violence. Certainly neither those who were newly enfranchised, nor the ancient right voters, proved to be immune to the electoral abuses that continued to occur in the reformed system. Those who had grown accustomed to receiving payments during a contest were unlikely to change their habits overnight. And there were those who, though new to the game of politics, were quick to realise that the franchise entrusted to them could bring more than the mere satisfaction of returning a member to parliament.

It is important, however, to remember that electoral violence was not always the product of corruption. Riots broke out at British elections for a variety of reasons and direct interference with the voters was only one of them. Indeed the electorate is not the only place to be looking for answers: those who remained outside the sphere of official politics were just as likely, if not more so, to be involved in election disorder. For them a boisterous and physical campaign was their only means of participating in the political arena. Ultimately the limited source material available restricts any meaningful analysis of riotous crowds. What evidence there is, however, suggests that a wide cross-section of society were involved in such incidents.⁵⁴ Neither the newly enfranchised voters, nor their older counterparts, were more likely to participate in violence.

⁵³ *Coventry Weekly Times*, 8 April 1857, p.2.

⁵⁴ A more detailed discussion of the composition of electoral 'mobs' can be found in Chapter IV.

Throughout the period the potential for disorder existed in the procedures that governed parliamentary electioneering. This is not to argue that election riots occurred entirely because the processes of electoral politics invited them - the failure of procedural changes to significantly alter the frequency of violence disproves such a theory. However the public and participatory characteristics of mid-century electioneering undoubtedly contributed to the likelihood of conflict. The most potent of these included the centralization of polling booths, the public nomination and open voting. The numerical restriction of polling booths focused partisan activity and public enthusiasm at specific locations thereby increasing the potential for crowd violence. Public nominations, in which prospective candidates addressed large audiences of voters and non-voters alike, provided an event of mass, popular participation that proved almost as violent as the polling day itself. And the system of open voting served to facilitate the practice of intimidation by exposing the voter, and his choice, to the wider community.

However, prior to 1867 no legislation was passed in the Commons that dealt with these procedural inducements to riot. This was in large part due to the fact that for much of the century violent electioneering was viewed as a subsidiary feature of electoral corruption. Indeed Hoppen writes that "The aspects of nineteenth-century English electioneering most often condemned at the time were bribery and treating, rather than violence".⁵⁵ This is not to argue that the statutes ignored electoral disorder, far from it. Many of the reforms passed between 1857 and 1880 were aimed at producing more peaceful elections. However most were directed principally at discovering and penalizing corrupt practices, and the history of election disorder is only partly related to the matter of electoral malpractice.

⁵⁵ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.609.

Before the Second Reform Act changes to the pattern of election disorder owed more to fluctuations in the frequency of contests, and to the particular characteristics of specific general elections, than to alterations in either election procedure or the law dealing with corruption. Between 1832 and 1867 there were few measures that dealt with electoral procedure. The First Reform Act reduced the period allowed for polling to two days in the counties and one day in the boroughs. The polling day proved in most cases to be the most violent part of the campaign. It was the culmination of weeks or months of party activity and provided a focal point for final, perhaps desperate, attempts to generate electoral support. The day also drew large and enthusiastic crowds determined to enjoy themselves in an atmosphere of excitement and suspense. My sample of violence shows that between 1857 and 1880 50% of election disorder occurred on the polling day, compared to 22% prior to the poll.⁵⁶ By restricting the duration of polling this measure was a significant step towards reducing the potential for violence. However the decline in electoral contests after 1832, and the subsequent reduction in violence, makes it difficult to assess the direct impact that this measure had on the frequency of disorder. Given that election violence continued to be a feature of the polling day throughout the period, it seems obvious that the measure had little real influence over the pattern of disorder.

Throughout the period anti-corruption legislation was primarily aimed at eradicating the influence of bribery and treating. Both involved a transaction between electoral agent and voter in which some valuable, usually money or alcohol, was provided in return for consideration at the poll. And both could be responsible for the outbreak of violence: the bribery of election 'mobs' to terrorize voters and rival party

⁵⁶ The total sample included 191 episodes of violence. The timing for 166 episodes could be positively identified, leaving 25 unknown. 43 episodes of violence occurred prior to the poll and 96 on the polling day. For more details of the timing of election disorder, and of the sample of violence, see Chapter IV.

supporters did occur; and the ubiquitous use of treating certainly raised the likelihood of violence by ensuring that significant portions of the electorate passed the campaign in a reasonable state of intoxication. However there were few measures passed that proved effective in limiting corrupt practices or in eradicating the disorder that accompanied them. Between 1839 and 1852 various bills were passed dealing with the matter of election petitions. These were designed to streamline the machinery dealing with the trial of controverted elections, and to increase the investigatory powers of the House in relation to evidence gathered during petition hearings.⁵⁷ In practice they led to an immediate decrease in petitions from 122 in 1852 to 72 in 1857.⁵⁸ Yet their influence in eradicating corruption was modest; their impact on the frequency of violence was non-existent.

The Corrupt Practices Act of 1854 was an important step towards eradicating corrupt practices at elections. However it was significant largely because it was the first step and not necessarily the most effective. The Act established the first comprehensive definition of bribery and treating. More importantly it defined, for the first time, undue influence (or intimidation). A person was guilty of this offence if they, "make use of, or threaten to make use of, any Force, Violence, or Restraint, or inflict or threaten the Infliction...of any Injury, Damage, Harm or Loss, or in any other Manner practice Intimidation upon or against any person in order to induce or compel such Person to vote or refrain from voting".⁵⁹ The Act thus established *what* undue influence was but provided no mechanism for preventing it. The inability of this type of legislation to influence the nature of electioneering was a fact acknowledged in the Commons by W.E.Forster, the Minister for Education. In 1871

⁵⁷ O'Leary, *Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, pp.21 – 23.

⁵⁸ F.W.S.Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, p.631.

⁵⁹ Leader, *The Franchise*, p.3.

during the first reading of the Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Bill he commented,

I have been in favour of the Ballot, on the ground that bribery and intimidation are two of the greatest evils we have to contend with in connection with our Parliamentary and representative system – and that the best way to prevent an evil is to stop the cause of it...On that ground I have always thought that we should be more successful by the Ballot than by Corrupt Practices Acts, or by penalties, however stringent.⁶⁰

The Act also extended a provision of the Election Expenses Regulation Act (1827) banning the use of ribbons, flags, banners and bands of music during campaigns.⁶¹ These had long been a potent source of disorder. Victorian crowds took their political displays seriously and parades of colourfully bedecked partisans, often accompanied by bands of music, frequently led to violence. The borough of Blackburn in Lancashire was a frequent scene of disorder throughout the period, and during the General Election of 1868,

A procession comprising some 4000 persons was formed, and party colours were freely carried...When the procession reached that part of the town chiefly inhabited by the workpeople of the Conservative member, Mr.Hornby, several fights took place...a lad riding on a pony down the street...was set upon by a number of Irishmen because he displayed a little orange and blue riband on his pony. He and the pony were beaten with bludgeons...and the lad was seriously injured. This was the sign for a general row. One man was picked up in the streets quite dead.⁶²

And during the East Essex county election of 1880,

⁶⁰ *Hansard* 3, vol.194, 20 February 1871, p.529 – 530.

⁶¹ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.111.

⁶² *Carmarthen Journal*, 16 October 1868, p.7.

During the polling on Monday at Mannington, East Essex, free fights were of frequent occurrence. A body of roughs, wearing Conservative colours, attacked a Liberal banner, and nearly succeeded in capturing it. It was however rescued and borne in triumph past the Conservative headquarters. A hand-to-hand fight ensued, in which the Conservative rough elements had the worst of it.⁶³

James Vernon argues that attempts to restrict the use of such parades, colours and symbols reflected an official reaction against the development of 'an autonomous popular politics'. He writes that "Such was the paranoia that visual iconography aggravated, even created, divisions which disrupted the delicate social and political equilibrium of both the town and nation, that legislation was passed to outlaw their use".⁶⁴ However such efforts were to prove fruitless and Victorian campaigns continued to be characterised by such colourful, often provocative, displays. During the South Derbyshire county election of 1868 a serious riot erupted in Ripley following the introduction of a dog decorated with blue ribbons.⁶⁵ And, continuing with the canine theme, a retired publican in Ramsgate was sentenced to six weeks hard labour for causing the death of a dog during the 1880 General Election. The *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* reported that he had, "painted the dog all over with the Liberal and Conservative colours, and the animal was poisoned through licking the paint off".⁶⁶

The 1854 Act also established a system of election auditors whose task it was to inspect the accounts payable to candidates following an election. However their introduction helped to identify only the most obvious cases of bribery and treating. Their effectiveness was hampered by inefficiency and by the many ways available for election committees to hide corrupt expenditure. Ultimately the Act was not effective

⁶³ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 April 1880, p.6.

⁶⁴ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.111 – 112.

⁶⁵ *Bristol Daily Post*, 23 November 1868, p.3.

⁶⁶ *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 10 April 1880.

in reducing the incidence of bribery or treating, and Charles Seymour writes that "So far as intimidation was concerned the failure of the Act was generally acknowledged".⁶⁷ The factor of violence was not likely to be diminished from electioneering by such anti-corruption legislation. Besides being weak and ineffective it failed to address the structural inducements to riot such as open voting, public nominations and centralised polling. Bribery and treating continued to generate a measure of disorder because the procedures in place for preventing them were not effective as deterrents. The period of the greatest frequency of election violence was still ahead, and for 14 years after 1854 parliamentary interest in corrupt practices waned.

The nexus between electoral contests and disorder is one of the more salient features of mid-Victorian electioneering, so much so that it can be used as a crude barometer of the pattern of party activity. The causality being argued here is this: increased levels of party activity in the constituencies led to a greater frequency of contested elections, and thus to an increase in disorder.⁶⁸ Therefore, the pattern of electoral violence between 1857 and 1880 may be understood through an analysis of the development of electoral activity. Throughout the period incidences of disorder increased as the rate of contested elections grew. Contests became more frequent as old political compromises were disturbed, the power of patrons weakened or as advances in local organization led the political parties to present candidates where previously they would not have bothered. The advent of mass electorates, particularly after 1867, increased the level of party activity in the constituencies. The registration,

⁶⁷ Seymour, *Electoral Reform*, p.385.

⁶⁸ A full discussion of the correlation between election contests and violence is provided in Chapter IV. Contests are discussed here within the context of increasing electoral activity and the consequences for the frequency of violence.

and subsequent defence, of supporters became a more consistent feature of electoral preparation. Candidates, too, were required to pay more attention to their constituencies. The frequency of election meetings during the period reflected the need for a candidate to cultivate his constituency. At such events candidates (if they were in touch with their supporters) addressed voters and non-voters alike on matters of local importance and, increasingly, party policy. The fact that between 1857 and 1880 a total of 21 episodes of violence occurred *prior* to the nomination day – 19 of which occurred during election meetings – suggests the frequency of electoral activity before the official, procedural elements of the contest began.⁶⁹ Furthermore, this trend increased slightly during the period: a total of 8 episodes of violence occurred during meetings between 1857 and 1865, compared to 11 between 1868 and 1880. The growth of electoral activity during the period contributed directly to the increased frequency of violence.

Uncontested elections were a regular, though diminishing feature of mid-century politics. Indeed it was not uncommon during the 1850s and early 1860s for about half of all constituencies to go uncontested.⁷⁰ In the 1850s weak party structures and the confused nature of parliamentary politics, both hangovers of Corn Law repeal in 1846 and the resulting Conservative party schism, contributed to the lack of election contests. The fluidity of politics was evident at Westminster where two Palmerstonian governments, in 1855 and 1857, were brought down by coalitions of Whigs, Liberals, Peelites, Radicals and Conservatives.⁷¹ And in 1866 Russell's ministry was defeated on a reform bill amendment after 48 Liberals voted with the

⁶⁹ Table 1 shows that pre-poll violence accounted for 43 cases of violence during the period: this includes 22 episodes on the nomination day.

⁷⁰ In 1857 47% of English and Welsh elections were contested; in 1859 44% and in 1865 56% were contested. See Table 8 in Chapter IV.

⁷¹ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.62.

Conservatives.⁷² Indeed in the decade between 1857 and 1867 no fewer than 5 ministries were formed and dissolved, yet there were just 3 occasions, in 1857, 1859 and 1865, when a general election effected the change. The dislocation of party politics during the period acted as a dampener on partisan conflict outside Westminster. Angus Hawkins writes that before the Second Reform Act there was only one occasion (1832) when more than one thousand candidates stood for election, whereas after 1867, "there were never less than a thousand candidates".⁷³

In the 1850s and early 1860s party organisation made little contribution to the frequency of electoral contests. Neither the Whig-Liberals nor the Conservatives had anything resembling a national party machine – though the latter were striving to improve their organisational infrastructure. Party organisation was undertaken by a limited number of local associations loosely affiliated to embryonic national organs, and by private correspondence between individual members and their constituencies. The development of central party administration dates from the early 1860s. The Liberal Registration Association was founded in 1860, however it had little local influence and John Vincent describes it as being, "overshadowed by the tendency of the Whip and the party leaders, particularly at election times, to organise the local parties through their massive private correspondence".⁷⁴ In 1863 the National Conservative Registration Association was founded, yet it lacked support from the party leadership and played no part in the general election of 1865.⁷⁵ Following that election an official Conservative registration office was established in 1866, however its significance lies in the period after the Second Reform Act.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.109.

⁷³ Angus Hawkins, "Parliamentary Government and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830 – 1880", *English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), p.665.

⁷⁴ Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Party*, p.86.

⁷⁵ Robert Stewart, *The Foundation of the Conservative Party, 1830 – 1867* (London, 1978), p.337.

Throughout this period Liberal party leadership left much of the work of organisation to local solicitors, to local club movements in the wards and to registration societies. Indeed of greater importance to the Liberals in the mobilisation of supporters was the emergence of the new, nonconformist, press and the growth of militant Dissent. The former carried out the task of party propaganda, the latter marshalled volunteers for Liberal campaigns.⁷⁶ Conservative organisation likewise owed much to local knowledge and personal efforts. The party did, however, work hard during the period to overhaul a seemingly unshakeable Liberal majority. To this end solicitors from the firm of Baxter, Rose, Norton and Co. were employed to coordinate the party's electoral management. The counties, however, jealously guarded their electoral independence from outside intervention, and the work of Philip Rose and Markham Spofforth was largely concentrated in the boroughs. Before 1865, however, there was little substantial improvement in the rate of contested elections. Indeed between 1852 and 1857 *uncontested* elections in England and Wales increased by more than 30% (see Table 4 below). Efforts to improve electoral organisation were not reflected in a substantial growth of contests much before 1865. Table 4 below shows the number of uncontested constituencies at English and Welsh general elections between 1857 and 1880.

Table 4. Uncontested Constituencies at English and Welsh general elections, 1852 - 1880 (and the percentage difference between elections)

| Year | Boroughs | % Change | Counties | % Change | Total uncontested | % Change |
|------|----------|--------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1852 | 58 | | 55 | | 113 | |
| 1857 | 95 | +63.8 | 56 | +1.8 | 151 | +33.6 |
| 1859 | 90 | -5.3 | 68 | +21.4 | 158 | +4.6 |
| 1865 | 70 | -22.3 | 55 | -19.2 | 125 | -20.9 |
| 1868 | 33 | -52.9 | 43 | -21.9 | 76 | -39.2 |
| 1874 | 26 | -21.3 | 60 | +39.5 | 86 | +13.1 |
| 1880 | 16 | -38.5 | 29 | -51.7 | 45 | -47.7 |

⁷⁶ Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Party.*, p.83.

To begin with, Table 4 reveals the lack of election contests in the counties during the first half of the period. Indeed the number of counties that were uncontested increased at both the elections of 1857 and 1859, and it was not until 1865 that they experienced a significant increase in contests (represented above by a 19.2% decrease in uncontested constituencies). The general elections of 1857 and 1859 proved the high water mark of uncontested elections. The paucity of contests at these elections contributed to a relatively low incidence of electoral disorder. The two campaigns of 1857 and 1859 generated a modest 22 instances of violence, compared to 83 at the next two elections of 1865 and 1868. In 1857 less than half of the total number of constituencies went to the polls. The campaign proved disastrous for the Conservatives who could no longer rely on protection as a unifying theme. In the counties they lost 23 seats. They fared no better in the small boroughs where they won only 68 compared to the Liberals who were successful in 109.⁷⁷ The general election of 1859 witnessed a modest increase in uncontested elections, despite a concerted effort by the Conservatives in which an estimated £50,000 was spent out of the party's central fund.⁷⁸ A small decrease in uncontested boroughs in 1859 (5.3%) reflects the increased attention paid to those constituencies by the Conservatives. This election provided the party with its best result between 1846 and 1874, with most successes coming from a recovery in the counties and the small boroughs. In the latter they won 11 more boroughs than in 1857.⁷⁹ The result was, however, insufficient to provide the Conservatives with an absolute Commons majority. Following Derby's resignation on 10 June, Palmerston formed his second ministry.

⁷⁷ Ed Jaggard, "Small Town Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain", unpublished paper, Edith Cowan University, 2001, p.7.

⁷⁸ Stewart, *The Foundation*, p.331.

⁷⁹ Jaggard, "Small Town Politics", p.7.

Hoppen writes that the general election of 1865, "reflected the ambivalent nature of contemporary politics".⁸⁰ Certainly no particular question of policy dominated the campaign, yet Table 4 shows a modest *increase* in the number of contested elections between 1859 and 1865. During that period the boroughs experienced a 22.3% decrease in uncontested elections, and the counties a 19.2% decrease. In 1865 the Conservatives lost the gains they had made in the boroughs in 1859; in England alone they lost 12 borough seats.⁸¹ For their part the Liberals were particularly successful in those English boroughs with more than 2,000 voters, where they captured 49 out of 59 seats.⁸² The increase in contests led to a jump in the incidence of disorder. The 1865 election generated 24 cases of violence, 14 more than in 1859. The rise of violence in 1865 owed much to the greater frequency of contested elections, in turn a reflection of the steady growth of electoral activity. The potential for violence grew as the political parties strove to disrupt the electoral somnolence of uncontested boroughs. Throughout the period county elections occasioned markedly less violence than the boroughs, a fact reflected in the lack of contests in the former and the concentration of party activity in the latter. It was not until after 1867, when greatly enlarged electorates led to rapid advances in party organisation, that electoral contests in England and Wales began to significantly increase. Coterminous with the growth in electoral activity was a marked increase in electoral violence. And whereas the incidence of violence peaked in 1868, it did not decline to pre-1865 levels during the elections of 1874 and 1880.

⁸⁰ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.245.

⁸¹ Stewart, *The Foundation*, p.340.

⁸² Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.105.

III

Throughout the nineteenth-century Britain was becoming an increasingly urbanised and industrialised society. The technological advancements of the early century provided the basis for revolutions in transport, industry and communication which were gradually transforming the landscape, economy and society. In the 40 years after 1851 the British population rose by 65% to reach 33 million in 1891.⁸³ An accelerating trend towards urbanisation concentrated this growing population in the expanding conurbations surrounding cities such as Manchester, Bradford and Leeds. Indeed between 1801 and 1891 the percentage of the population living outside towns of more than 2,500 people dropped from 66% to 25.5%.⁸⁴ The relative importance of the agricultural sector contracted during the period as mining and industry generated an increasing share of economic growth. Between 1801 and 1871 the percentage of the British workforce employed in agriculture dropped from 35% to 15%.⁸⁵ The social and political influence of institutionalised religion gradually weakened in the wake of these changes, a process aided by the growth of secularism and the emerging challenge of Nonconformism. By the end of the 1880s, writes Hawkins, "traditional communities were finding themselves under growing economic and social pressure. Old ties of affiliation and obligation were being eroded...Notions of social status, as much as being dependent upon region or religion, were becoming increasingly defined in terms of class".⁸⁶ Against this background the Second Reform Act of 1867 marked a significant step towards the creation of a modern democratic electoral system. The redistribution of seats recognised the importance of the growing

⁸³ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.4.

⁸⁴ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.14.

⁸⁵ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

industrial centres, while franchise alterations added more than one million voters to the electoral system. The introduction of so many new voters to the system provided an important stimulus to the development of party organisation in the decades after 1867.

The Reform Act of 1867 refashioned the electoral landscape of England and Wales. The balance of electoral power shifted away from the smaller boroughs as 52 seats were taken from such constituencies and distributed to the counties, and in some cases, to the large urban boroughs. Through redistribution and disfranchisement between the 1865 and 1868 general elections 60 English and Welsh boroughs with fewer than 500 voters disappeared from the electoral system. Whereas in 1857 only 18 boroughs could boast more than 5,000 electors, in 1868 64 boroughs could make that claim. Throughout the period electoral violence was a feature of the larger urban boroughs. In those constituencies the preconditions for disorder which existed in the system of open elections, centralised polling, and extended and ritualised campaigning, were combined with large and rapidly growing electorates. In such an environment increasingly sophisticated party organizations worked hard to register and mobilise their supporters, leading to an inevitable increase in party conflict, partisan enthusiasm and thus the likelihood of an election contest. An intensification of party feeling and an increase in contested elections were essential precursors to disorder. The consolidation of voters in the large boroughs after 1867 therefore contributed to the concentration of violence in those constituencies. In the smaller boroughs and counties an absence of contests, the persistence of political traditions and the lingering strength of patrons poured cold water on the intensity of partisan emotion and sapped the source of electoral violence.

In England and Wales the Second Reform Act resulted in an overall reduction of 33 boroughs as follows: 11 boroughs returning 17 members were totally disfranchised for corruption; 35 boroughs were stripped of one seat; 11 new boroughs returning 13 members were created and 6 additional seats were allocated to the burgeoning metropolises of Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Stafford and Merthyr. Eleven counties in England and Wales received an extra 2 members while Lancashire gained a further 3 members. In addition London University was granted a single seat. The changes to the rest of the system were more modest. In Scotland the new burgh of Hawick was granted a member and both Glasgow and Dundee gained an extra member each. The counties of Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire were each divided, and the universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and St. Andrews were granted a single member. There were no changes to the constituencies in Ireland. Table 4 below outlines the structure of British politics in the wake of the Second Reform Act.

Table 5. United Kingdom Electoral System, 1867 - 1884

| | England | MP's | Wales | MP's | Scotland | MP's | Ireland | MP's | Total Constituencies | Total MP's |
|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Counties | 82 | 170 | 13 | 17 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 64 | 159 | 283 |
| Boroughs | 185 | 285 | 15 | 16 | 22 | 26 | 33 | 39 | 255 | 366 |
| University | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 9 |
| Total | 270 | 460 | 28 | 33 | 56 | 60 | 66 | 105 | 420 | 658 |

England and Wales continued to dominate the electoral system after 1867. Together they accounted for more than 70% of the total membership of the House of Commons between 1857 and 1880. England was the electoral heavyweight of the partnership with almost half of the members at Westminster drawn from the English boroughs alone. After 1867 England returned 460 members to the Commons from 270 constituencies. Wales, Scotland and Ireland together returned just 198 members from

150 constituencies. Within this framework the boroughs outnumbered the counties by more than 2 to 1 and consistently returned more than half of all members. Between 1857 and 1880 the framework of the English and Welsh electoral system fluctuated with the ebb and flow of constituencies added and subtracted. The concentration of disorder in the boroughs reflected their numerical majority, and the fact that county constituencies were less frequently contested than their urban counterparts. The table below outlines the number of county and borough constituencies in England and Wales during each general election of the period.

Table 6. England and Wales Electoral System 1857 - 1880

| | England | | | | | | Wales | | | |
|------|----------|------|----------|------|------------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
| Year | Boroughs | MP's | Counties | MP's | University | MP's | Boroughs | MP's | Counties | MP's |
| 1857 | 184 | 319 | 68 | 142 | 2 | 4 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 17 |
| 1859 | 184 | 318 | 68 | 142 | 2 | 4 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 17 |
| 1865 | 185 | 319 | 69 | 144 | 2 | 4 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 17 |
| 1868 | 185 | 285 | 82 | 170 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 16 | 13 | 17 |
| 1874 | 183 | 281 | 82 | 170 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 16 | 13 | 17 |
| 1880 | 183 | 281 | 82 | 170 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 16 | 13 | 17 |

The redistribution provisions of the Second Reform Act also eroded the numerical strength of the small boroughs. Thereafter the number of small boroughs in England and Wales (those with less than 2,000 voters) declined steadily – from 42% of the total number of boroughs in 1868, to 39% in 1874 and to 34% in 1880. After 1867 the large boroughs accounted for an increasing percentage of the total Commons membership. In 1868 a total of 200 (or 66%) English and Welsh members were drawn from boroughs with more than 2,000 electors. The restructuring of the system eradicated all boroughs with fewer than 500 voters. In the House of Commons about 30% of members were now drawn from the larger boroughs. However Table 3 (see page 78) reveals that the small boroughs remained a significant feature of electoral politics throughout the period. As late as 1880 fully one-third of all English and

Welsh boroughs had fewer than 2,000 voters. In 1868 these boroughs returned 101 members to parliament, in 1874 92 members and in 1880 76 members.

The franchise provisions of the Second Reform Act enfranchised almost 1.5 million new voters across the United Kingdom.⁸⁷ As such it was a more modest increase than that of the First Reform Act, which had resulted in a 492% increase in the number actually voting between 1831 and 1832, as opposed to the 172% increase between 1866 and 1868.⁸⁸ In the counties the occupation franchise was reduced from £15 to £12 and the suffrage was extended to those who owned land valued at more than £5. Liberal amendments in committee further reduced the copyhold and leasehold qualifications from £10 to £5.⁸⁹ As a result of these changes the county electorate grew by a modest 248,620 voters to a total of 791,253. However it was in the urban areas of England and Wales that the 1867 Act had its greatest impact. In the boroughs the introduction of household suffrage and the abolition of compounding increased the electorate from 514,026 to 1,225,042.⁹⁰ The increase in the number of voters was impressive if not uniform. In some urban constituencies such as Finsbury, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets the increase was comparatively small, whereas many of the industrial centres witnessed spectacular rises. In Birmingham the number of voters was tripled and in Leeds the number increased four-fold. In Wales the electorate of Merthyr Tydfil leapt from 1,387 to 14,577. After 1867 1 in 3 adult males in England and Wales were enfranchised, with most of the new voters to be found in the largest towns.

⁸⁷ Craig, *British Electoral Facts*, pp.9-10. 854,572 voters in 1865 and 2,333,251 in 1868.

⁸⁸ Beales, "The Electorate", p.150.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Hoppen, *Mid Victorian Generation*, p.253.

Disraeli's reform strategy ensured that those elements of the system traditionally supportive of the Tories were protected. Therefore the Act of 1867 did not equalise the suffrage between the counties and boroughs, though it did standardise the ratio of voters to population in each type of constituency.⁹¹ The gulf between county and borough franchises was maintained in an attempt to ensure the Conservative's continued domination in the former. In the boroughs the new household suffrage enfranchised for the first time a large proportion of the working class. However, despite the increase of about 700,000 new voters to the urban electorate, the Act effectively restricted the enfranchisement of *les classes dangereuses* by obstacles both planned and unforeseen. The one year residence qualification and abolition of compounding directly affected the working classes – for whom short-term shared rental accommodation was not uncommon. Furthermore the poor law overseers proved inadequately prepared to deal with the massive task of registration that faced them, particularly in the large cities like London or Manchester. The formal obstacles to enfranchisement were, however, removed by Goschen's Act of 1868 – which restored compounding – and Dilke's Act of 1878 which allowed the registration of multiple occupiers.⁹² Consequently, by 1881–2 the borough electorate reached a total of 1,629,373 voters.

Neither the Second Reform Act nor the legislation of 1872 and 1883 proved effective in limiting the potential for violence, though the Ballot Act did alter the pattern of disorder. Certainly beyond an increase in the number of county polling places the Act made no direct alteration to electoral procedure. After 1867 the counties were free to “enable each Voter, so far as is practicable, to have a Polling Place within a

⁹¹ B.L.Kinzer, *The Ballot Question in Nineteenth Century English Politics* (New York, 1982), p.115.

⁹² Davis and Tanner, “The Borough Franchise After 1867”, p.308.

convenient Distance of his Residence".⁹³ However the same was not to be extended to the boroughs until 1872. This provision had no effect on the pattern of disorder because more than half the cases of mid-century election disorder occurred in the boroughs and not the counties. Furthermore, given that contests were less frequent in the counties, the multiplication of polling districts there was unlikely to greatly influence the overall pattern of disorder. Likewise the 1868 Parliamentary Elections Act, which transferred the trial of election petitions from the Commons to the constituencies in which they were presented, made no impact on violent electioneering.

Indeed election disorder increased in the years immediately following the Second Reform Act. Several factors contributed to the rise in disorder. The Act greatly expanded the size of the electorate in those constituencies that traditionally experienced the most disturbances: the large urban and industrial towns. This new electorate included many working class voters whose economic position exposed them to the pressures of intimidation and coercion. The need to mobilize and register the new electorate after 1867 gave added impetus to the growth of local party organizations, registration associations and national organs of party control. Hawkins points to the years between 1867 and 1886 as the period when political parties developed "extensive constituency organization and centralized party bureaucracies".⁹⁴ This is not to argue that party organization emerged *rapidly* after the Second Reform Act, or that its influence and efficiency was either widespread or established. Rather it is to stress that the demands of an enlarged electorate impressed upon the political parties the need for greater organizational efforts. This realization contributed to the intensification of electoral activity and to a rise in the number of

⁹³ Leader, *The Franchise*, p.29.

⁹⁴ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.3.

contested elections. Between 1865 and 1868 the number of contests in England and Wales jumped from 158 to 223. The result was an increase in the frequency of violence. The General Election of 1868 followed hot on the heels of the Reform Act and proved to be the most disorderly, corrupt and petitioned campaign of the period. Indeed there were more cases of electoral violence in 1868 than during the 1857, 1859 and 1865 elections combined.

The rioting and flood of petitions that followed the general election of 1868 formed the background to a recommendation for a select committee inquiry into the subject of elections and electioneering. H.A.Bruce, the Home Secretary who presented the motion for a select committee on 4 March 1869, admitted that "For years past Parliament has been struggling in a vain endeavour to give to our elections the dignity that should preside over ceremonies of such great importance".⁹⁵ In his speech Bruce mentioned the 'national taint' of corruption, the 'injurious expense' of electioneering, the 'evils' of bribery and intimidation, the 'annoyance and trouble' of paid canvassers, and added that "There is one other feature connected with our system of election which I think will be generally condemned; I refer to those scenes of rioting and violence which so frequently characterise a contested election".⁹⁶ The Committee gained bipartisan support despite Conservative concerns that an agenda regarding secret ballot was at its core. It was subsequently appointed to inquire into all modes of procedure connected to both parliamentary and municipal elections, "in order to provide further guarantees for their tranquillity, purity and freedom".⁹⁷ The Select Committee, headed by Lord Hartington, examined 80 witnesses during 5 months of deliberation and produced over 500 pages of evidence pertaining to

⁹⁵ *Hansard* 3, vol.194, 4 March 1869, p.648 – 649.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.653.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.663.

electoral procedure. Among the issues addressed by the Committee were public nominations and declarations, the use of rooms in public houses during elections, the multiplication of polling places, the subject of voting papers, the law relating to the recovery of expenses for damages committed by rioters, election expenses and the introduction of secret voting.

The inquiry's final report was tabled in the Commons on 15 March 1870. However recommendations were made regarding only a few of the issues that were investigated. A resolution to prohibit the use of paid agents and canvassers was rejected because of doubts about the possibility of policing such a measure. In addition the Committee concluded, "an election cannot always be conducted without paid agents of some kind".⁹⁸ The multiplication of polling places was recommended though there were questions as to the effectiveness of such a measure. A resolution on the use of voting papers, a system in use at university constituencies, was not passed on the grounds that it would tend to increase, rather than decrease, corruption. A considerable portion of the Committee's time was spent investigating the issue of secret voting. In the final report the inquiry concluded that "the weight of evidence leads to the conclusion that this change in the mode of voting would not only promote the tranquillity both of Municipal and Parliamentary Elections, but will also protect voters from undue influence and intimidation".⁹⁹ This recommendation was ultimately carried into existence with the passage of the Secret Ballot Act of 1872. The effect of that legislation on the pattern of electoral violence will be discussed below.

⁹⁸ 'Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections', *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, VI, p.7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

The Committee made no recommendation to abolish the public nomination, despite a wealth of evidence describing the event as a meaningless farce and a potent source of disorder. The final report did, however, conclude that "the addresses which are delivered are rendered inaudible by noise, tumult, and wilful interruption, and occasionally, serious disturbances begun on the nomination day are continued through the election".¹⁰⁰ A resolution in favour of abolishing the ceremony was defeated by a single vote on the grounds that no practical alternative could be found. The Committee further concluded that the majority of uncontested elections were concluded on the nomination day without any disturbance. The public nomination thus remained until the passage of the Secret Ballot Act of 1872, when it was replaced by the sending in of papers.

The Ballot Act of 1872 had potentially the greatest impact on the frequency of electoral violence of any legislation during the period. Yet even so it had a limited influence over the pattern of violence down to 1880. The abolition of the public nomination undoubtedly reduced the opportunities available for crowd violence. After 1872 disturbances before the polling day declined sharply. Between 1857 and 1872 26% of election disorder occurred before the polling day compared to 13% after the nomination was abolished.¹⁰¹ The same cannot, however, be said for the impact of secret voting. Prior to the Ballot Act the polling day accounted for 49% of electoral violence, after 1872 that increased slightly to 52%.¹⁰² The continued

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁰¹ Between 1857 and 1872, 35 episodes of violence occurred before the poll, 65 cases on polling day and 18 after the poll was closed (the timing of 14 cases was unknown). Between 1872 and 1880, 8 episodes of violence occurred before the poll, 31 cases on polling day and 9 after the poll was closed (with 11 cases unknown). For more details of the timing of electoral violence see Chapter IV.

¹⁰² Between 1857 and 1872 a total of 65 out of 132 cases of election violence occurred on the polling day. After 1872 31 out of 59 cases took place while the polls were open (the timing for a total of 25 episodes is unknown).

outbreak of riots and disturbances during the general elections of 1874 and 1880 suggest that what influence the Ballot Act had was slight.

The scale of violence after 1872 must also be viewed within the context of the entire period. The General Election of 1868 was an unusually contentious campaign that followed a major piece of reform legislation. In addition the issue of Irish Church disestablishment provided a divisive religious issue, the influence of which was hardly diminished by William Murphy's inflammatory anti-Catholic lectures. The scale of violence in 1868 – it accounted for 40% of all cases of disorder between 1857 and 1880 – thus stands out as something of an anomaly during the period. The peculiar circumstances of that campaign were unlikely to occur repeatedly, much less at consecutive general elections. Thus the reduced frequency of violence after 1868 should not be viewed as a consequence of reform in 1872. The levels of disorder in 1874 and 1880 were still higher than those of the late 1850s and early 1860s. What the Ballot Act did achieve was to alter the *pattern* of disorder: the removal of the nomination ceremony merely increased the proportion of violence occurring on the polling day.

The death of Palmerston in October 1865, just 4 months after the general election, signalled the end of an era in British politics. Within three years changes in party leadership on both sides of the House would see Russell and Derby retire in favour of Gladstone and Disraeli. Not only was the reintroduction of parliamentary reform inevitable after Palmerston's death but, as Angus Hawkins writes, "the 'truce of parties' was over".¹⁰³ The trend toward contested elections barely visible before 1867 accelerated after the Second Reform Act as party activity intensified. The registration

¹⁰³ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.108.

of voters became an increasingly important element of party management in the new age of mass electorates. Richard Shannon writes that after 1867, "this time and money-consuming procedure became a standard feature of rival party manoeuvring".¹⁰⁴ He records the example of Blackburn where the revision in 1863 took three hours, compared to seven days in 1868!¹⁰⁵ The new urgency in revising the registers, combined with central party efforts to bring local associations under their control, contributed to a post-1867 growth in electoral activity.

Between 1867 and 1880 party organisation, on both sides, made undoubted advances. For their part the Conservatives were quicker to establish the framework of a national party bureaucracy than were the Liberals. In 1870 the Conservative National Union was brought under the auspices of the Central Office, directed by Spofforth's successor, John Gorst. Under his guidance the Union developed a network of centrally-affiliated local associations, whose activities included supervision of the registers, the distribution of pamphlets and the organisation of political meetings.¹⁰⁶ Yet the control exercised over these provincial associations by the Central Office should not be exaggerated. Hawkins writes that "The National Union trod carefully. It assisted local organisations when requested, while avoiding exciting local suspicions of central control".¹⁰⁷ Yet the work of Gorst and the Central Office certainly paid dividends for Conservative electoral fortunes. At the general election of 1874 the party reaped the benefits of organisational efficiency and was returned with 352 seats compared to the Liberals' 243 seats.¹⁰⁸ Thereafter the party

¹⁰⁴ Richard Shannon, *The Age of Disraeli 1868-1881: The rise of Tory democracy* (London 1992), p.56.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.184 - 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.185.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970), p.281 - 283.

machinery entered a period of decline, culminating with the Conservative defeat of 1880 – when the party captured fewer seats than in 1847.

The Liberals did not achieve a similar degree of centralised party control until 1886 when, following the split over Irish Home Rule, the National Liberal Federation and the Liberal Central Association came under the joint-stewardship of Francis Schnadhorst.¹⁰⁹ Before that date the party relied upon the joint efforts of the Liberal Registration Association and various pressure groups like the National Education League, the Reform League, the Liberation Society and the United Kingdom Alliance.¹¹⁰ These groups, with often divergent aspirations, made it difficult for popular liberalism to coalesce around a central party organisation. By 1877, under the direction of the Liberal chief Whip W.P. Adam, the Liberal Registration Association had been remodelled to become the Liberal Central Association. In that same year the Birmingham-based National Liberal Federation was established. As the National Union was for Gorst, so the NLF was a platform for the political ambitions of one man: Joseph Chamberlain. Its influence on party organisation, apart from providing a possible model for local party development, was slight. Hoppen writes that as late as 1884, “the majority of borough associations (110 out of 198) were not even affiliated”.¹¹¹ Of greater importance in building a consensus of liberal opinion was the influence of militant nonconformity which, “provided the moral conscience of Liberal activism”.¹¹²

These developments in central and local party organisation, coupled with the renewed vigour of registration efforts, contributed to a growth in electoral contests. In 1868 a total of 49 more seats were contested than at the general election of 1865.

¹⁰⁹ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.272.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.273.

¹¹¹ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.260.

¹¹² Hawkins, *British Party Politics.*, p.273.

Table 4 shows a 52.9% decrease in uncontested borough elections between 1865 and 1868, while the counties experienced a 21.9% decrease over the same period. However the steady decline in uncontested elections did not continue uninterrupted thereafter. Whereas in 1874 the pattern of decline in the boroughs continued unbroken, there was an almost 40% *increase* in the number of counties that failed to produce a contest. An explanation for this can be found in the sweeping Conservative victory of that year. The party's success in 1874 was most evident in the counties, where they captured all but 33 of the 187 English and Welsh county seats. This achievement was based as much on Liberal disunity as on advances in Conservative organisation. The Liberals were less prepared to fight an election than were the Conservatives, and their organisational weakness was compounded by internal schism and disaffection. Under cover of the ballot large numbers of Liberal desertions contributed to the loss of 136 parliamentary seats. The Conservatives benefited from organisational advances begun after their defeat in 1868 and increased their representation by 73 seats. In 1874 the Conservatives were able to field between 40 and 50 more candidates than in 1868, compared to the Liberals who fielded about 70 fewer candidates.¹¹³ The strength of Conservative organisation contributed to their victory in 47 of the 60 uncontested counties recorded in Table 4. The increase in uncontested county elections in 1874 is therefore a reflection of Conservative party dominance, and Liberal weakness, in those constituencies.

Greater partisan activity in the constituencies after 1867 inevitably led to an increase in the potential for election violence. Table 1 (see page 62) reveals the general rise in violence between 1857 and 1868 (with the exception of 1859). Thereafter the level of disorder declined, but remained relatively high compared to the

¹¹³ Blake, *The Conservative Party*, p.114.

pre-1868 period. As the temper of constituency electioneering rose so too did the frequency of contested elections, and with it a greater likelihood of disorder. The incidence of violence was certainly related to more than just the frequency of electoral contests: contentious campaign issues, local party conflict and the strength of disruptive electoral traditions could all contribute to the level of disorder. Yet the correlation between contested elections and the outbreak of violence is an important one. Table 8 (see Chapter IV) reveals that fluctuations in the incidence of violence at elections between 1857 and 1874 mirrored changes in the frequency of electoral contests. Only in 1880, when the number of contests increased but the amount of disorder declined, was the link between them disrupted. It has already been noted that alterations in electoral procedure had little, if any, impact on the frequency of electoral disturbances. The growth of electoral activity, measured here by the increasing frequency of contested elections, provides the most compelling explanation for the pattern of mid-Victorian election violence.

IV

This chapter posed two questions related to the nature of election violence. Firstly, were Robert Lowe's fears regarding the influence of franchise extension justified on the grounds of contemporary electoral realities or on his own, somewhat biased, experiences? Secondly, did reform in 1832 and 1867 increase the frequency of electoral violence? These two questions are, in fact, interrelated: The first queried the empirical basis of Lowe's statement that a rise in violence would follow the enfranchisement of the lower classes; the second involved an assessment of the impact of such reforms on the pattern of election disorder. The first question is

perhaps better answered in later chapters. Chapter III examines violence within the context of Victorian electioneering, while Chapter IV outlines the scale and frequency of disorder and attempts an analysis of the participants of such events – were they drawn exclusively, as Lowe predicted, from the bottom of society? However, given the sudden and dramatic rise in electoral riots in 1868 – the first general election after the passage of the Second Reform Act – and the contemporary perception that widespread corruption of the new working class voters had contributed to the increase, Lowe's fears of 1866 appear largely to have been realized. Yet the influence of reform on the frequency of disorder is more complicated than a direct casual link between increasing numbers of lower class voters and violence. The growth of the urban electorate in 1867 was a powerful stimulus to party organization which in turn contributed to a rise in party conflict, and thus to an increase in electoral contests. English and Welsh elections produced more violence after 1867 because more elections were contested – providing more occasions at which partisan conflict, popular enthusiasm and corruption could lead to episodes of crowd violence.

In answering the second question this chapter has suggested that alterations in electoral procedure were less responsible for fluctuations in the pattern of disorder than were structural changes to the system and the steady rise of organized party bureaucracy. The Reform Act of 1832 acted as a long-term stimulus to violent electioneering because, through the introduction of a system of registration and franchise extensions, it established the basis for a gradual rise in partisan activity, an important precursor of electoral conflict. However, a post-1832 decline in contested elections led to a reduction in the potential for violence. In the 1860s, however, increasing party activity and the growth of contests contributed to an increase in disorder. After the relative somnolence of electoral rioting in the 1850s and early

1860s, the Second Reform Act laid the foundations for an increase in disorder because further franchise extensions, increased registration efforts, the growth of party organization and the growing importance of consistent electoral management helped stoke the flames of partisan conflict. Therefore, rather than interpreting mid-nineteenth century electoral violence as a sort of cultural or political 'hangover' from a more vulgar and unreformed era, it should be recognized as a phenomenon that was generated, and indeed fostered, by the processes and structures of the electoral system. Violence did not continue into the Victorian era and beyond *despite* reform legislation, it continued in large part *because* of reform. Reform in 1832 and 1867 failed to remove those structural aspects of the system that encouraged violence, and added to the potential for disorder by stimulating partisan conflict and the development of political organisations by which that conflict could be pursued at the local and national level.

Chapter IV

A Statistical Analysis of Electoral Violence

I

The Game of MP – The turmoil of a General Election, with all its rows and riots, has at least suggested one peaceful amusement into which the youngsters of the day may enter without any fear of ‘pains and penalties.’ Messrs Stanley Rivers and Co. have published the Game of MP...wherein the juveniles may indulge in harmless mirth while their seniors are engaged in a synonymous game with graver aspects.¹

It is hardly surprising that the publication of a board game based on the chaos of electioneering should have been announced in December 1868. The general election of the previous month had set new benchmarks for venality and violence. Players of the Game of MP would hardly have been short of riotous examples to emulate because the ‘licensed saturnalia’ of a contested election was a recognised feature of English political culture by the nineteenth-century. Contemporary newspaper editorials on the outcome of elections often focused on the disorderly aspects of campaigning. Following the 1865 general election the *Nonconformist* reported that “Intimidation and clamour seem, to a great extent, to have superseded bribery at our elections, and both Liberals and Conservatives have sought to win their seats by alliance with the scum of the population”.² During the middle decades of the century crowd violence, physical intimidation, rioting and general disorder had become an expected dimension of British electioneering. And when the Hartington Committee reported to the Commons in March 1870 that “Serious rioting frequently takes place on the polling day”,³ their findings were not so much revelatory as stating the obvious. And yet the extent to which the hurly-burly of Victorian campaigning gave way to actual and serious violence has remained somewhat obscured. Given the

¹ *Gloucester Journal*, 5 December 1868, p.5.

² *Nonconformist*, 26 July 1865, p.605.

³ *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, VI, ‘Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections,’ p.3.

considerable quantitative vacuum in which previous discussions of election violence have been conducted, a survey of this phenomenon throughout the period is long overdue.

The 23 years between 1857 and 1880 yield an impressive catalogue of electoral violence. A survey of contemporary newspapers, Home Office correspondence and election petition reports found a total of 191 cases of violence during that period.⁴ The six general elections of 1857, 1859, 1865, 1868, 1874 and 1880 contributed 181 episodes of disorder between them. A further 10 episodes were located during by-elections in 1860, 1861, 1862, 1867, 1869, 1871 and 1877. Examples of by-election violence are not the primary focus of this study, however they are included in the sample because they contribute to a general picture of mid-Victorian electioneering. A careful search of local records and provincial newspapers would undoubtedly find more examples of such violence. Table 7 below reveals the distribution of disorder at each general election of the period and by-election violence as it was uncovered.⁵ The table includes 25 *duplicate* episodes of disorder during the period. A duplicate entry records the occurrence of more than one instance of violence in a single constituency during one particular campaign. In Carlisle, for example, the 1865 borough election was disrupted by violence twice: the first time during the nomination ceremony; the second time on the polling day. Duplicate entries are included in the sample because they provide a clear picture of the frequency with which violence occurred at Victorian elections.⁶

⁴ This figure includes the 25 duplicate entries of violence recorded during the period.

⁵ In Table 7 years in bold type are general elections, other years are by-elections.

⁶ Because duplicate entries can not be included in statistics that compare disorder with constituency numbers, they are discarded for some of the analysis which follows. When included in the tables of electoral violence they are clearly indicated.

Table 7. Election Disorder by Year: England and Wales, 1857 - 1880

| Year | Separate Cases of Violence | Duplicate Cases | Total Cases |
|-------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1857 | 12 | 0 | 12 |
| 1859 | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| 1860 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 1861 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1862 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 1865 | 24 | 5 | 29 |
| 1867 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 1868 | 59 | 12 | 71 |
| 1869 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1871 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1874 | 25 | 7 | 32 |
| 1877 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1880 | 26 | 0 | 26 |
| | 166 | 25 | 191 |

Table 7 reveals an increase in the scale of violence at elections between 1857 and 1868, and a gradual decline thereafter. The period opened with two relatively quiet elections in 1857 and 1859, with 12 and 11 cases of violence respectively. A low incidence of contested elections during those campaigns contributed to the relative lack of disorder. In 1857 less than half (47%) of all English and Welsh constituencies went to the polls, a figure that decreased further in 1859 (43%).⁷ At the general election of 1865 an increase in contests was paralleled by an increase in the scale of violence. Despite the fact that no especially divisive issue dominated the hustings the election generated 29 episodes of violence. In 1868 an extended campaign, enlarged electorate, contentious political issue (Irish Church disestablishment) and an increase in contests contributed to a massive increase in cases of disorder. The general election of 1868 was the most violent of the period with 59 cases of violence. Election contests declined in 1874 during a campaign in which the Liberal hegemony that had existed since 1847 was broken. Despite the introduction of secret voting in 1872 the election of 1874 was characterized by rioting and violence. A total of 32

⁷ See Table 8 on page 121.

cases of violence were found, many of which occurred on the polling day. In 1880 the Liberals returned to government amid a Conservative whitewash in which the latter lost 114 seats. This brief and bitter campaign was the most heavily contested of the period. 84% of English and Welsh constituencies went to the polls, and a total of 26 episodes of violence were recorded.

What then, was the frequency with which English and Welsh constituencies experienced violent electioneering? Given the relatively low level of mid-Victorian contests, comparisons between figures of violence and the total number of constituencies in the system are misleading. Table 8, therefore, reveals a more accurate picture of the frequency of disorder by showing the percentage of *contested elections* that experienced some degree of violence.⁸

**Table 8. Contests and General Election Disorder:
England and Wales, 1857 - 1880**
(Excludes duplicate entries)

| Year | Total Constituencies | Contested Constituencies | Disorder Figures | % of contests that experienced disorder |
|------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1857 | 280 | 134 | 12 | 8.9 |
| 1859 | 280 | 124 | 10 | 8.1 |
| 1865 | 282 | 158 | 24 | 15.1 |
| 1868 | 295 | 223 | 59 | 26.4 |
| 1874 | 293 | 214 | 25 | 11.6 |
| 1880 | 293 | 250 | 26 | 10.4 |

The figures in table 8 reveal the substantial portion of the electoral system that was characterised by violence. During the relatively quiet elections of 1857 and 1859 almost 9% of contested elections witnessed some form of disorder, while in 1868 as much as 26.4% of contests were violently disrupted. Table 8 provides a unique view

⁸ Note for Table 8: "Total Constituencies" excludes universities; "Disorder Figures" excludes duplicate entries of violence.

of the scale of mid-nineteenth century violence. It reveals that the phenomenon occurred at a significant number of contested elections, and highlights the extent to which it continued throughout the period. Indeed as late as 1880 fully 10% of electoral contests continued to be disrupted by violence. It is worth noting that the sample of violence is not drawn from a handful of unreservedly venal and disorderly constituencies. The sample includes a wide range of boroughs and counties, many of which were disrupted by violence only once. Throughout the period (excluding duplicate entries) only 37 constituencies witnessed more than one case of violence, 11 witnessed more than two and just three constituencies could claim more than three disturbed elections (Lincoln, Nottingham and Hull). A total of 80 constituencies experienced a single case of violence between 1857 and 1880. Indeed out of 26 episodes of disorder in 1880, 18 occurred in constituencies never before disrupted by violence.⁹

Table 8 highlights the important link between electoral contests and violence. In one respect the connection is an obvious one: English and Welsh elections experienced scenes of disorder only under the conditions of intense excitement, enthusiasm and interest that were generated by a contest. In the absence of a political contest the likelihood of disorder was remote. Consequently during the period no episode of violence was found that took place during an uncontested election. Table 8 reveals that between 1859 and 1874 decreases in contests were paralleled by decreases in violence. Thus between 1859 and 1865 a 27% rise in contests was mirrored by a 140% leap in cases of violence, and between 1865 and 1868 electoral contests climbed by 41% and violence rose by 145%. However after 1868 this pattern is disrupted. In 1874 contested elections declined by just 4%, yet episodes of disorder

⁹ For more details on how many constituencies experienced multiple episodes of violence see Table 13 on page 167.

dropped by 57%. And in 1880, for the first time during the period, the percentage of contests that experienced violence declined when the rate of contests increased.

What can therefore be said about the relationship between contests and violence? The level of contested elections undoubtedly contributed to the potential for disorder by raising the number of opportunities at which it might occur. After all, without a contest there was *no* likelihood of violence. However, the particular circumstances of each general election played a crucial role in the scale of violence. During the 1868 election 75.5% of English and Welsh constituencies were contested and 59 separate cases of violence occurred. Yet in 1880 there were just 26 episodes of disorder during a campaign in which 85.5% of constituencies were contested. The difference in the scale of violence at these elections has a two-fold explanation: firstly, the phenomenon of electoral disorder was undoubtedly declining during the late-Victorian period. Between 1868 and 1880 the proportion of contested elections that experienced violence dropped by 60%, from 26.4% to 10.4%; secondly, there is a strong but not definitive correlation between the frequency of electoral contests and the scale of violence. Other factors obviously contributed to the scale of disorder. The 1868 general election owed its temper to the length of the campaign (four months), to the divisive issue of Irish Church disestablishment, and to the anti-Catholic lecture tour of the evangelical activist William Murphy. The 1874 campaign, by contrast, lasted just three weeks and included no issues of comparable intensity.

The figures in Table 8 suggest that English and Welsh electoral violence enjoyed something of a mid-Victorian revival. From a relative low-point in the 1850s the frequency of election disorder increased steadily in the mid-to-late 1860s. Thereafter the phenomenon began to decline with progressively fewer cases of

violence in 1874 and 1880. Table 8 shows a small numerical increase in cases of disorder between the last two elections of the period (from 25 to 26 cases of violence), but a 16% growth in contested elections in 1880 resulted in a net decline in the percentage of violent contests (from 11.6% to 10.4%). Table 8 therefore reveals three important points. Firstly, that mid-Victorian election violence occurred at a significant number of English and Welsh contested elections. Secondly, that the percentage of contests that experienced violence increased between 1857 and 1868, and declined in the years that followed. Thirdly, that despite the relative decline in violence after 1868, late-century contests continued to experience considerable levels of violence. Indeed both the 1874 and 1880 general elections witnessed more violence per contest than either 1857 or 1859, suggesting, as Stevenson has argued, that electioneering remained a potent source of disorder well beyond the mid-Victorian period.

The sample reveals the serious nature of election disorder. Hoppen questions the severity of the phenomenon and argues that most English violence of the period was, "merely a general disorder on the streets which only occasionally turned into something more serious".¹⁰ He records various election 'excesses' between 1837 and 1868 that hardly extend in severity beyond a few smashed windows, a fractured knee-cap and the singing of 'obscure local songs'.¹¹ Hoppen thus describes the Beverley election of 1868: "'several gentlemen on the hustings were struck by stones and sticks, and the ladies were obliged to retire'- hardly the stuff of murderous confrontation".¹² Indeed it is not, if that described the worst excesses of the 1868

¹⁰ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.607.

¹¹ *Ibid.* see especially pp.607 – 608.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.607.

general election. Hoppen implies that election violence was more of an 'enjoyable circus' than a serious matter of public disorder. However Table 9 shows the nature of Victorian electoral violence to have been overwhelmingly serious, and even potentially fatal.

Table 9. The Scale of Disorder, 1857 - 1880

(Includes duplicate entries of violence)

| Year | Riot | Disturbance | Incident | Total |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| 1857 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 12 |
| 1859 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 11 |
| 1860 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 1861 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1862 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 1865 | 8 | 14 | 7 | 29 |
| 1867 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 1868 | 27 | 30 | 14 | 71 |
| 1869 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1871 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1874 | 11 | 12 | 9 | 32 |
| 1877 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1880 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 26 |
| | 63 | 77 | 51 | 191 |

Table 9 shows that between 1857 and 1880 English and Welsh elections accounted for 63 riots, 77 disturbances and 51 incidents.¹³ 'Riots' and 'disturbances' are regarded as serious cases of disorder as both involved destruction of property, personal assault and some degree of magisterial response. The less serious category of 'incident' invoked little official reaction and commonly involved disruption to the electoral process through noise, minor assault or stone-throwing. The table reveals that during the mid-Victorian era serious cases of election violence outnumbered less serious cases by 140 to 51. Violent electioneering during the period also resulted in 11 fatalities: a police constable was killed during a riot in Kidderminster in 1857;¹⁴

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the definitions of 'Riot', 'Disturbance' and 'Incident' see Chapter III.

¹⁴ See Kidderminster case study in Chapter V for details.

the Grantham borough election of 1865 left one voter dead after a crowd of Liberal supporters attempted to up-end the hustings into a fire;¹⁵ in Newport during the 1868 Monmouth borough election a woman was killed as soldiers cleared the streets during a riot;¹⁶ the county election of Monmouthshire in the same year left 3 people dead;¹⁷ in Blackburn in 1868 two men died during violence at the municipal and parliamentary elections;¹⁸ in North Durham a riot during the county contest resulted in the death of a 63 year-old man after a paving stone was smashed over his head;¹⁹ in Cambridge the porter of Christ's College was stoned to death during an election skirmish; and in Gravesend the leader of a riot during the borough contest died after his leg was broken.²⁰ With the exception of Kidderminster and Grantham all reports of fatalities occurred during the bitter campaign of 1868. 11 fatalities in 23 years is not a significant number of deaths. Yet alongside the statistics of violence they contribute to an impression that Victorian elections could generate serious levels of disorder.

II

Mid-Victorian election disorder was predominantly a feature of large, urban constituencies. In contrast to Richter's assertion that "It was in the small towns and rural areas that the great majority of election disturbances occurred",²¹ the sample reveals violence to have been concentrated in the boroughs, with fewer cases of

¹⁵ *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 14 July 1865, p.7.

¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1868, p.5.

¹⁷ *Gloucester Journal*, 28 November 1868, p.2; *Boston Gazette*, 28 November 1868, page unknown.

¹⁸ *Nonconformist*, 11 November 1868, p.1,104; *Carmarthen Journal*, 16 October 1868, p.7.

¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1868, p.6.

²⁰ *Gloucester Journal*, 5 December 1868, p.3; *Gravesend Journal*, 2 December 1868, p.3.

²¹ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.23.

disorder located in the largely rural counties. Table 10 below reveals the distribution of electoral violence across England and Wales between 1857 and 1880.²²

Table 10. Constituency Disorder: England and Wales, 1857 - 1880

| Year | Borough Disorder | <i>Borough Duplicate</i> | County Disorder | <i>County Duplicate</i> | By-Election Disorder | Total |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| 1857 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| 1859 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| 1860 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 1861 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1862 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 1865 | 19 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 29 |
| 1867 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 1868 | 36 | 4 | 23 | 8 | 0 | 71 |
| 1869 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1871 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1874 | 19 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 32 |
| 1877 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1880 | 14 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| | 109 | 13 | 47 | 12 | 10 | 191 |

Throughout the period borough elections accounted for 122 cases of general and by-election violence. By comparison the counties contributed just 59 cases of violence. Therefore 63.8% of all entries of disorder took place in the boroughs, and just 30.8% occurred in the counties. To a large extent the lack of county violence reflected the numerical majority of borough constituencies. Between 1857 and 1880 boroughs outnumbered county constituencies by slightly more than two to one. In 1865 there were 200 boroughs and 82 counties across England and Wales. The very fact that there were more boroughs than counties increased their chances of experiencing disorder. Furthermore, the boroughs were more likely to be contested than the counties. In the latter politics were generally less open and political control might be in the hands of established land-owning families. During the period 72.6% of the

²² Note on Table 10: "By-Election Disorder" refers to *borough* by-elections. No disorder was found at county by-elections during the period.

total number of borough elections were contested, compared to 44.6% of all county elections.²³ However such figures can obscure the frequency of county violence. A comparison with the statistics of electoral contests provides a more accurate picture of constituency disorder. The sample reveals that *proportionately* more contested county elections experienced some degree of violence than contested borough elections. Between 1857 and 1880 a total of 17.7% of the total number of county contests witnessed violence, compared to 12.4% of all borough contests. This percentage difference serves to illustrate that, in proportion to the total number of constituencies, county elections experienced similar levels of violence to the boroughs.

Larger boroughs in particular were prone to violence because of their concentrated population, larger electorate and greater political organization. The link between party organization and electoral disorder is made by John Stevenson. He writes that the passage of Reform in 1832 made, "little difference to the traditional tactics of electoral intimidation and violence...the Act...raised the level of constituency organization by enforcing the registration of voters, thus stimulating the formation of political clubs and associations".²⁴ As the sizes of constituency electorates increased throughout the century, local party organizations became more important in mobilising partisan support. The development of local party associations could sharpen political divisions, intensify partisan rivalry and lead to the tit-for-tat hiring of marching bands, polling-booth 'defenders' or even armed gangs: all of which contributed to the potential for violence. The larger boroughs were thus more

²³ Between 1857 and 1880 there were 1,194 possible borough contests of which 867 were actually contested (72.6%). The counties experienced 236 contests out of a possible total of 529 (44.6%). Figures drawn from Vincent and Stenton (eds), *McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book*, and corrected where necessary with Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*.

²⁴ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, (1st edn), p.287.

likely to experience violent electioneering because the circumstances that helped generate partisan conflict was more pronounced.

The distribution of borough violence is shown below in Table 11.²⁵ For the years between 1857 and 1867 “small” refers to those boroughs with fewer than 1,000 voters and “large” to those with more than 1,000 voters. After the redistribution of constituencies in 1867 small boroughs are classed as those with fewer than 2,000 voters, and large boroughs with an electorate over 2,000.

Table 11. Distribution of Borough Violence by Size of Electorate
(Excludes duplicate entries)

| Year | Borough Sizes | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------|
| | Small | Large |
| 1857 | 4 | 8 |
| 1859 | 3 | 6 |
| 1860 | 0 | 2 |
| 1861 | 0 | 1 |
| 1862 | 0 | 2 |
| 1865 | 7 | 12 |
| 1867 | 1 | 1 |
| 1868 | 2 | 34 |
| 1869 | 0 | 1 |
| 1871 | 1 | 0 |
| 1874 | 2 | 17 |
| 1877 | 1 | 0 |
| 1880 | 4 | 10 |
| | 25 | 94 |

Table 11 shows that election disorder was consistently a feature of the large boroughs, with 79% of violence occurring there compared to 21% in the small boroughs. This concentration of violence was despite the fact that between 1857 and 1867 small boroughs dominated the electoral system. Before the Second Reform Act of 1867 approximately 57% of all English and Welsh boroughs had less than 1,000 electors. Despite the majority of small boroughs, violence appears to have been far more likely

²⁵ Table 11 includes 119 cases of borough violence (including 10 episodes of by-election violence).

in the larger constituencies. Indeed of the 12 boroughs that experienced violence in 1857 5 had more than 3,000 voters and in 1868 borough disorder occurred in 20 constituencies with more than 5,000 voters, including 11 with an electorate over 10,000. These figures suggest that far from being restricted to 'small towns and rural areas', electoral disorder was located in the greater urban centres. The borough of Wednesbury with a population of 116,809 and 14,277 voters experienced turbulent elections in 1868 and 1874; Sheffield with 185,172 inhabitants and an electorate of 36,701 witnessed violence at contests in 1857 and 1874; and Finsbury with a population of 452,484 and 25,461 voters encountered serious election violence in 1859 and 1868.

The timing of disorder reveals a pattern of rising intensity as election campaigns progressed. Table 12 below reveals the timing of election disorder during the period.²⁶

Table 12. The Timing of Election Violence, 1857 - 1880

(Includes duplicate entries of violence)

| Year | Canvass | Meeting | Nomination | Polling Day | Declaration | Unknown |
|-------------|----------|-----------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1857 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| 1859 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 1860 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 1861 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1862 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 1865 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 12 | 3 | 6 |
| 1867 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1868 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 44 | 8 | 6 |
| 1869 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1871 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 1874 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 21 | 6 | 0 |
| 1877 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1880 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 3 | 11 |
| | 2 | 19 | 22 | 96 | 27 | 25 |

²⁶ Table 12 includes all figures of disorder including duplicate entries and by-election disorder. The dotted line above the 1874 column indicates the point at which the nomination ceremony was discontinued and secret voting established – both of which were introduced in 1872. "Unknown" entries of disorder include those where it was difficult to establish the exact timing of the disturbance.

While the declaration of the poll often generated scenes of violence, it was more often the polling day that provided the riotous denouement to the proceedings. Given the incendiary nature of English crowds at times of popular excitement it is little wonder that the forms and processes of constituency electioneering resulted in disorder. The rituals and ceremonies that comprised Victorian campaigns provided ample opportunities for mass participation. The entry of the candidate to the constituency, the nomination ceremony and the declaration of the poll all attracted enormous crowds. However throughout the period none resulted in violence more frequently than the polling day.

Canvassing was a door-to-door process by which candidates and their supporters could meet their constituents, obtain promises for votes and gauge their chances in the coming contest. As the size of electorates increased however the personal canvass became less used as a method of securing support. The single case of disorder during a canvass occurred in Cheltenham during the borough election of 1865. On that occasion the Liberal member for the borough, Colonel Berkeley, was mobbed by Conservative roughs "while on a canvassing expedition at the lower end of the town".²⁷

The term "meeting" refers to any official gathering of voters or non-voters organised by a candidate or his supporters, for the purpose of making known some information relating to the election campaign. Meetings could be called to announce a new candidature, to refute allegations made by political rivals or to deliver a speech on some topic of local or national importance. Jon Lawrence argues that such events provided a stage for what he describes as the 'politics of disruption'. He writes that

²⁷ *Cheltenham Examiner*, 12 July 1865, p.2.

“the physical control of civic space – of public squares, meeting-halls, factory gates or polling-day crowds – remained central to the symbolism of political legitimacy for politicians, as much as for their supporters”.²⁸ Election meetings provided a visible battleground for rival partisans who often sought to disrupt proceedings through noise or violence. During the period these meetings accounted for 19 cases of disorder. In Finsbury in 1859 an election address by the Liberal candidate Sir S.Morton Peto drew an estimated 3,000 people. As the meeting unfolded a large Radical element threw the proceedings into disarray, “A general *melee* ensued, terminated only by many of the gas fittings being torn down, the darkness causing the vast crowd to disperse”.²⁹

Between 1857 and 1872, 22 episodes of violence occurred on the day of the nomination of candidates. Before it was abolished in 1872 this procedure occupied a central role during an election campaign and was usually conducted in a central position in the constituency. James Vernon writes, “the sense of mounting tension generated by this ritual unfolding of the campaign...reached a crescendo, with the construction of the hustings in preparation for the nomination”.³⁰ The process of nomination consisted of several speeches followed by a show of hands for each candidate. Involvement in the process was not restricted to voters, and nomination crowds commonly included women and children. Traditionally the contest could be decided without a poll of the electors if one candidate received a majority of the show of hands. However by the mid nineteenth-century the procedure had become largely redundant. A candidate could demand a poll regardless of the number of hands raised in his support, and in large constituencies the proceedings were often completely inaudible due to the size of the crowds that attended.

²⁸ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p.181.

²⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1859, p.2.

³⁰ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.158.

The poll normally followed the nomination by a single day. This proximity to the actual casting of votes made the ceremony an important focal point for corrupt practices. Indeed the Hartington Committee of 1869 found that in some cases the nomination day served to intensify the efforts, both legal and illegal, of a legion of party agents and canvassers. A member of the Liberal Central Committee in Bristol gave evidence to the Committee that men were hired to disrupt the nomination by giving "a hearing only to those people for whose side they are hired".³¹ The potential for disorder was always high during the nomination simply due to the size of the crowds that gathered. The amount of disorder recorded during the nomination day would doubtless be far higher if the sample included all instances in which the ceremony had been merely *disrupted*. Electoral law provided for the adjournment of the nomination "in case of riot...[or] until the obstruction ceases".³² In many cases the noise and excitement of a nomination crowd were an expected, though deplored, part of the process. In places such as Bradford, where nomination crowds were regularly – though doubtfully – estimated to reach 70,000, few people could clearly see the hustings and only press reporters were able to hear the speeches. In 1869 Edward West, the Mayor of Bradford, described the 1868 nomination to the Hartington Committee:

After the proposers and seconders of the two gentlemen had spoken, and spoken amidst very great interruption, very few of their remarks being heard, except by those close in front of the hustings, a battle royal ensued between some men carrying boards; they broke the boards in pieces and armed themselves with the pieces, and with sticks and stones, and other weapons that they could get hold of, and immediately commenced a riot.³³

³¹ *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1868-9, VIII, "Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections", p.221.

³² Leader, *The Franchise*, p.83 (5 & 6 Will. 4, c. 36, s.8).

³³ *British Parliamentary Papers*, "Report from the Select Committee", p.144.

In 1872 the public nomination was finally legislated out of existence, a belated victim of the Hartington Committee's inquiry. The procedure was replaced by the sending in of nomination papers, and a potent cause of violence was removed from the election process.

Several historians of popular disturbance in England have pointed to the impact of reform in altering the pattern of election violence. Quinault's study of public order in Warwickshire concludes that "electoral reform sapped the sources of electoral disorder".³⁴ Quinault argues that increases to the electorate after 1867 made voter intimidation more difficult. He stresses that the introduction of secret voting in 1872 "further shielded the individual voter". Quinault is not alone in suggesting that larger electorates and vote by ballot reduced the opportunities for disorder. Stevenson suggests that after the introduction of secret voting most violence took place during the campaign and not at the polls: "an obvious comment on the open hustings and centralised voting as a cause for disorder prior to 1872".³⁵ Yet Table 12 suggests that little change occurred in the timing of electoral violence during the period. Between 1857 and 1872 the polling day accounted for 49.6% of all cases of violence (131), whereas after 1872 the proportion of violence that occurred during the poll increased fractionally to 52.5% (31 cases out of a total of 59 post-1872 episodes of disorder). The percentage of cases that were unable to be categorised must be taken into account. These comprised 30.5% of all post-1872 episodes of violence. However Table 12 shows that after the introduction of secret ballot more than half of all disorder continued to take place on the polling day. The removal of voters from the public hustings therefore failed to significantly alter the pattern of election violence. Reform in 1867 and 1872 similarly failed to remove the potential for disorder. Indeed

³⁴ Quinault, "The Warwickshire County Magistracy", p.202.

³⁵ Stevenson, *Popular Protest*, p.288.

as the constituencies grew in size individual attempts at coercion gave way to organised crowd violence or to treating, and neither outcome was likely to reduce the temper of electioneering.

The declaration, like the nomination, attracted considerable public attention. The announcement of the election result was always an anticipated and well attended event. The appearance on the hustings of defeated or victorious parties was often the signal for disorder. Successful candidates who were unpopular could be made to run a gauntlet of abuse, missiles or worse. In 1857 Richard Malins, the recently re-elected member for Wallingford, was attacked and chased from the Town Hall following the declaration and forced to take shelter in a tavern until after dark.³⁶ Neither were agents or supporters of candidates immune from attack. Following the York borough declaration in 1868 Captain John Sutton, described as a principal supporter of the Conservatives, "was attacked by a number of Irishmen. He was in a cab at the time, the windows of which were smashed in with sticks...and after defending himself with his umbrella, had to seek refuge in a passage".³⁷ The return of a popular candidate could also trigger violence. In Lincoln in 1868 the announcement of Radical victory in the borough election resulted in celebrations that saw lighted tar barrels rolled about the town and the chief constable's house attacked.

Throughout the period 27 cases of disorder occurred during or after the declaration. This relatively high incidence of post-poll violence throws doubt upon the suggestion that much of the violence of the period was the result of corrupt practices. Instead it highlights the popular appeal of elections as entertainment. Once a contest was decided the apprehension and excitement of the campaign gave way in

³⁶ *The Times*, 30 March 1857, p.7.

³⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1868, p.3.

some cases to scenes of celebration or retribution. Neither were necessarily the outcome of corrupt inducements.

III

In mid-Victorian Britain the scale and distribution of election violence owed much to the particular features of each campaign, as well as to the number of contested elections. These included the relative strengths of party organization, the divisiveness of specific issues, local electoral traditions, personalities, influence and corruption. All could sharpen the intensity of constituency campaigning and thus contribute to the potential for disorder. The following section will examine electoral violence within the context of each general election of the period. This will be followed by a more thorough analysis of the geographic distribution of disorder.

The 1857 general election produced 12 episodes of parliamentary violence. A lack of contested elections contributed to this relative lack of disorder: in England and Wales only 47% of constituencies went to the polls, making this campaign the least contested since 1832.³⁸ Furthermore the fragmentation of party politics contributed to the blurring of distinctions between the parties. In 1857 there were 34 contests between Liberals alone. Contests between Liberals and Peelites also "reflect[ed] the dislocation of Conservatism in the 1840s".³⁹ The Liberal party benefited from Conservative disarray in 1857 and was returned to power with a Commons majority of 92 seats. The Conservative failure was most pronounced in the counties where the party lost 24 seats in England alone. The general election of 1857 has often been

³⁸ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.61.

³⁹ Jackson, "The British General Elections", p.164.

described as a personal victory for Lord Palmerston: a "triumphant plebiscite" in support of the ageing premier based largely on his foreign policy record. Whereas the profile of parliamentary reform rose during the campaign, and religious questions gained importance in Ireland and Wales, it was support or criticism of Palmerston and his government's handling of the Chinese Question that divided most candidates. The Liberals may have swept into power based largely on the premier's popular appeal but they were not to remain there for long. The new administration met in May 1857 and was gone by February 1858, driven from office by scandal, political blunder and foreign crisis.

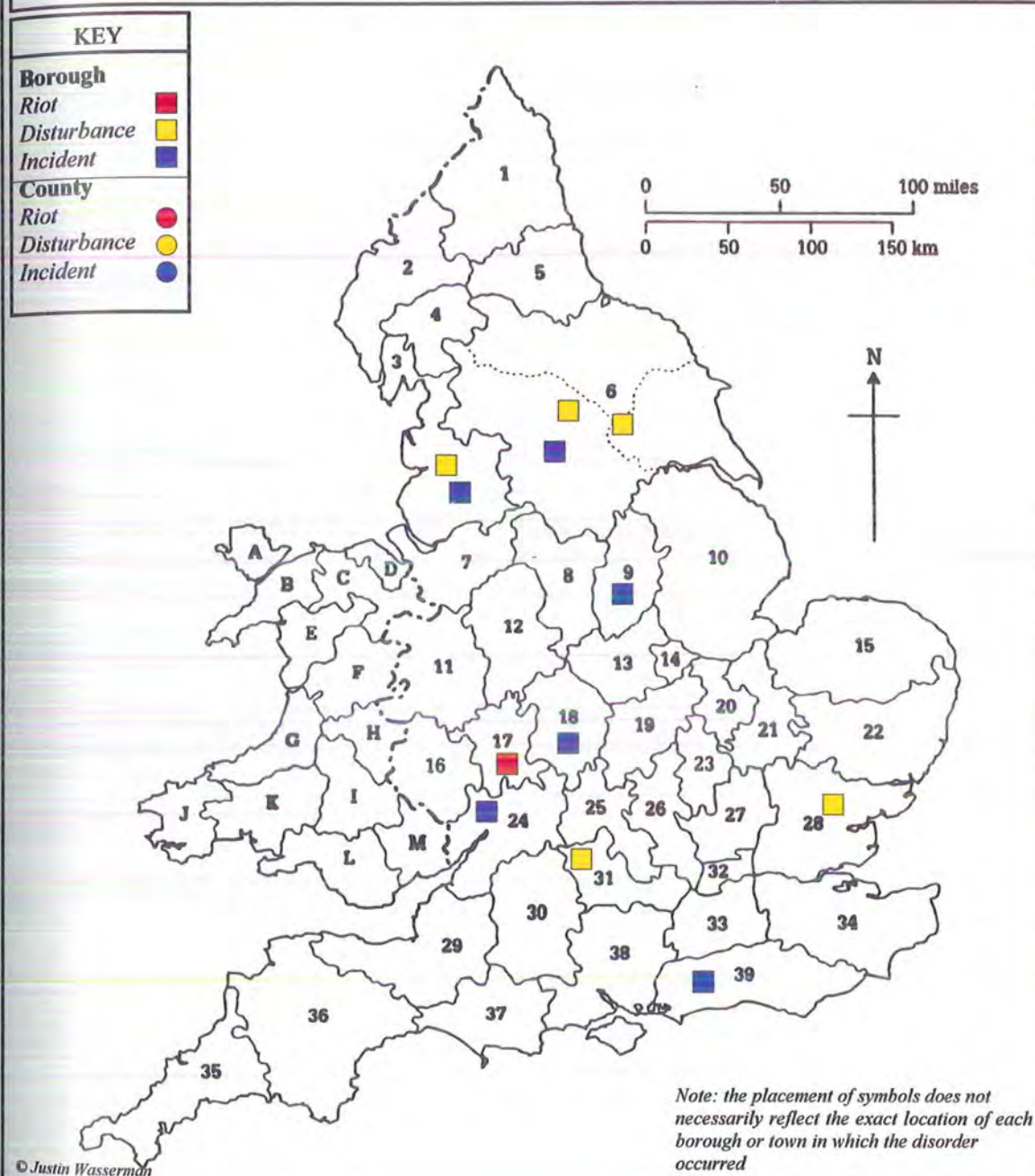
The pattern of disorder in 1857 reflected the general distribution and character of mid-century electoral disturbance. Episodes of violence occurred in the north, south and midlands of England (See Map 1 below) and included 1 riot, 5 disturbances and 6 incidents. All cases of disorder took place in borough constituencies. Furthermore the nature of the violence encompassed the full scope of electoral interference from organised intimidation to what contemporaries labelled 'rough sport'. Successful Conservative candidates who opposed Palmerston proved unpopular with election crowds in Tewkesbury, Wallingford and York. At Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire the Liberal monopoly of the borough since 1841 was broken with the election of a Conservative. The new member, Frederick Lygon, was opposed to "an aggressive foreign policy" and found himself pelted with stones and mud as he stood on the hustings.⁴⁰ The treatment of Richard Malins at the hands of a Wallingford crowd has already been noted.⁴¹ In York the election of a Conservative opposed to Palmerston led to fighting between the crowd and the police.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Berrows and Worcester Journal*, 4 April 1857, p.2.

⁴¹ See page 108.

⁴² *Berrows and Worcester Journal*, 4 April 1857, p.2.

Map 1. General election disorder in England and Wales, 1857

**A total of 12 separate cases of electoral violence (no duplicates)****Guide to Counties**

1. Northumberland 2. Cumberland 3. Lancashire 4. Westmoreland 5. Durham 6. Yorkshire 7. Cheshire 8. Derbyshire
 9. Nottinghamshire 10. Lincolnshire 11. Shropshire 12. Staffordshire 13. Leicestershire 14. Rutland 15. Norfolk
 16. Herefordshire 17. Worcestershire 18. Warwickshire 19. Northamptonshire 20. Huntingdonshire 21. Cambridgeshire
 22. Suffolk 23. Bedfordshire 24. Gloucestershire 25. Oxfordshire 26. Buckinghamshire 27. Hertfordshire 28. Essex
 29. Somerset 30. Wiltshire 31. Berkshire 32. Middlesex 33. Surrey 34. Kent 35. Cornwall 36. Devon 37. Dorset
 38. Hampshire 39. Sussex A. Anglesey B. Caernarvonshire C. Denbighshire D. Flintshire E. Merioneth F. Montgomeryshire
 G. Cardiganshire H. Radnorshire I. Brecknockshire J. Pembrokeshire K. Carmarthenshire L. Glamorganshire M. Monmouth

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3. Rochdale, Bolton 6. Beverley, York, Sheffield 9. Nottingham 17. Kidderminster 18. Coventry 24. Tewkesbury
 28. Harwick 31. Wallingford 39. Brighton

However not all violence in 1857 was related to the simple issue of support for Palmerston. Elections in the 1850s were still largely constructed within a local context and issues of nationwide significance were often secondary to those of a more provincial character. Indeed of the 12 cases of disorder in 1857, 8 occurred in boroughs where no Conservative was elected. In many cases the violence was more related to local concerns than to national political issues. Disorder in Beverley grew out of allegations that the Peelite candidate, E.A. Glover was ineligible to stand for election. Despite his success at the polls Glover's indignant supporters burnt an effigy of his principal accuser and attacked the Liberal party chairman.⁴³ The serious riot in Kidderminster was due to the economic and political situation in the borough, and to the personality of its bellicose member, Robert Lowe.⁴⁴ In Rochdale an election meeting was broken up by colliers organised and paid for by the local Conservative association. During the disruption, "Alderman Livsey and the table in front of him were tipped (sic) over, he upon the table, and both upon the remains of the front seats, which were all smashed".⁴⁵ Less serious instances of violence likewise showed little relation to national issues: at Harwich a crowd attacked and demolished the hustings following the declaration and "made a clean sweep of the materials in not more than ten minutes";⁴⁶ at the Sheffield nomination it was the local police who came under fire from a crowd armed with furnace coke and turnips;⁴⁷ and the Nottingham declaration was disrupted by a group of Chartists upset that their nominee had not been returned.⁴⁸ In few places can the imprint of national politics be found. Much of the violence had its origins in either local partisan rivalry

⁴³ *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1857, Session 2 (243), Vol.159, "Select Committee on Beverley Borough Election Petition", p.6.

⁴⁴ A detailed analysis of the Kidderminster borough election of 1857 can be found in Chapter V.

⁴⁵ *North Lincolnshire Herald*, 4 April 1857, p.3.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 30 March 1857, p.8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 March 1857, p.7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

(Wallingford, York); corruption (Rochdale); campaign excitement and enthusiasm (Harwich, Sheffield, Brighton); or local personalities and issues (Beverley, Kidderminster).

On April Fool's Day 1859 the Conservative ministry led by Disraeli was defeated on a Commons' motion attacking the Government's proposed reform legislation. The bill was too obviously favourable to Conservative electoral fortunes and was defeated by a coalition of opposition groups.⁴⁹ The announcement that a general election would be held was made on the same day. Thus the stage was set for a campaign in which parliamentary reform would prove the most important political question. Foreign policy was again an issue, this time over the war between France, Austria and Sardinia. In 1859 party organization played a more important role than in 1857, particularly for the Conservatives. Improvements in organization and an increase in funding to the constituencies from the party's central fund contributed to a Conservative recovery.⁵⁰

Electoral contests declined further than in 1857 and just 124 constituencies (or 43% of the total) across England and Wales went to the polls in 1859. The Conservatives regained ground lost in 1857 and returned more than 300 members for the first time since 1841. They gained 16 county and 16 borough seats compared to the Liberal's 5 county and 28 borough seats. However the Conservative recovery was not enough to retain office and they were defeated by a liberal coalition with a majority of 40 seats. The election also witnessed the further marginalisation of the Peelite faction, which returned just 22 members in 1859 and which would soon be

⁴⁹ Norman McCord, *British History, 1815 – 1906* (Oxford, 1993), p.252.

⁵⁰ Jackson, "General Elections", p.258.

drawn into the emerging Liberal Party.⁵¹ The drop in contested elections in 1859 contributed to a reduction in violence, with just 11 cases found including a duplicate entry from the Lancashire borough of Bury. The sample records one riot, five disturbances and four incidents in 1859. These cases were scattered across northern and southern England (See Map 2 below). The violence was concentrated in the boroughs with a single episode recorded in a county constituency (Yorkshire, W.R).

In the single member borough of Bury the political battle was fought between moderate and radical Liberals. The Liberal split, which dated from 1852, proved bitter enough that rival allegations of corruption were common during elections. In 1857 the borough was contested by the moderate Frederick Peel and the radical R.N.Philips. Caroline Jackson writes that the election ended in "a welter of accusation and last minute slanders".⁵² Peel's supporters lodged a petition against Philips' return citing the intimidation of voters but were unsuccessful. In 1859 Philips declined to contest the borough and his replacement was the radical Thomas Barnes, a stranger to the town. Peel stood again and was this time successful due to his support among the town's publicans and to "an outlay of bribes of considerable value".⁵³ During the campaign drunken 'Peelites' disrupted Barnes' election meeting and at the declaration fighting erupted between the rival parties. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that "the friends of Mr.Peel took forcible possession of that portion of the hustings allotted to the friends of Mr.Barnes, not permitting the latter to retire by the way of the staircase, but throwing them over the front of the hustings, to the great danger of life and limb".⁵⁴

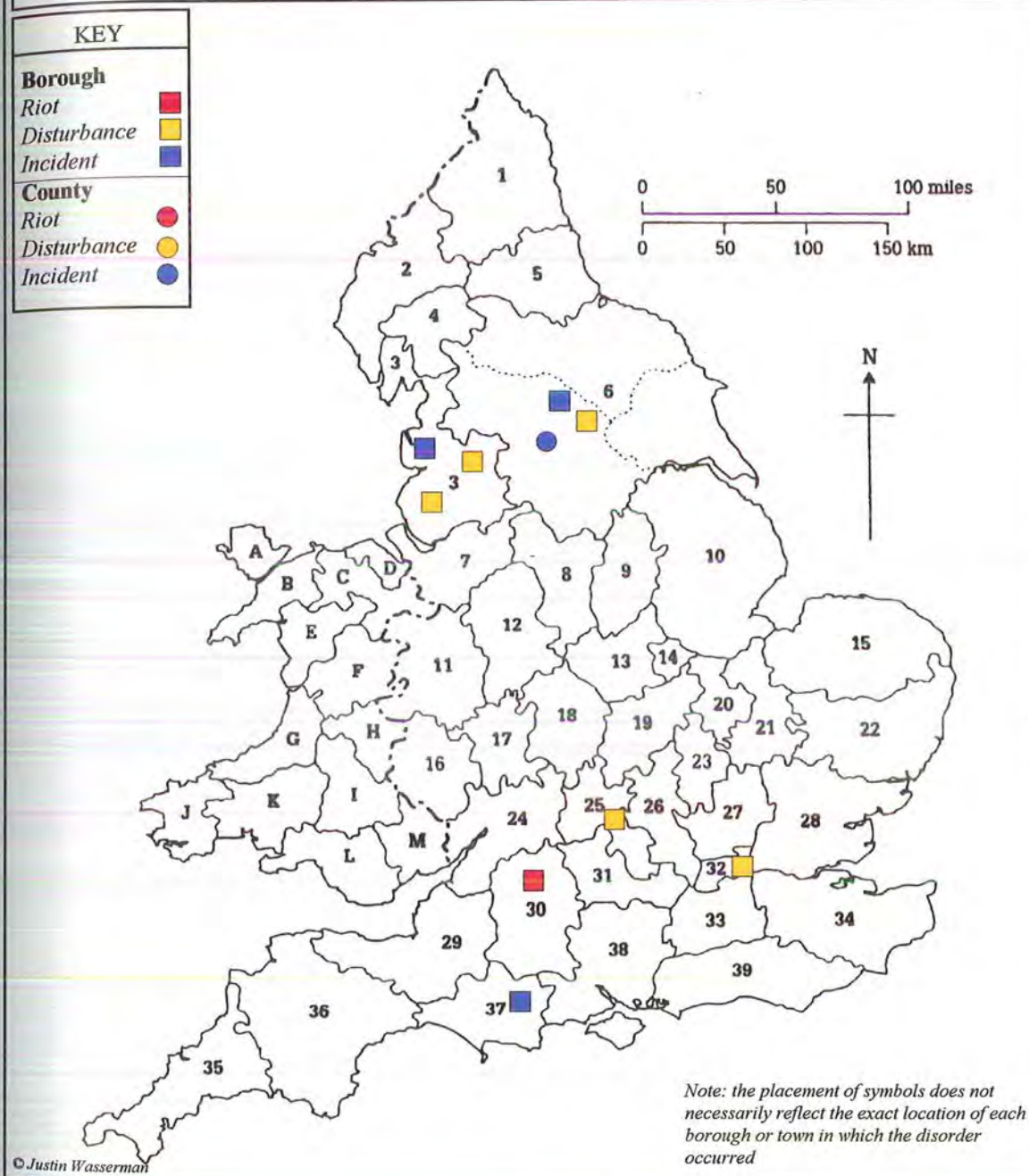
⁵¹ McCord, *British History*, p.252-3.

⁵² Jackson, "General Elections", p.3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1859, p.4.

Map 2. General election disorder in England and Wales, 1859

**A total of 10 separate cases of electoral violence (1 duplicate)****Guide to Counties**

1. Northumberland 2. Cumberland 3. Lancashire 4. Westmoreland 5. Durham 6. Yorkshire 7. Cheshire 8. Derbyshire
 9. Nottinghamshire 10. Lincolnshire 11. Shropshire 12. Staffordshire 13. Leicestershire 14. Rutland 15. Norfolk
 16. Herefordshire 17. Worcestershire 18. Warwickshire 19. Northamptonshire 20. Huntingdonshire 21. Cambridgeshire
 22. Suffolk 23. Bedfordshire 24. Gloucestershire 25. Oxfordshire 26. Buckinghamshire 27. Hertfordshire 28. Essex
 29. Somerset 30. Wiltshire 31. Berkshire 32. Middlesex 33. Surrey 34. Kent 35. Cornwall 36. Devon 37. Dorset
 38. Hampshire 39. Sussex A. Anglesey B. Carnarvonshire C. Denbighshire D. Flintshire E. Merioneth F. Montgomeryshire
 G. Cardiganshire H. Radnorshire I. Brecknockshire J. Pembrokeshire K. Carmarthenshire L. Glamorganshire M. Monmouth

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3. Salford, Bury, Oldham. 6. Beverley, Hull, Leeds. 25. Banbury. 30. Calne. 32. Finsbury. 37. Dorset.

The Beverley election again resulted in disorder albeit of a more sedate character. In 1859 E.A.Glover returned to contest the borough after being stripped of his election in 1857 and having spent time in jail during 1858 for false declarations as to his property qualifications. The nomination was described as "very disorderly" and stones were thrown at the hustings. The most serious case of disorder in 1859 occurred in Calne in Wiltshire. Two years after almost being killed at the hands of a Kidderminster mob, Robert Lowe found himself again at the centre of an election riot. Lowe's return for Calne with the aid of his patron, Lord Lansdowne, was the signal for serious rioting. The *Bridlington Free Press* commented,

The mob...attacked the police in force, and drove them into the Town Hall, where they kept them prisoners for two hours...The mob then demolished every pane of glass in the police station, smashed the windows of the agent of Mr.Lowe and Lord Lansdowne's solicitor, and kept the town in terror until a very late hour at night.⁵⁵

Election violence in 1859 was characterised by disrupted political meetings with disorder attending speeches in Finsbury, Bury, Salford and Leeds. William Massey's election address in Salford was disturbed and in Hull the Conservative party were met with a boisterous reception at the declaration and pelted with mud, sticks, lumps of paper(!) and stones.⁵⁶

The relatively quiet elections of 1857 and 1859 gave way to the more violent election of 1865. On the surface however there was little to indicate that the campaign would be a bitter one. The parliament elected in 1859 "had died a natural death" and no single contentious political issue dominated the hustings. Government expenditure, malt tax, church rates and foreign policy all rated more attention than parliamentary

⁵⁵ *Bridlington Free Press*, 7 May 1859, p.3.

⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1859, p.4.

reform in 1865. The Liberals relied on careful domestic management and an unspectacular record in foreign policy. There was little doubt about the outcome and the Liberals were re-elected with the 80 year-old Palmerston again at the helm. The party actually increased their majority by 20 seats and in the Commons 359 Liberals faced 299 Conservatives. Yet the campaign was the most heavily contested since 1841, a factor attributable to the retirement of many older members. Indeed the 1865 election returned 105 members to the Commons for the first time.⁵⁷ In England and Wales there were 158 contests, an increase of 34 over 1859, representing 55% of the total number of constituencies. At £750,000 the official election expenses were the highest yet recorded. A total of 35 petitions went to trial in 1865, a figure that represented one-fifth of all petitions lodged since 1832.⁵⁸ The election occasioned more violence than the 1857 and 1859 campaigns combined. A total of 29 cases of disorder were recorded in 1865, including 5 duplicate entries.⁵⁹ The *Nonconformist* commented of the campaign, "The great triumph of Liberal opinion at the General Election has been greatly tarnished by the senseless and disgraceful scenes which have been witnessed in various parts of the United Kingdom".⁶⁰ The violence was located principally along a north-south corridor between Yorkshire and Wiltshire (See Map 3 below), with isolated cases in Devon, Pembrokeshire and Cumberland.

Five county elections were disrupted by violence in 1865, with the North and South Warwickshire campaigns each contributing a duplicate entry (7 cases of county violence in total). Despite the increase in county disorder the large boroughs continued to dominate the sample.

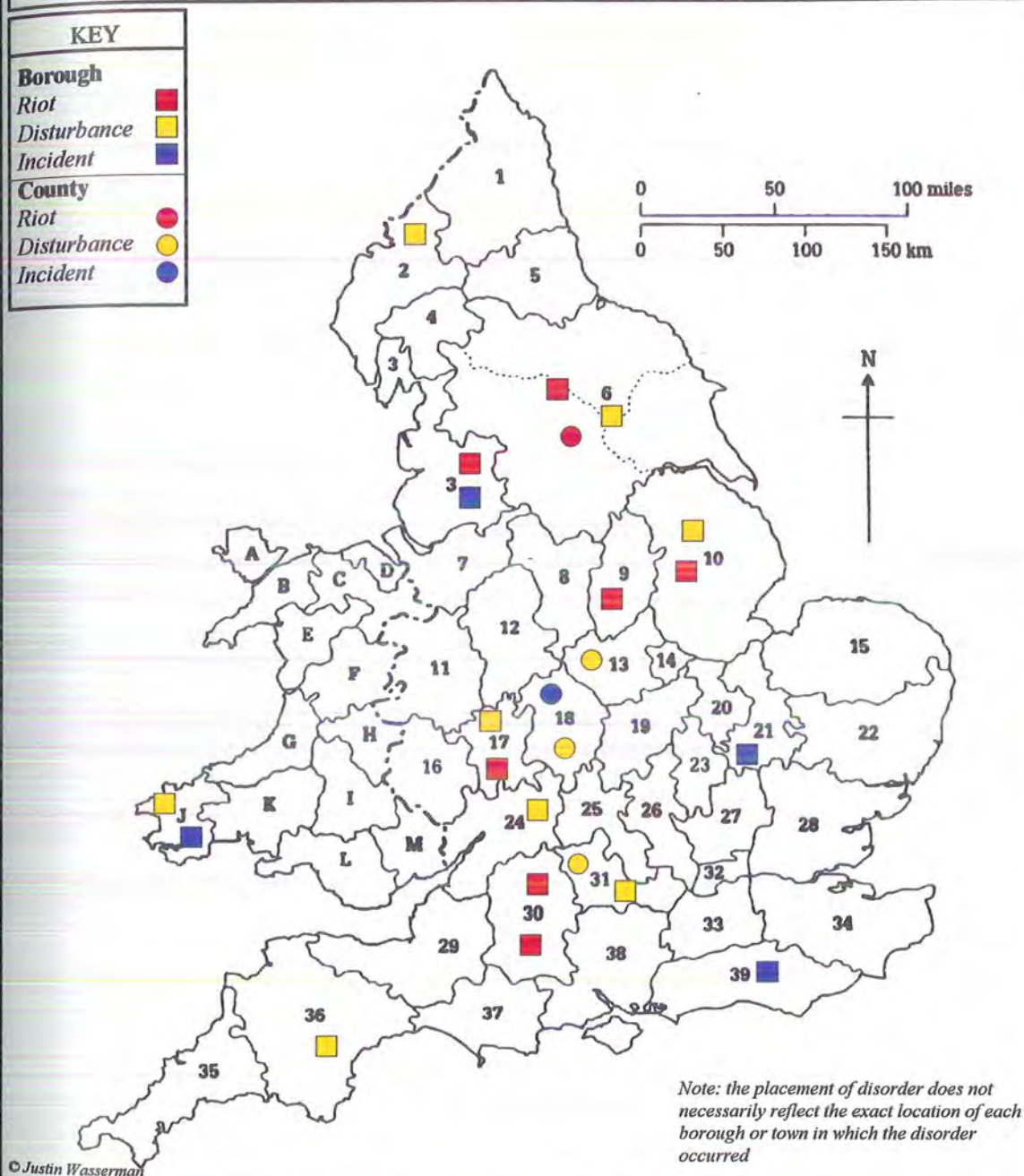
⁵⁷ O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.28 and Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.105.

⁵⁸ O'Leary, *op cit*, p.28.

⁵⁹ The duplicate entries in 1865 included: Carlisle, Cheltenham, Nottingham, Atherstone (Warwickshire, North) and Leamington (Warwickshire, South).

⁶⁰ *Nonconformist*, 26 July 1865, p.603.

Map 3. General election disorder in England and Wales, 1865

**A total of 24 separate cases of electoral violence (5 duplicates not shown)****Guide to Counties**

1. Northumberland 2. Cumberland 3. Lancashire 4. Westmoreland 5. Durham 6. Yorkshire 7. Cheshire 8. Derbyshire
 9. Nottinghamshire 10. Lincolnshire 11. Shropshire 12. Staffordshire 13. Leicestershire 14. Rutland 15. Norfolk
 16. Herefordshire 17. Worcestershire 18. Warwickshire 19. Northamptonshire 20. Huntingdonshire 21. Cambridgeshire
 22. Suffolk 23. Bedfordshire 24. Gloucestershire 25. Oxfordshire 26. Buckinghamshire 27. Hertfordshire 28. Essex
 29. Somerset 30. Wiltshire 31. Berkshire 32. Middlesex 33. Surrey 34. Kent 35. Cornwall 36. Devon 37. Dorset
 38. Hampshire 39. Sussex A. Anglesey B. Caernarvonshire C. Denbighshire D. Flintshire E. Merioneth F. Montgomeryshire
 G. Cardiganshire H. Radnorshire I. Brecknockshire J. Pembrokeshire K. Carmarthenshire L. Glamorganshire M. Monmouth

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2. Carlisle 3. Rochdale, Oldham 6. Rotherham, Huddersfield, Hull 9. Nottingham 10. Lincoln, Grantham
 13. Leicestershire North 17. Kidderminster, Dudley 18. Atherstone (Warwick.N), Leamington (Warwick.S)
 21. Cambridge 24. Cheltenham 30. Chippenham, Cricklade 31. Maidenhead, Windsor 36. Tavistock 39. Lewes
 J. Pembroke, Haverfordwest

There were 19 cases of borough violence in 1865, including 12 boroughs with more than 1,000 electors (Hull with 5,566 voters and Nottingham with 5,934 voters). The scale of violence reflected the general pattern of mid-century disorder with 8 riots, 14 disturbances and 7 incidents. Serious riots broke out at elections in Rochdale, Lincoln, Nottingham, Chippenham, Cricklade, Dudley, Huddersfield and at Rotherham during the Yorkshire, West Riding contest. The general election resulted in a rare fatality: In Cheltenham a Liberal supporter died after being shot in the face by a Conservative voter.⁶¹ In Pembrokeshire election enthusiasm led to the old practice of 'cooping' voters prior to the poll. *The Welshman* reported of the Haverfordwest election, "A large number of tallymen had been engaged on both sides, and many an unsuspecting voter was taken captive only to be set at liberty after the turmoil had ended".⁶² The two cases of borough violence recorded in Pembrokeshire in 1865 (See Map 3 or appendix) represent the first instances of Welsh disorder during the period. The lack of violence in the Principality before 1865 reflected the lack of contests there. At both the 1857 and 1859 general elections there were just 4 constituencies in Wales that went to the polls. This situation did not alter markedly in 1865, when there were 5 contests. Welsh electoral lassitude during this period owed much to the political power of the local Anglican gentry; their decline and the resulting rise in contests (and therefore violence) date from the late-1860s.

In Chippenham the election of two Conservatives, Sir. J. Neeld and Gabriel Goldney, sparked a riot in which the houses of at least 50 Conservative voters were attacked including that of Goldney's election agent. Chippenham was a small patronage borough in Wiltshire with just 392 voters in 1865. The Neeld family, one of the most influential in the county, exercised a controlling influence over the

⁶¹ *Nonconformist*, 19 July 1865, p.587.

⁶² *The Welshman*, 14 July 1865, p.3.

borough's two seats. The violence in 1865 demonstrates the risks that patrons ran by openly ignoring popular sentiment. While the election result may never have been in doubt, the violent upheaval that followed the Liberal candidate's loss certainly reveals the unpopularity of the patron's political control. The local police force of 12 constables faced an estimated 500 men, women and children infuriated at the loss of William Lysley. *The Times* reported the violence which rapidly escalated from stone-throwing to destruction of property,

For nearly three hours the windows, window panes, and furniture in the houses of obnoxious persons were destroyed...In order to show their feelings against the Vicar, the Rev. J.Rich, the mob proceeded to the churchyard and tore up the tombstones, which they hurled against the windows of his house.⁶³

In the borough of Nottingham corruption and intimidation led to serious riots and ultimately to a void election. This large borough of 5,964 voters returned two members to parliament and had a well-established tradition of corruption. The hiring of organised mobs, or 'lambs', in the Conservative interest had become something of a local institution. The bitterly contested election of 1865 proved no exception, with violence being a feature of both the nomination and polling days. Three candidates stood in the Liberal interest including Sir R.J.Clifton, a former Peelite and the owner of several local collieries, Samuel Morley, a hosiery manufacturer and prominent nonconformist, and Charles Paget, a Nottingham manufacturer and deputy lieutenant of the county. A.G.Marten, *QC* stood as a Conservative. The employees of Clifton's collieries were prominent during the disturbances which punctuated the election campaign.

⁶³ *The Times*, 14 July 1865, p.6.

On the day of the nomination a large group of framework knitters came by train to Nottingham in support of the Liberal candidates. When they arrived, however, they were "set upon by a violent rabble and driven back into the station".⁶⁴ The *Nonconformist* reported that "Numbers of roughs waited in various avenues in the town for Messrs. Paget and Morley, but they did not make their appearance".⁶⁵ During the nomination the violence continued and "the hustings was got possession of, the flags torn down, the scaffolding set fire to, and totally consumed. The rabble pelted each other with stones, and several persons were severely wounded".⁶⁶ On the polling day Paget and Morley's committee room was attacked and gutted and "bands of men armed with sticks [committed] serious outrages on the property and persons of the inhabitants".⁶⁷ The violence continued to escalate and a request was made for military assistance. However the excitement declined after the declaration of the poll, no doubt due to Clifton's success.

The election result was petitioned against and both Samuel Morley and Sir Robert Clifton were unseated. Morley's supporters were found to have bribed over 600 voters, ostensibly as protection against the intimidation practiced by his opponent. Clifton and his agents were found guilty of intimidation. For his part Morley denied any complicity in corrupt practices. In a letter to Gladstone following the verdict on the petition he wrote,

It has been a great disappointment to find myself compromised by acts of which I was entirely ignorant till I heard of them last week; but for which I am justly held responsible, though I doubt whether the [election] Committee fully appreciated the difficulty my friends had to

⁶⁴ *Nonconformist*, 28 July 1865, p.527.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ HLRO, *General Index to the House of Commons*, "Special Reports from Election Committees", 1866 - 1878-9, p.591.

encounter owing to the shameful conduct of unscrupulous opponents.⁶⁸

Gladstone regretted Morley's departure from the Commons and remarked during the Church Rates debate that his "absence from this House I deplore on personal as well as moral grounds".⁶⁹ Regardless of Morley's innocence or guilt in the matter, this incident provides an insight into how politicians found guilty of corruption were viewed by their contemporaries. Morley's political career was not damaged by his association with corrupt practices. He was returned for Bristol in 1868 and remained member for that borough until 1885.

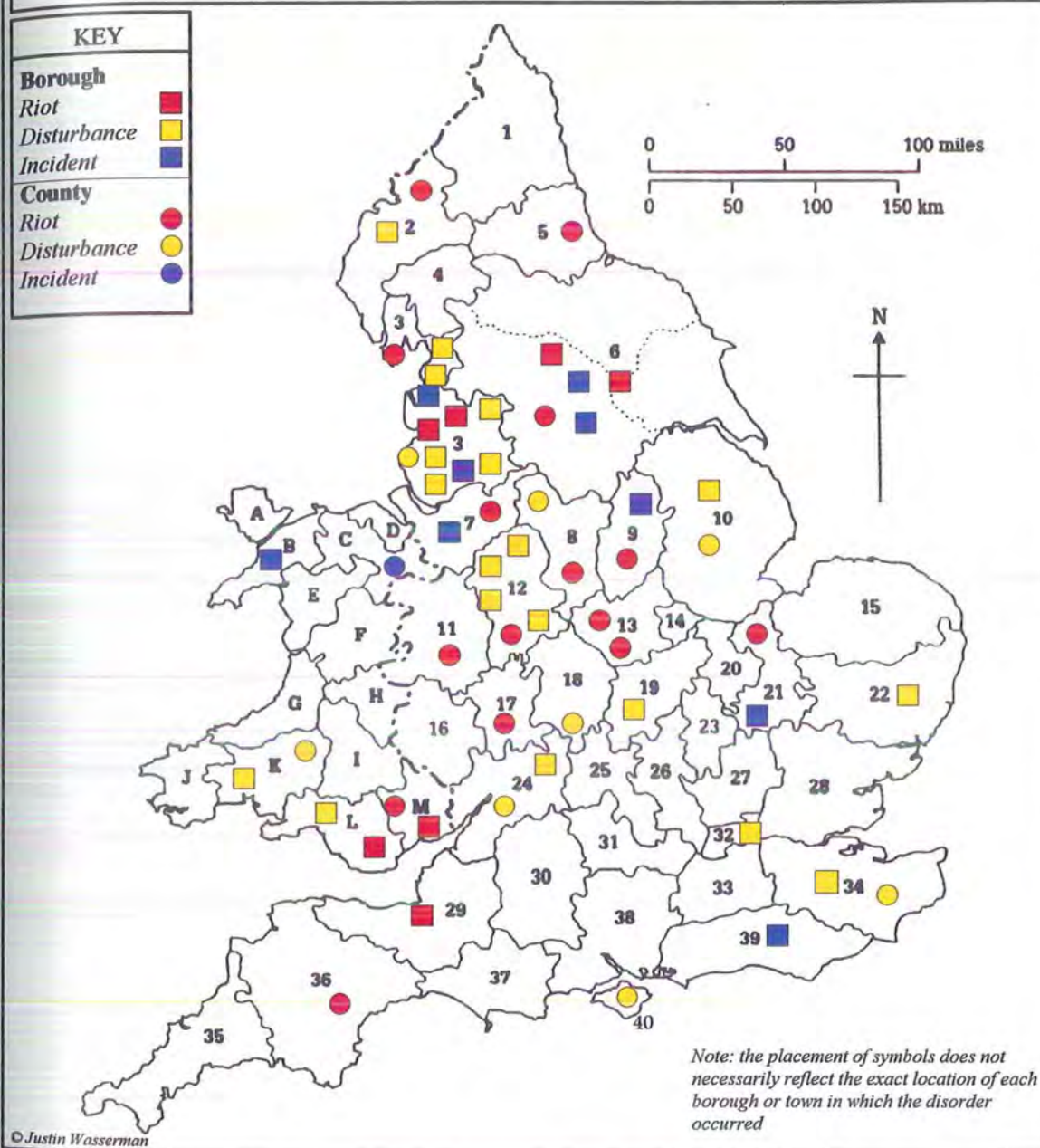
The scale of disorder during the 1868 general election undoubtedly casts a long shadow across the period, the prolonged campaign was certainly the most violent of the mid-Victorian era and, in terms of petitions lodged and corruption uncovered, one of the most venal. This election alone accounts for one-third of all cases of election disorder between 1857 and 1880. Fifty-nine English and Welsh elections experienced some form of disorder in 1868, representing an incredible 26.4%, or almost one-quarter, of the total number of election contests in that year.⁷⁰ A total of 57 serious cases of violence (27 riots and 30 disturbances) left at least 9 people dead in widespread rioting that stretched from Cumberland in the north to the Isle of Wight in the south. The violence was predominantly located in the midlands and in Lancashire and Yorkshire, though violence was also reported as far afield as Devon, Kent, Suffolk, Carmarthenshire and Carnarvonshire (See Map 4 below).

⁶⁸ British Library, Additional Mss 44410, ff.99, Samuel Morley to W.E.Gladstone, 25 April 1866.

⁶⁹ *Hansard* 3, Vol.183, 8 May 1866, p.620 – 621.

⁷⁰ The figure of 59 cases of violence disregards duplicate entries. See Table 7 (p.121) for more details of the scale of election disorder during the period.

Map 4. General election disorder in England and Wales, 1868

**A total of 59 separate cases of electoral violence (12 duplicates not shown)****Guide to Counties**

1. Northumberland 2. Cumberland 3. Lancashire 4. Westmoreland 5. Durham 6. Yorkshire 7. Cheshire 8. Derbyshire
 9. Nottinghamshire 10. Lincolnshire 11. Shropshire 12. Staffordshire 13. Leicestershire 14. Rutland 15. Norfolk
 16. Herefordshire 17. Worcestershire 18. Warwickshire 19. Northamptonshire 20. Huntingdonshire 21. Cambridgeshire
 22. Suffolk 23. Bedfordshire 24. Gloucestershire 25. Oxfordshire 26. Buckinghamshire 27. Hertfordshire 28. Essex
 29. Somerset 30. Wiltshire 31. Berkshire 32. Middlesex 33. Surrey 34. Kent 35. Cornwall 36. Devon 37. Dorset
 38. Hampshire 39. Sussex 40. Isle of Wight A. Anglesey B. Caernarvonshire C. Denbighshire D. Flintshire E. Merioneth
 F. Montgomeryshire G. Cardiganshire H. Radnorshire I. Brecknockshire J. Pembrokeshire K. Carmarthenshire
 L. Glamorganshire M. Monmouth.

Guide to Disorder

2. Carlisle, East Cumb. 3. Blackburn, Bury, Wigan, Warrington, Preston, Bolton, Salford, Ashton-u-Lyne, Stalybridge, Manchester, Blackburn (E. Lancs), Wigan (S.W. Lancs) 5. Durham (N. Durham) 6. Wakefield, Halifax, York, Bradford 7. Birkenhead, Sandbach (Mid-Chesh) 8. Clay Cross (E. Derby), Ripley (S. Derby) 9. Nottingham, Mansfield (N. Notts) 10. Boston, S. Lincoln 11. Church Stretton (Shrop) 12. Tipton, Stafford, Wednesbury, Lichfield, Brierly Hill (W. Staff) 13. Shepshed (N. Leices), Hinckley (S. Leices) 17. Halesowen (E. Worcs) 18. Leamington (S. Warwick) 19. Peterborough 21. Cambridge, Whittlesey (Camb) 22. Ipswich 24. Cheltenham, Coleford (Glouc) 29. Bristol 32. Finsbury 34. Gravesend, Bromley (W. Kent) 36. Hatherleigh (S. Devon) 39. Horsham B. Carnarvon C. Ruthin (Denbigh) K. Carmarthen Borough, Carmarthenshire L. Cardiff, Aberdare (Monmouth) M. Newport, Tredegar (Monmouth) 40. Newport (IoW)

The military were needed to restore order in several towns during the 1868 campaign including Ashton-under-Lyne, Bolton, Blackburn, Blaenavon, Brierly Hill, Newport and Wakefield.⁷¹ At Shepshed in North Leicestershire the Pensioners and Yeomanry were put on alert after rioters clashed with police reinforcements sent from Loughborough.⁷² During the West Staffordshire election the polling was abandoned at Brierly Hill after the hustings were destroyed and mobs of Liberal and Tory roughs fought in the streets.⁷³ In North Durham a riot erupted on the polling day during which rival partisans fought for control of the hustings. A fierce stone-throwing battle ensued during which the *Manchester Guardian* reported: "the shrieks of women and children for assistance [were]...awfully distinct even above the din that prevailed during the stampede down Framwell-gate".⁷⁴ At the close of the poll in Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire an organised mob of navvies and labourers descended on the town and "demolished everything they could lay their hands on".⁷⁵ In all the general election generated a total of 27 riots, 30 disturbances and 14 incidents. The increase in county violence in 1868 reflected the growth of contests in those constituencies. In 1865 only 17.8% of English and Welsh counties were contested compared to 40.3% in 1868, an increase fuelled by a leap in Welsh county contests from 5 (in 1865) to 15, and by contests in 16 English counties that were new creations of the Second Reform Act.

There were unique reasons for the scale of violence in 1868. This bitter election featured a recently enlarged electorate, a lengthy campaign and a significant increase in the number of contests. The reforms of 1867 ensured that a larger

⁷¹ These towns were not all boroughs in their own right, and include some county towns where polling took place.

⁷² *Derbyshire Courier*, 28 November 1868, p.3.

⁷³ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1868, p.6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 26 November 1868, p.7.

proportion of the working class were enfranchised in 1868 than at previous elections. These new voters included many who were vulnerable to the pressures of intimidation and to the lure of bribery. Martin Pugh writes that "the exercise of influence was naturally marked in the election following immediately upon the 1867 Reform Act, when large numbers of working men voted for the first time but under the old conditions of open voting".⁷⁶ These newly enfranchised voters were sought after by the established political parties, and the increase in contests in 1868 is evidence of the stimulus Reform had on party organization. A total of 223 English and Welsh contests in 1868 represented 74% of the total number of constituencies, and an increase of 65 from 1865. Widespread press reports of bribery, treating and intimidation clearly indicate the efforts of party agents to capture the new electorate, and the increased level of party activity, whether legal or illegal, led to a significant increase in both official election expenses and the number of petitions lodged. Though grossly underestimated the 1868 expenses totalled £1.3 million, almost £700,000 more than in 1865.⁷⁷ The voters themselves proved no less immune to political pressures or corruption than their predecessors; 101 petitions, or double that of 1865, being presented following the election, and 22 contests were declared void, an increase of 16 over the previous general election.⁷⁸

The campaign itself lasted from August to November and was described by the Home Secretary H.A. Bruce as "the long agony which preceded the general election".⁷⁹ Disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Ireland was the most prominent and most contentious issue during the election. Gladstone committed the Liberals to a policy of reform in Ireland where the established Church commanded a

⁷⁶ Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, p.13.

⁷⁷ O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.56.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁷⁹ *Hansard* 3, Vol.194, 4 March 1869, p.650.

membership of just 12% of the population.⁸⁰ Furthermore the issue of Irish reform coincided with a rise in Anglo-Irish tensions. Several high profile Fenian attacks on the British mainland in the winter of 1867 were followed by the controversial lecture tour of the anti-Catholic evangelist William Murphy. Local causes of disorder were thus less important during a campaign in which a single political issue dominated the hustings. And in 1868 the subject of Irish reform forced "a national agenda on local platforms to an extent previously unknown in mid-Victorian elections".⁸¹ English working-class hostility towards immigrant Irish labour merely exacerbated strongly held anti-Catholic sentiment. Anglo-Irish conflict thus played a prominent role in many election disturbances in 1868. In Lancashire in particular William Murphy's talks generated a considerable amount of disorder, one example being in Wigan, where two Liberals headed the poll, a body of Tory colliers attacked houses in the Irish section of town. However, "The Irishmen...soon organised themselves, drove out their assailants, and also repulsed a second attack".⁸² Irishmen and women were also reported as being prominent in disturbances in Blackburn, Bury, Bolton and York.

However not all disorder was influenced by the divisive national agenda of Irish reform. Corruption in the form of treating and undue influence provided a ready precursor to violence. In Bolton local Irishmen were reported as indulging in serious fighting, but defeated Liberal's also accused the Conservatives of importing "large bodies of armed and violent men"⁸³ into the town. Violence in Warrington flared after Conservative supporters kidnapped several Liberal voters.⁸⁴ In Sandbach,

⁸⁰ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.144.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.147.

⁸² *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1868, p.6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1868, p.5.

⁸⁴ *Special Edition of the Warrington Guardian*, 17 November 1868, p.2.

following the Mid-Cheshire election, a riot broke out after rival gangs of 'roughs' clashed in the streets. On that occasion the police came under serious attack and "several of the constables were received with a volley of stones. One was beaten with a flagstaff, another had his head cut open, and Captain Smith was injured in the side".⁸⁵ And during the West Staffordshire election a ferocious riot ensued after a body of "lambs" from Dudley marched on body of "roughs" from Cradley-Heath.⁸⁶

The concentration of violence in 1868 raises important questions about the nature and frequency of mid-century electoral disorder. What implications does this cluster of violence at a single campaign have for conclusions about disorder across the entire period? Was the general election of 1868 merely an anomaly in an otherwise peaceful period? It seems reasonably clear that a peculiar convergence of factors contributed to the scale of violence in 1868. A greatly enlarged electorate, the intensification of party activity with its adjuncts of corruption and undue influence, a divisive religious issue, all exacerbated long held traditions of participation, carnival and disorder.

The violence in 1868 led directly to a Commons investigation into the procedure of both parliamentary and municipal elections. The Hartington Committee presented its findings to the House in March 1870. Its report on electioneering in mid-Victorian Britain concluded that many borough elections were characterised by fighting, drinking and various forms of corruption. Among the recommendations made by the Committee to improve this situation were the abolition of open nominations, an increase in the number of polling booths, an improvement of the law relating to electoral malpractice and the introduction of secret voting. These proposals were

⁸⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 December 1868, p.5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1868, p.6.

included in the Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Bill (Ballot Act) passed in July 1872. The simultaneous passage of a Corrupt Practices Act outlawed the use of public houses as committee rooms.⁸⁷ These changes may have led some to hope for an improvement in electoral conditions. However such hopes were soon to be proved illusory. The scale of violence in 1874 was second only to that of 1868 and proved that alterations to the procedure of electioneering made little impact on the outbreak of violence.

The General Election of 1874 provided the Conservatives with their only electoral victory of the period. A mere three weeks were provided for the campaign which was characterised by Liberal disunity as much as Conservative cohesion. Since 1868 the Conservatives had assiduously tended to the machinery of party organization. The National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations was formed in 1867 and was followed in 1870 with the establishment of the Conservative Central Office. The creation of these two bodies was an important step in the development of national party organizations.⁸⁸ However their effectiveness in 1874 should not be overdrawn. Conservative organization was more advanced in the larger urban boroughs and the counties remained largely under the influence of their traditional landlords. The smaller boroughs were often left with a single party agent or no organization at all. Yet the Conservatives were far better prepared than the Liberals in 1874 and were able to present a coherent and unified front. Their campaign addresses followed broadly similar lines including: "defence of the Church of England, an end to Gladstone's domestic hyperactivity, more religious teaching in

⁸⁷ Richter, "Public Order", p.184.

⁸⁸ E.J.Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party: Conservative leadership and organization after the Second Reform Bill* (Oxford, 1968), p.105.

schools, opposition to Home Rule, relief for local taxpayers, and the vaguest of vagueness on foreign affairs".⁸⁹

By comparison the Liberal Party was divided and in disarray. Without an issue such as Irish Church disestablishment to rally the various elements of liberalism the party struggled to maintain unity. Radicals and nonconformists were unhappy with the pace and extent of government reforms and the Whigs and moderate Liberals were increasingly alarmed at Gladstone's democratic rhetoric. Nonconformist disillusionment contributed to a split in the Liberal vote. In 1874 official Liberals were challenged by unofficial candidates in 34 constituencies.⁹⁰ The passage of the 1872 Licensing Act had alienated both the temperance movement and the brewing interest. The former believed the licensing reforms had not gone far enough, the latter was angry with increased industry regulation. By reducing the opening hours of public houses the Liberals created a powerful enemy in the publicans. A total of 214 English and Welsh constituencies were contested in 1874, representing a marginal decrease from 223 in 1868. The election proved a spectacular Conservative victory, with the Liberal majority of 100 seats obtained in 1868 being converted into a Conservative majority of 52. In England the Conservatives captured 143 out of 170 county seats and "pushed Liberal electoral support back into Northern England".⁹¹

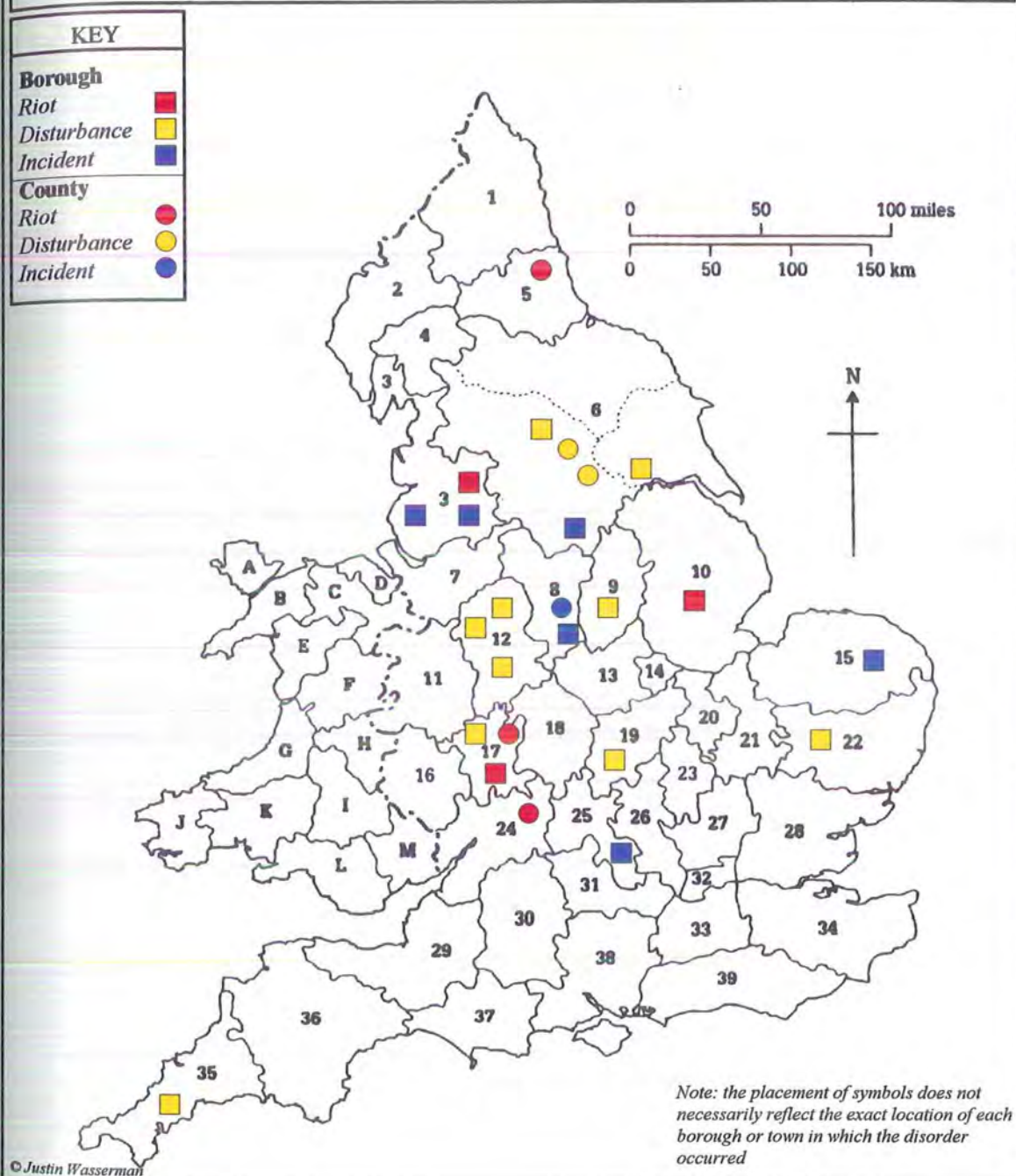
The 1874 general election produced an all too familiar inventory of riot, mayhem and destruction. In all 19 borough elections and 6 county elections produced a total of 32 cases of electoral violence. There were 11 riots, 12 disturbances and 9 incidents at elections as far field as Cornwall, Norfolk and North Durham (See Map 5 below).

⁸⁹ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.612.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.172.

Map 5. General election disorder in England and Wales, 1874



A total of 25 separate cases of electoral violence (7 duplicates not shown)

Guide to Counties

1. Northumberland 2. Cumberland 3. Lancashire 4. Westmoreland 5. Durham 6. Yorkshire 7. Cheshire 8. Derbyshire
 9. Nottinghamshire 10. Lincolnshire 11. Shropshire 12. Staffordshire 13. Leicestershire 14. Rutland 15. Norfolk
 16. Herefordshire 17. Worcestershire 18. Warwickshire 19. Northamptonshire 20. Huntingdonshire 21. Cambridgeshire
 22. Suffolk 23. Bedfordshire 24. Gloucestershire 25. Oxfordshire 26. Buckinghamshire 27. Hertfordshire 28. Essex
 29. Somerset 30. Wiltshire 31. Berkshire 32. Middlesex 33. Surrey 34. Kent 35. Cornwall 36. Devon 37. Dorset
 38. Hampshire 39. Sussex 40. Isle of Wight A. Anglesey B. Caernarvonshire C. Denbighshire D. Flintshire E. Merioneth F.
 Montgomeryshire G. Cardiganshire H. Radnorshire I. Brecknockshire J. Pembrokeshire K. Carmarthenshire L. Glamorganshire M.
 Monmouth.

Guide to Disorder

3. Liverpool, Stalybridge, Warrington 5. Hetton (Durham, North) 6. Castleford, Barnsley, Hull, Pontefract, Sheffield
 8. Chesterfield, Derby 9. Nottingham 10. Lincoln 12. Wolverhampton, Wednesbury, Stoke-on-Trent 15. Norwich
 17. Dudley, Bewdley, Lye 19. Peterborough 22. Ipswich 25. Oxford 35. Penryn and Falmouth
 24. Cinderford (Gloucestershire)

The scale of disorder in 1874 marks it as the second most violent of the period. Violence was most marked on the polling day (See Table 12) which accounted for 21 out of 32 cases of disorder. Such figures contradict Richter's argument that most violence took place after the declaration of the poll. Similarly Cornelius O'Leary writes that "the riots that occurred in 1874 took place (as before) during the campaign, not on polling day".⁹² The scale and distribution of violence in 1874 challenges the notion that electoral disorder had largely disappeared by the late-Victorian period.

The election campaign of 1874 may have been, as Hoppen asserts, "notable for its calmness and quiet"⁹³ in comparison with its immediate predecessor. However it was still far from peaceful: in Sheffield an armed mob paraded through the streets, attacked passers-by, "entered a beer house...and got nine gallons of beer from the landlord under pressure";⁹⁴ as in 1868 the polling at Barnsley for the South-West Yorkshire election ended in riot. The police were pelted with "stones, oranges [and] earthenware" before the windows of seven hotels were smashed and a cab carrying the ballot boxes was attacked;⁹⁵ several borough elections in Staffordshire proved disorderly, as at Wolverhampton where the ironworks and factories shut early and there were pitched battles between rival mobs of partisans.

At half-past one a mob of youths, wearing Conservative colours, and armed with staves, collected in the centre of Wolverhampton, and commenced an indiscriminate attack upon all wearing the Liberal colours...Vehicles and horses and even women were beaten...The Liberals responded and commenced a similar sally, armed with timber, which they tore down from fences.⁹⁶

⁹² O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.89.

⁹³ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.610.

⁹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1874, p.7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 February 1874, p.6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 February 1874, p.5.

In April 1874 the Chief Constable of Staffordshire, William Congreve, wrote to the Home Office concerning his preparations for the recent county and borough elections. He described how by-elections in 1873 for East Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth had, "led me to hope that under the Ballot the excitement which frequently prevailed under the former system was not to be anticipated". However his optimism was "undeceived by the riotous proceedings at Dudley on the 4th of February". The borough elections for Wednesbury, Stoke and Wolverhampton all took place on the same day. Congreve admitted that in many places his force was "at times more or less overpowered" and that "most of the oldest officers affirm that never, on any previous occasion, have they seen at Elections so savage and determined a mob".⁹⁷

As during the rest of the period, the causes of violence in 1874 were many and varied. Violence was always likely to be marked during a campaign in which the publicans were supposed to have taken an active role. In some places anti-government campaigning by the licensed victuallers led to disorder. In Hull a number of publicans who had supported the Conservative interest had their windows smashed, while public houses were also the focus of riotous mobs in Barnsley, Nottingham, Sheffield and Bewdley. Such places were, however, perennial targets for attack during mid-Victorian elections. In Dudley the intimidation of voters by an armed mob led to a void election. At Penryn in Cornwall partisan rivalry erupted into violence when a Liberal procession was attacked by a body of Conservatives. The police were frequent targets of mobs throughout the period and this was particularly obvious in 1874. For example a force of constables from Stourbridge were sent to

⁹⁷ *Staffordshire Record Office*, C/PC/1/1/1, "Reports of Staffordshire Chief Constable, 1859 – 1887", 2 April 1874.

Lye during the East Worcestershire election only to be stoned halfway home again. Several of their comrades were left in Lye, "being too much injured to march away".⁹⁸

Election crowds often responded violently to police interference, particularly when force was required to restore order. In North Durham a riot developed after a constable struck a rioter with his truncheon. This act precipitated a general attack on the police, the rescue of several prisoners and attacks on houses in which the police had fled for safety.⁹⁹ However the violence in North Durham was more complicated than mere police-mob conflict. One of the Conservative candidates was unpopular with the local miners. George Elliot was a self-made man and an ex-miner himself. The *Nonconformist* described him as, "very wealthy...but, like some others, he is dead against the class from which he has risen".¹⁰⁰ He was credited with an unpopular insertion in the Mines Regulation Act and during an election meeting in 1874 was stoned by hundreds of miners. They campaigned vigorously against him, employing exclusive dealing and intimidation against Tory tradesmen. The result was serious rioting in many county towns including Seaham where the mob, "fired a truck containing 25 barrels of tar, and burnt a stack of pit props and other timber".¹⁰¹

The Conservative government elected in 1874 limped into its seventh session in 1880, the first to do so in the nineteenth-century, dogged by foreign and domestic troubles and hounded by a re-invigorated and morally outraged Gladstone. Disraeli's dissolution on 8 March thus proved the party leadership to be out of touch with the state of its electoral strength and complacent in the face of Liberal reorganisation. Gladstone's return to the political limelight came in the wake of the Bulgarian

⁹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1874, p.5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 February 1874, p.7.

¹⁰⁰ *Nonconformist*, 4 February 1874, p.107.

¹⁰¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1874, p.7.

atrocities and as a candidate for the Scottish county of Midlothian. His campaign speeches there in November and December 1879 harshly criticised Conservative foreign policy in the Balkans and South Africa. A worsening industrial and agricultural depression in the late 1870s added to Conservative ills. In addition the failure of the government to protect the landed interest against falling food prices and cheaper imports eroded their traditional support base.¹⁰² Conservative prospects in 1880 were further weakened by the deterioration of the party's organization. Since 1874 the work of Gorst and the Central Office had been allowed to decay until the latter had "practically ceased to exist except as a clerical agency".¹⁰³

By contrast the Liberals had steadily improved their organization since 1874. The split between Whigs and radical nonconformists had been repaired and in many large boroughs Liberal associations were being remodelled to reflect a more 'popular' appeal. Working-class participation was encouraged in these new organs of Liberal party machinery, the most famous model of organization being the Birmingham 'caucus'. In 1877 the National Liberal Federation was created to coordinate local party associations. By the end of that year 47 English and Welsh boroughs were affiliated.¹⁰⁴ The national scope and effectiveness of the NLF should not, however, be overstated. Its power was weakened by internal divisions and both Whigs and moderate Liberals were wary of its radical nature.¹⁰⁵ The Federation was also largely controlled by Joseph Chamberlain and the Birmingham Liberals and was resented by party associations in Scotland and Wales.¹⁰⁶ Despite these divisions the Liberal Party

¹⁰² McCord, *British History*, p.280 – 281.

¹⁰³ Feuchtwanger, p.138.

¹⁰⁴ D.G.Wright, *Democracy and Reform, 1815 – 1885* (London, 1970), p.91.

¹⁰⁵ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.221.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

was in a much better position to contest the 1880 election than were the Conservatives.

The dissolution in March left three weeks for the campaign. The session ended with the controversial passage of the Parliamentary Elections and Corrupt Practices Act (1880). This legislation repealed a section of the 1867 Reform Act which prohibited the payment of travel expenses for voters.¹⁰⁷ The use of paid cabs and conveyances was thus marked during the bitter campaign that followed. There were 249 electoral contests in England and Wales in 1880, an increase from 214 in 1874. The Liberals were returned in a stunning victory with their largest nominal majority since 1832. Conservative numbers in the Commons fell from 352 to 238 while Liberal numbers increased from 300 to 414, including 61 Home Rulers.¹⁰⁸ Liberal gains were marked in the counties where they captured 38 English and Scottish seats.¹⁰⁹ In many ways the election marked the transition towards a more modern style of politics. It was the first 'national' campaign to be fought by two mass party organizations and the involvement of the party leadership in campaigning was a portent of the future. Yet the influence of an older style of politics lingered in the continued significance of local issues and the local influence of party associations. Members of parliament who enjoyed strong local support were unlikely to be influenced by the 'party machine' or the party leadership.¹¹⁰ Finally the prevalence of corruption and violence during the campaign proved that, at least at the constituency level, little had changed since 1857.

The *Nonconformist* could always be counted on for the most vitriolic and high-minded denunciations of electoral disorder and in 1880 commented that "The

¹⁰⁷ O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.115.

¹⁰⁸ Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p.210.

¹⁰⁹ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.635.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.260.

election excesses visible in the present contest have much of the rancour and brutality of old times without the humour that at least enlivened the grossness".¹¹¹ There were indeed serious riots in 1880 but not all the humour had been stripped from the system. In Richmond during the polling for mid-Surrey a tradesman 'of liberal views' was captured by Conservatives and, "pasted over with Tory bills, put in a boat and sent down the river...after having been covered in flour".¹¹² The campaign proved an exceptionally bitter one and 26 elections witnessed violence of some kind. In all there were 9 riots, 10 disturbances and 7 incidents (See Map 6 below). Conservative candidates proved generally unpopular during the election. In South Shields the borough election drew an enormous crowd that barricaded the Conservative candidate, H.B.Hamilton, inside his hotel. During the melee that followed "six policemen were severely cut about the head and face".¹¹³ Conservative candidates and voters were the focus of crowd violence in Warrington, Dorchester, Pontefract, Rotherham, Devonshire, Winchester and Northwick (Mid-Cheshire).

However Liberals also suffered at the hands of riotous crowds. At Shanklin on the Isle of Wight a Liberal election meeting was disrupted by a body of 'navvies' who, "smashed the furniture and fittings, and a fight between them and the townspeople took place, in which several persons were seriously hurt".¹¹⁴ More serious violence occurred in Shaftesbury and Rotherham, at the former a large crowd prevented the Mayor and the successful Liberal candidate from leaving the Town Hall, while at the latter the Riot Act was read and the 21st Hussars paraded through the streets "with drawn sabres".¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *Nonconformist*, 1 April 1880, p.339.

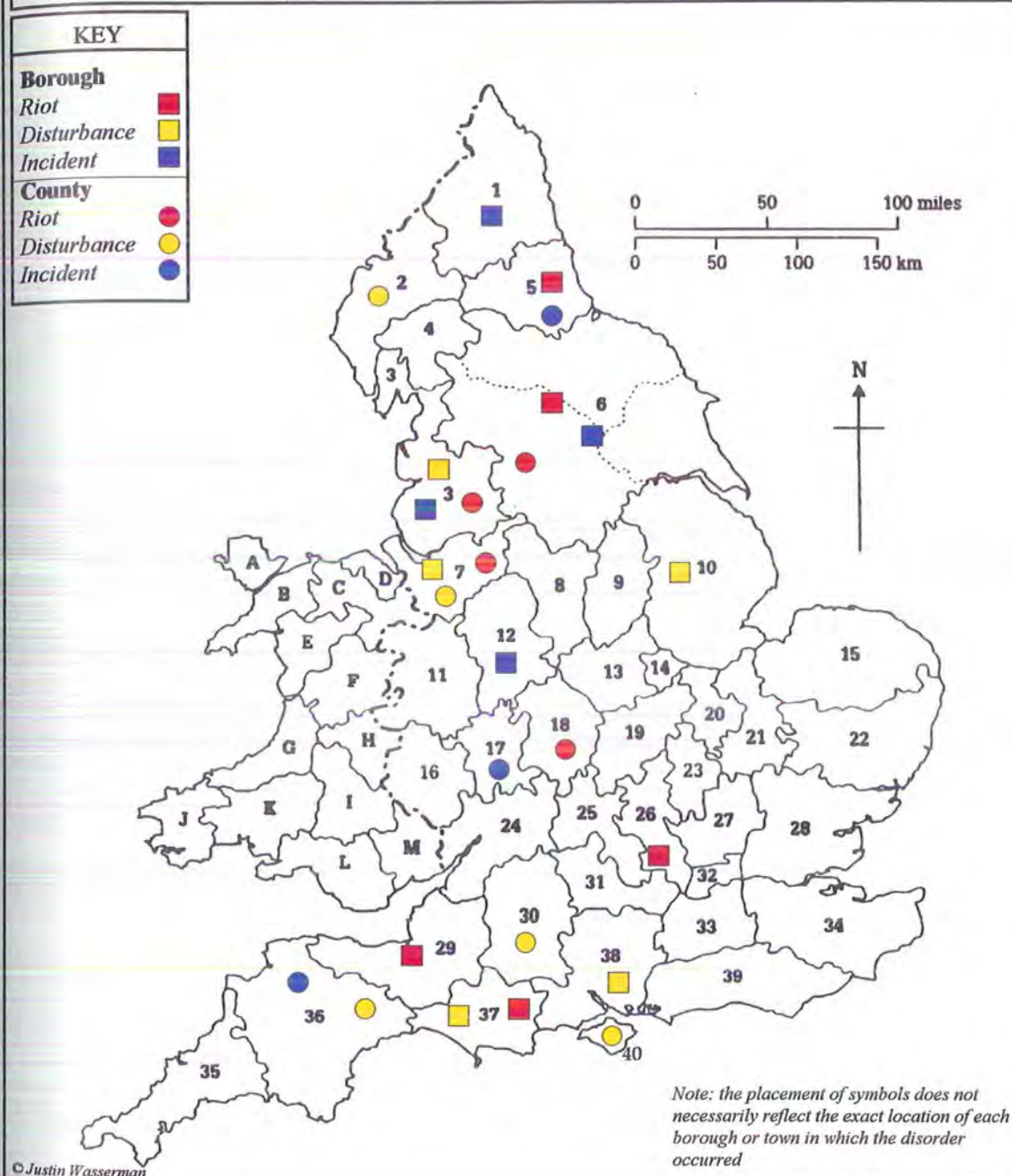
¹¹² *Manchester Guardian*, 7 April 1880, p.6; note this incident is *not* included in the sample as it was a short-lived and largely non-violent event.

¹¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1880, p.7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ William Saunders, *The New Parliament, 1880* (London, 1880), p.230.

Map 6. General election disorder in England and Wales, 1880

**A total of 26 separate cases of electoral violence (no duplicates)****Guide to Counties**

1. Northumberland 2. Cumberland 3. Lancashire 4. Westmoreland 5. Durham 6. Yorkshire 7. Cheshire 8. Derbyshire
 9. Nottinghamshire 10. Lincolnshire 11. Shropshire 12. Staffordshire 13. Leicestershire 14. Rutland 15. Norfolk
 16. Herefordshire 17. Worcestershire 18. Warwickshire 19. Northamptonshire 20. Huntingdonshire 21. Cambridgeshire
 22. Suffolk 23. Bedfordshire 24. Gloucestershire 25. Oxfordshire 26. Buckinghamshire 27. Hertfordshire 28. Essex
 29. Somerset 30. Wiltshire 31. Berkshire 32. Middlesex 33. Surrey 34. Kent 35. Cornwall 36. Devon 37. Dorset
 38. Hampshire 39. Sussex 40. Isle of Wight A. Anglesey B. Caernarvonshire C. Denbighshire D. Flintshire E. Merioneth F.
 Montgomeryshire G. Cardiganshire H. Radnorshire I. Brecknockshire J. Pembrokeshire K. Carmarthenshire L. Glamorganshire M.
 Monmouth.

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1. Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2. Barrow-in-Furness 3. Warrington, Ashton-under-Lyne, Farnworth (S.E. Lancs) 5. South Shields,
 South Durham 6. Pontefract, Hull, Rotherham (S.W. Yorks) 7. Chester, Northwick (Mid-Chesh), Neston (W. Chesh) 10. Lincoln
 12. Lichfield 17. Oldbury (E. Worcs) 18. Leamington (S. Warwicks) 26. Great Marlow 29. Bath 30. Swindon (Wiltsh)
 36. Newton Abbot (E. Devon), Exmouth (N. Devon) 37. Dorchester, Shaftesbury 38. Winchester 40. Shanklin (Isle of Wight)

At Chester the candidacy of F.L.Malgarini led to a riot, owing to Liberal working men believing he was a 'tory decoy' sent to Chester to split the Liberal vote. He appeared at an election meeting wearing "evening dress, white kid gloves and [a] silk hat".¹¹⁶ However after being chased from the meeting he was attacked in the streets and viciously assaulted, his committee-room was trashed and he was forced to leave town before the polling. Chester was an extensively corrupt borough and a subsequent investigation revealed that £9,000 was spent in 1880 treating an estimated 2,000 venal voters.¹¹⁷ The election was ultimately declared void on the grounds of bribery and treating by Liberal agents.¹¹⁸

Following the election 42 petitions were presented of which 28 came forward for trial. The election may have borne the imprint of modernism but it was still largely operating within an older model of politics. The removal of the prohibition on paid conveyances had seen a considerable increase in the practice. Combined with the lack of a legal limit to election expenses and little public condemnation of corruption there was little likelihood that fiscal restraint or electoral morality would be shown. Given the scale of violence in 1880 it is little wonder that Cornelius O'Leary described the campaign as "an unparalleled orgy of extravagance".¹¹⁹

IV

The location of electoral violence across England and Wales is shown in maps 1 to 7 (See Map 7 below). For the 1857 and 1859 elections the maps reflect a scarcity of disorder and the dominance of borough violence.

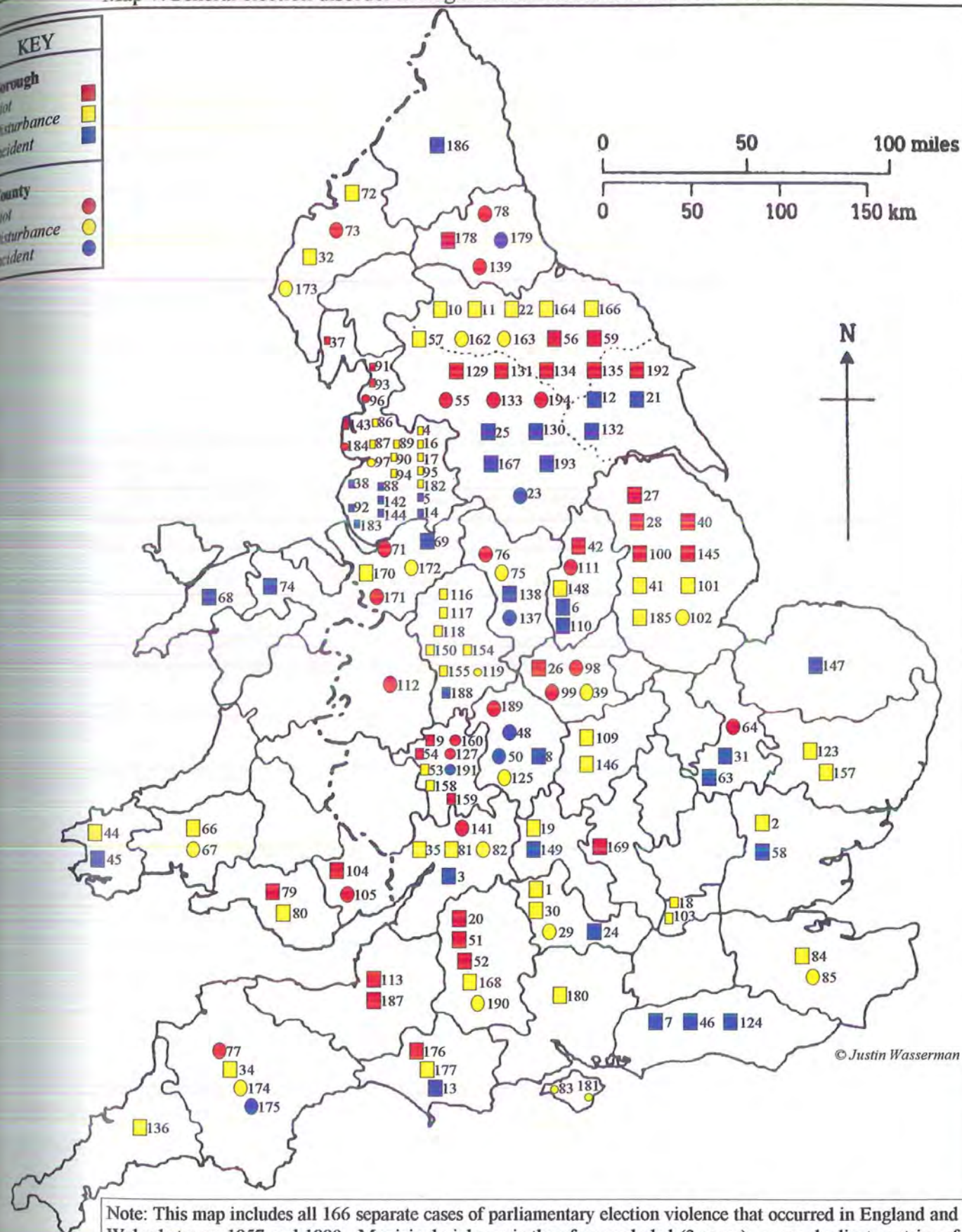
¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.232.

¹¹⁷ O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.136 – 139.

¹¹⁸ HLRO, *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol.135, 1880, "Chester Election Petition", p.313.

¹¹⁹ O'Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p.157.

Map 7. General election disorder in England and Wales Between 1857 and 1880



Note: This map includes all 166 separate cases of parliamentary election violence that occurred in England and Wales between 1857 and 1880. Municipal violence is therefore excluded (3 cases), as are duplicate entries of disorder (25 cases). Each episode of violence in the sample has been numbered (for reference purposes only) and may be located in the appendix.

Map 3 (1865) reveals a notable increase in mid-century violence and establishes a pattern of concentration through the midlands and northern England. The widespread distribution of violence in 1868 is illustrated clearly in Map 4, particularly in Lancashire where there were numerous Anglo-Irish conflicts. Maps 5 (1874) and 6 (1880) show the continued, and widely dispersed, nature of electoral violence in the later half of the period, while map 7 shows the distribution of all 166 separate cases of parliamentary disorder that occurred between 1857 and 1880.¹²⁰ Map 7 reveals two important features of mid-Victorian election disorder: violence occurred at constituencies spread across England and Wales; and the area of greatest concentration was in the west midlands and in northern England. What if any explanations are there for the patterns of violence shown in the maps, and do they shed light on the incidence of electoral violence?

The wide distribution of disorder shown in map 7 reinforces the importance of this study. Election violence was not an isolated or regional anomaly but a nation-wide phenomenon. The sample therefore does not reflect a large amount of violence in a small number of constituencies. Table 13 below reveals the frequency with which individual boroughs and counties experienced violence.

Table 13. The Frequency of Violence at Borough and County Elections, 1857 - 1880
(Excludes duplicate entries of violence)

| Constituency Type | Number of occasions each constituency type experienced violence | | | | | Total Constituency | Total Cases of violence |
|----------------------|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| | 1 case | 2 cases | 3 cases | 4 cases | 5 cases | | |
| Boroughs | 57 | 20 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 83 | 119 |
| Counties | 25 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 47 |

Between 1857 and 1880 a total of 117 English and Welsh constituencies accounted for 166 separate cases of electoral violence. Table 13, which excludes duplicate

¹²⁰ Map 7 excludes all duplicate cases of violence.

entries, shows that disorder was more likely to occur in a new location than an old, with only 10 constituencies experiencing more than two disrupted elections. In England and Wales as few as six counties escaped any form of electoral disturbance: Surrey, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Rutland and Westmoreland all failed to produce a single episode of violence; and in Wales there were no reports of election disorder in Anglesey, Breconshire, Cardiganshire, Flintshire, Merionethshire, Montgomeryshire or Radnorshire. The lack of violence in these districts is largely due to the fact that they included few boroughs, and fewer still of any notable size. The 6 English counties included just 8 boroughs, of which 5 had fewer than 1,000 voters before 1867. In the 7 Welsh counties there were 6 districts, none of which had more than 1,000 voters before 1867. In Wales the scarcity of large boroughs combined with the rarity of contested elections resulted in relatively few cases of disorder until 1868.

Map 7 shows that electoral violence was largely concentrated in the west midlands and northern districts of England. These areas were classified by the 1871 Census (England and Wales) as the West Midland, North Midland, North-Western and York divisions.¹²¹ These four districts accounted for 105 separate cases of violence during the period, compared to 61 cases in the remaining 7 divisions.¹²² The concentration of disorder in these areas can largely be explained by the distribution of large urban constituencies. The point has been made that electoral violence was

¹²¹ The divisions as classed in the 1871 Census were as follows: London (London and metropolitan areas of Middlesex, Surrey and Kent); South Eastern (Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire); South Midland (Middlesex, Herts, Bucks, Oxford, Northamptonshire, Hunts, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire); Eastern (Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk); South Western (Wiltshire, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Somerset); West Midland (Gloucester, Hereford, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire); North Midland (Leicestershire, Rutlandshire, Lincolnshire, Notts, Derbyshire); North Western (Cheshire, Lancashire); York (Yorkshire); Northern (Durham, Cumberland, Northumberland, Westmoreland); Wales (Monmouthshire and all counties of Wales). *British Parliamentary Papers*, Session 1873 (18), LXXI, I, "1871 Census England and Wales, III", p.63.

¹²² If duplicate episodes of violence are added: the first four divisions experienced 123 cases of violence, the remaining 7 divisions experienced 68.

predominantly a feature of large borough constituencies. The midlands and northern districts of England incorporated a considerable number of large boroughs compared to areas which recorded less disorder. Table 14 below outlines the number of small and large boroughs in each of the 11 divisions that constituted England and Wales. The figures for both 1857 and 1880 are included for comparative purposes.

Table 14. Election Violence and the Distribution of Boroughs by Size and Division, 1857 - 1880
(Excludes duplicates entries)

| Division | Cases of Violence | Small Boroughs | | Large Boroughs | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|------|----------------|------|
| | | 1857 | 1880 | 1857 | 1880 |
| West Midland | 26 | 16 | 10 | 11 | 18 |
| North Western | 31 | 3 | 0 | 14 | 19 |
| York | 26 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 13 |
| North Midland | 22 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 9 |
| South Western | 15 | 33 | 24 | 6 | 8 |
| Welsh | 10 | 11 | 3 | 4 | 12 |
| South Eastern | 12 | 18 | 12 | 15 | 20 |
| Northern | 9 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 12 |
| South Midland | 8 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 6 |
| Eastern | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| London | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 7 |

The dotted line in Table 14¹²³ divides the bulk of the divisions from the four that experienced the greatest frequency of disorder. The West Midland, North Western, York and North Midland divisions are characterised by fewer small boroughs and a greater number of large boroughs. By comparison the divisions with the least amount of disorder, South Midland, Eastern and London, had the lowest number of large boroughs. In 1857 the four most disorderly divisions included 33 small boroughs and 39 large boroughs. By contrast the remaining 7 divisions incorporated 82 small and 45 large boroughs. This table reinforces the point that it was in the larger urban

¹²³ In 1857 "small" refers to a borough with less than 1,000 voters and "large" to a borough with over 1,000 voters. In 1880 "small" refers to a borough with less than 2,000 voters and "large" to a borough with more than 2,000 voters.

boroughs that electoral disorder was more likely to occur, and not in the smaller country towns as suggested by Donald Richter. Violence was centred predominantly in the midlands and northern districts due to the concentration of larger boroughs in some of those areas. Thus the South Western division had the most number of boroughs during the period but experienced relatively little disorder because most of those were small in size.

The maps show electoral violence to have been concentrated in the industrial districts of England where the employment of those engaged in, "Art and Mechanic Productions...the textile fabrics and dress...in food and drinks...[and] Animal Substances"¹²⁴ was high and employment in agriculture was generally low. Thus it was in the Black Country, the Potteries, and the cotton, woollen and metal production and manufacturing areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire that much of the disorder occurred. Table 15 below shows the division of labour across the 11 divisions of England and Wales.

Table 15. Explaining the Pattern of Disorder: Labour, Ethnic and Police Statistics

(Includes duplicates)

| Division | Violence | % Employed Industry | % Employed Agriculture | % General Labourers | % Irish Immigrants | Police to Population |
|---------------|----------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| West Midland | 40 | 24 | 7 | 2.5 | 1.4 | 1:1317 |
| North Western | 33 | 31 | 3 | 2.1 | 6.6 | 1:1473 |
| York | 27 | 29 | 6 | 1.4 | 2.4 | 1:1167 |
| North Midland | 23 | 23 | 11 | 1.9 | 0.8 | 1:1200 |
| South Western | 16 | 18 | 12 | 2.4 | 0.7 | 1:1277 |
| Welsh | 14 | 19 | 10 | 3.1 | 1.6 | 1:1658 |
| South Eastern | 12 | 14 | 10 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1:1043 |
| Northern | 11 | 23 | 6 | 2.6 | 4.7 | 1:1176 |
| South Midland | 8 | 19 | 13 | 1 | 2 | 1:1309 |
| Eastern | 5 | 14 | 15 | 2 | 0.5 | 1:1217 |
| London | 2 | 22 | 1 | 2 | 2.8 | 1:268 |

¹²⁴ *British Parliamentary Papers*, "1871 Census England and Wales", p.63.

Table 15¹²⁵ includes duplicate entries of violence to provide a more accurate picture of the scale of Victorian disorder. The table shows the percentages of the population in each division that were employed in industry, agriculture or general labour. The figures are drawn from the 1871 Census. The West Midland, North Western, York and North Midland divisions all recorded high percentages of industrial employees and correspondingly low rates of agricultural employment. Those divisions with fewer industrial and more agricultural labourers generally experienced less disorder. Somewhat surprisingly the figures for "General Labourers" are not higher in the four most disturbed divisions. Given that navvies, lumpers, and colliers featured prominently in electoral riots it is surprising that there is not a greater correlation between this category and the more disorderly divisions. Table 15 shows no obvious link between violence and the presence of general or itinerant labourers. However it is important to remember that these demographic figures do not serve to discount the involvement of particular occupational groups in electoral violence. Rather they provide a means of understanding the general distribution of disorder. The lack of violence in a predominantly rural area does not rule out the participation of agricultural labourers.

A case in point is the involvement of the Irish. Hoppen suggests that during the period "many of the more violent riots...were, in some close or remote manner – connected with the local presence of Irish immigrants".¹²⁶ Certainly contemporary opinion would have agreed with such a verdict and accounts of electoral disorder contain numerous references to Irish involvement. Yet Table 15 reveals that the

¹²⁵ Figures for Table 15 drawn from 1871 Census England and Wales. Those classed as employed in Agriculture included "Persons possessing or working the land, and engaged in growing Grain, Fruits, Grasses, Animals and other Products. Persons engaged about animals." (p.63). General Labourers constituted a sub-division of what was classed an Indefinite and Non-Productive Class and included, "labourers and others – branch labour undefined" (p.63).

¹²⁶ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.605.

pattern of disorder was not necessarily concentrated in areas with large numbers of Irish immigrants. The West Midlands could claim just 1.4% of its population were Irish-born yet it experienced the most cases of disorder. The North Western district, with 6.6%, had the largest Irish population and a high frequency of violent electioneering, yet the same could not be said for the Northern division. Likewise the Irish population of the North Midlands reached only 0.8% yet it was the fourth most disorderly division during the period. Thus the pattern of disorder can not be quantitatively linked to the distribution of Irish immigrants, although in the North Western division it does perhaps account for the scale of violence in 1868, when the issue of Irish Church reform inflamed Anglo-Irish conflict.

Donald Richter asserts that election violence was a feature of small rural towns because "it was there that the absence as yet of any effective policing was most conspicuous".¹²⁷ It has been noted already that violence was overwhelmingly concentrated in large urban constituencies. Yet to what extent did a police presence influence the outbreak of election violence? Throughout the period borough forces remained small and in many cases were bolstered by county reinforcements during elections. The policing of campaigns was a difficult business given the large numbers of people involved and the lack of sufficient trained constables. In 1876 the borough of Blackburn had 80 officers to police 76,339 people, Nottingham had 120 police to 86,621 people and Wolverhampton had just 69 police to a population of 68,291.¹²⁸

Community policing was still in its infancy during the period and the quality of recruits was sometimes questionable. David Large writes that "In the eighties fifties policemen were not infrequently found drunk on duty, failing to carry out all

¹²⁷ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.23.

¹²⁸ *British Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1876, (17) LXI, "Return of Number of Separate Forces of Police in Metropolis, City of London, Counties and Boroughs of England and Wales", p.397.

their beat, taking naps while on duty [or] idling their time away chatting to ladies of dubious reputation".¹²⁹ William Congreve, Chief Constable of the Staffordshire Police, in special orders to his force on the eve of the 1868 general election exhorted his men, "to observe the strictest sobriety, punctuality and attention to orders".¹³⁰ In Hampshire following the general election of 1880 Superintendent Littleton of the County Police was charged with misconduct after being found, "the worse for liquor and unfit for duty".¹³¹ In many instances, however the police were merely outnumbered and unable to prevent crowd violence. At the Harwich borough election in 1857 a mob destroyed the hustings: "notwithstanding the protection of a large body of the county constabulary".¹³² In such cases the local force was supplemented by a military presence. In Nottingham during the 1865 general election a body of special constables and regular police were "not deemed sufficient to keep the peace", and were replaced by a squadron of the 10th Hussars. In 1868 the *Manchester Guardian* reported that during the Newport election in Monmouthshire, "rioters had beaten back the police before the military was called in".¹³³ Nevertheless local forces were not completely ineffectual and where reinforced could prevent the escalation of violence.

It should also be noted that the police were often targeted by election crowds. Police intervention could also lead to an increase in violence, particularly if rioters were arrested. In a study of popular disturbance in the Black Country between 1835 and 1860, D.Philips writes that "The forces of authority, clumsily used, may provoke a crowd and offer it something to unite against, thus turning a disorganised protest

¹²⁹ David Large, "The Municipal Government of Bristol, 1857 – 1901" (Bristol, 1999), p.76.

¹³⁰ Staffordshire Record Office, General Orders of County Police Force, 1865 – 1873, p.367.

¹³¹ Hampshire Record Office, Hampshire County Constabulary Records, General Orders 1879 - 1881, 17th April 1880, pp.32 – 80.

¹³² *The Times*, 30 March 1857, p.8.

¹³³ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1868, p.5.

into a riot".¹³⁴ In North Durham in 1874 a constable's use of his baton against a rioter precipitated a riot in which the prison was attacked and policemen pursued by an angry mob. Richter himself writes that "Where the police constituted a defensible force, they attempted to control the rioting as best they could, but in most instances the crowd attacked them with far greater fury and with more formidable weapons than they the people".¹³⁵ Establishing the role of the police in the incidence of electoral violence is thus problematic. The figures in Table 14 do not reveal an obvious pattern between police numbers and electoral disorder. It is possible that an analysis of police numbers in each borough of each division would provide a different result. Yet such a task is beyond the scope of this study. Given that in some cases police action prevented disorder and in other cases inflamed public opinion, it appears likely that an explanation for election violence based on police presence, or lack of it, is not plausible.

The distribution of disorder shown in Map 7 reveals that election violence was most likely to occur in areas where large, urban conurbations coincided with industrial districts. Large boroughs experienced a greater frequency of disorder because they occasioned more contests, a vital pre-requisite for election violence. The politics of small rural constituencies were often more tightly controlled by patron influence or corruption, thus limiting the opportunity for an open contest. Furthermore small boroughs were less likely to possess the highly organised party associations more common in larger constituencies. Such organizations could act as an engine for partisan enthusiasm and thus conflict. Areas with a high density of industrial employment recorded high levels of disorder possibly due to the concentration of

¹³⁴ Philips, "Riots and Public Order", p.171.

¹³⁵ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.24.

labour in a single area. There are numerous examples of factories closing early on the polling day, disgorging into the street crowds of machine operatives keen to enjoy a half-day within the carnival atmosphere of a contested election. Norman Gash, in writing of election disorder argued that "In the big industrial towns the poorer class formed the raw material for mob riots".¹³⁶ However the identification of those who participated in electioneering violence, and their motives for doing so, is a less precise enterprise and one not revealed by the maps or through statistical analysis.

V

Sprinkled very thinly here and there, you might find a few fighting men, but the great majority are labourers bent on rough play, and with nothing else in view than 'a lark' and in far larger numbers you may count the disreputable idlers who frequent low public-houses and the corners of dirty streets. As regards this last class, their physical powers are in direct proportion to their intelligence and sobriety.¹³⁷

A survey of those involved in election disturbances is necessarily anecdotal. The sources available which might be used to compile a profile of participants in crowd violence do not often provide detailed lists of rioters' occupations, social status, ethnic or religious background. In many cases individual details were subsumed in favour of generalised labels such as 'mob', 'crowd' or 'roughs'. However it seems clear that the majority of election crowds were made up of non-voters; women, children and men unenfranchised by virtue of their socio-economic status. Participation in such events was not exclusive though, and there is evidence that voters could and did become involved in violence. Contemporary descriptions of rioters ranged from the common to the extraordinary. In Carmarthenshire a number of Conservative 'lambs'

¹³⁶ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.143.

¹³⁷ *Nonconformist*, 19 July 1865, p.584.

were led by, "the leading professors of fistiana in the neighbourhood".¹³⁸ The *Bristol Daily Post* in 1868 commented that "at every Tory gathering which takes place organised gangs of the flat-nosed, close-cropped genus are found regularly marshalled, frowning defiance at all who hesitate to bow down before the Blue rag".¹³⁹ Newspaper articles usually provided descriptions of rioters only when criminal charges had been laid, or when participants were regarded as unusual either because of their sex or social position. Election petitions, police reports and Home Office correspondence also provide limited details of the identity of rioters. However a survey of these sources can provide some insights into the composition of violent election crowds.

To contemporary observers at least there was no doubting the social make-up of election 'mobs'. When in 1867 the *Bradford Observer* wrote, "to whom [do] we owe it that the fountains of the great deep of ruffianism were, as it seemed, broken up," they did not question *who* had been involved. It was, in their words, "these sons of Belial, flushed with insolence and beer," or more specifically, "the spume of the inns and pothouses for miles all round".¹⁴⁰ Frequently blame fell on the ubiquitous 'rough', although fistmen, bludgeon-men, lambs and ruffians were all drawn from the 'lower orders' or the 'poorer classes'. Indeed Victorians identified a 'dangerous class' to whom they attributed much of the violence of the period. This class was commonly seen as a product of the large, industrial cities which were viewed as "breeding grounds of both physical and social disorders".¹⁴¹ John Stevenson writes that "Violence was the product of a residuum which remained to be brought under the

¹³⁸ *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 28 November 1868, [page unknown].

¹³⁹ *Bristol Daily Post*, 13 November 1868, p.2.

¹⁴⁰ *Bradford Observer* quoted in *Nonconformist*, 19 July 1865, p.584.

¹⁴¹ Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances*, p.299.

ameliorative influences of Victorian philanthropy".¹⁴² Thus disorder was popularly viewed as the preserve of particular groups such as the Irish or itinerant labourers. In 1868 the *Boston Gazette* blamed members of "the lower class" for an attack which destroyed the hustings,¹⁴³ and violence in Staffordshire in 1868 was credited to, "the lower class of voters, who had been drinking too freely".¹⁴⁴

Historians of English crowd violence have likewise attributed disorder to specific ethnic or occupational groups. Richter focused on the 'labouring classes' for whom, "the prospect of happy relief from the dreary responsibility of their pedestrian lives in a boisterous outburst...was too appealing to resist".¹⁴⁵ Gash looked to the 'poorer classes' in the industrial cities and in the smaller boroughs, "the England of the luddites and chartists...could usually provide the dissolute, the lawless, the unemployed, the professional bully, to carry out the will of any one with money and influence".¹⁴⁶ Hanham writes that corruption too was blamed on the residuum in the big towns, "where the dregs of the population tended to accumulate".¹⁴⁷ Certainly all such groups were included in reports of election violence. Yet our impression of Victorian rioters should not be restricted to a 'rabble' of idle and lawless labourers or malcontent Irish imports. Indeed a surprising cross section of society appeared within contemporary accounts of disorder.

The involvement of general labourers in election violence was frequently recorded. Numerous reports of riots included descriptions of navigators or 'navvies'. These were Irish or Scottish labourers employed to work on the canals and waterways of England. Their participation in violence seems often to have been organised and

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.300.

¹⁴³ *Boston Gazette*, 21 November 1868, [page unknown]

¹⁴⁴ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 21 November 1868, p.6.

¹⁴⁵ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.25 – 26.

¹⁴⁶ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.142.

¹⁴⁷ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.264.

even bought. In Bristol in 1868 the Tories were accused of hiring "a regular army of... 'navvies' drawn from the dock works, to spread terror amongst the peaceably disposed citizens".¹⁴⁸ In Lyme Regis a large number of navvies were brought in from Axminster during the 1859 borough election to hold up their hands for the Conservative candidate on the nomination day.¹⁴⁹ And at Shanklin on the Isle of Wight in 1880 a body of navigators employed at the harbour invaded a Liberal meeting and fought with those present.¹⁵⁰ Colliers, miners and factory workers were also notable participants; in Blackburn it was "the great ruffians of the mills" who initiated violence. The riotous contribution of factory operatives was recognised by William Congreve, Chief Constable of Staffordshire, in a letter to the Home Office in 1874.

I might also point out the inexpediency of closing works employing a large number of hands for the whole or part of the day at such times of excitement. This was done by several firms on the present occasion, and was the means of adding largely to the crowds of idle and disorderly persons.¹⁵¹

However mob violence was not restricted to unskilled or semi-skilled labourers. Artisans and tradesmen were included in transcripts of election trials and investigations. In Ripley in 1868 a moulder and a butcher gave evidence of their involvement in an electoral riot. A shoemaker from Cambridge was charged with the manslaughter of a porter from Christ's College after a fatal election disturbance in 1868. Those charged following the vicious riot at Kidderminster in 1857 included, "a forge man, a mason, a pump-maker, a weaver, a boatman, an umbrella maker, a

¹⁴⁸ *Bristol Daily Post*, 24 November 1868, p.2.

¹⁴⁹ *The Times*, 3 May 1859, p.8.

¹⁵⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1880, p.7.

¹⁵¹ Staffordshire Record Office, Reports of Staffordshire Chief Constable, 1859 – 1887, Letter to Home Office, 2 April 1874.

butcher, an innkeeper, several publicans, a railway contractor, a beer-house keeper, a corn-dealer and a town councillor".¹⁵² The *Coventry Weekly Times* also described the crowd that attacked Robert Lowe as consisting of, "numerous tradesmen...the most violent appearing to be bricklayers, masons and stonecutters".¹⁵³ During the Bristol riots in 1868 a druggist was charged with inciting a Conservative crowd to violence, and a large body of working men organised to protect Liberal voters was comprised, "for the most part of stalwart artisans".¹⁵⁴ In some notable cases members of the commercial or business class were reported as being prominent in disorder. A young man charged with breaking windows during the riot in Kidderminster in 1857 was described as, "apparently in the situation of a clerk, and decently attired",¹⁵⁵ while at Haverfordwest in 1868 a number of 'roughs' were allegedly, "urged on by a few respectably dressed 'men of business'".¹⁵⁶ However the participation of urban professionals was most likely exceptional.

Though Table 15 failed to show a clear correlation between the distribution of Irish immigrants and the outbreak of disorder, the Irish were often reported as being prominent during moments of election violence. During the period they were specifically identified as being involved in riots or disturbances in Ashton-under-Lyne, Blackburn, Bolton, Bradford, Bury, Farnworth (S.E.Lancashire), Newport (IoW), Preston, Warrington, Wednesbury, Wigan and York. This should not be considered an exhaustive list of Irish involvement in rioting. To this list should be added any case in which navvies or dock workers were recorded as both groups included Irish immigrants. The Irish were not always reported as having initiated

¹⁵² *Berrows and Worcester Journal*, 18 April 1857, p.8.

¹⁵³ *Coventry Weekly Times*, 15 April 1857, p.2.

¹⁵⁴ *Gloucester Journal*, 21 November 1868, p.7.

¹⁵⁵ *The Times*, 4 April 1857, p.10.

¹⁵⁶ *Carmarthen Journal*, 13 November 1868, p.5.

outbursts of violence, and in many cases they found themselves the targets of violent crowds. Following the close of the poll in Wigan in 1868 a body of Tory colliers attacked Irish homes and commenced a riot.¹⁵⁷ The defeat of two Conservative candidates in South East Lancashire in 1880 precipitated similar scenes in which, "the wearers of the blue...invaded the Irish district", smashed windows and fought with the police.¹⁵⁸ Contemporary accounts of crowd violence also recorded the presence of professional fighters or pugilists. In a number of cases these men headed election crowds. In July 1865 the *Cheltenham Examiner* reported the actions of a Conservative crowd led by "James Paul, a pugilist, and James Burge, a member of the same 'honourable fraternity'".¹⁵⁹ And during the Wednesbury borough election in 1868 a "party of prize-fighters" in the Conservative interest fought with the Irish.

Women appear to have been willing and enthusiastic participants in election violence. Throughout the period both women and children feature consistently in the records of electoral disorder. Bohstedt writes of female involvement in English riots between 1790 and 1810, arguing that women were most prominent in food riots yet were virtually absent from political riots.¹⁶⁰ However by the middle of the century women were recorded as participating in a number of electoral disturbances. In Warrington in 1880 a violent election crowd included "a great many Irishwomen and female factory operatives", while a fisherman who voted for the Tories at Carmarthen in 1868 was "assaulted by a band of female viragos".¹⁶¹ In Boston the nomination in 1868 was disrupted by a body of "women, girls and boys", all of them apparently from a local factory.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1868, p.6.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 7 April 1880, p.6.

¹⁵⁹ *Cheltenham Examiner*, 12 July 1865, p.2.

¹⁶⁰ Bohstedt, "Gender, Household", pp.88 – 122.

¹⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1880, p.5; and *Carmarthen Journal*, 20 November 1868, p.6.

¹⁶² *Boston Gazette*, 21 November 1868, page unknown.

VI

The origins of electoral disturbance were rarely straightforward or obvious. Violence could be the direct outcome of corruption either as organised intimidation or as the end product of excessive treating, or it could be the result of popular opposition to a candidate or his supporters. Isolating the motives of riotous crowds is a largely speculative process. An election riot could be caused by a number of factors that might only come to light under sustained local analysis. A comprehensive survey of all cases of disorder in the sample is obviously beyond the scope of this study. However Chapter IV includes four case studies which highlight the sometimes complicated, often parochial nature of electoral disturbance. For the bulk of the sample there are usually only brief media accounts to rely on or the findings of election petitions. In some cases a motive for violence is suggested while in others no explanation is given. Thus in Nottingham in 1857 a disturbance was blamed on Chartists who were “disappointed that their nominee had not been elected”,¹⁶³ whereas in 1865 the only explanation offered by the *Times* for violence in Kidderminster was: “Here as usual great excitement prevailed...this was all that could be ascertained out of the borough for the mob became riotous (as usual) and smashed the telegraph wires.”¹⁶⁴

Hoppen suggests that “*much* (my emphasis) of the English election violence of the period” was related to bribery and corruption. Yet he goes on to suggest that ‘letting off steam’, “might well be the most accurate description of what went on at the majority of English elections”.¹⁶⁵ Hoppen’s comments echo those of Richter who

¹⁶³ *The Times*, 28 March 1857, p.7.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1865, p.9.

¹⁶⁵ Hoppen, “Grammars”, p.607.

suggests that not all cases of election violence were attempts to influence the outcome of the polling. Rather he suggests that "many of the most serious disorders...were spontaneous outbursts of sheer ebullience".¹⁶⁶ Both studies subscribe to the idea that participation in riots was often pursued merely as a form of working-class entertainment. Richter writes that "the magnetic attraction of excitement for its own sake cannot be minimized, especially in an era notoriously deficient in public amusements".¹⁶⁷ It is certainly true that Victorian elections were popular events and occupied a position roughly analogous to that of modern sporting events. However this interpretation of violence strips the phenomenon of any meaning within the context of electoral politics. What is left is the motiveless, boredom-driven outburst of an overworked industrial populace. Such a reading renders irrelevant any examination of the process of political modernisation in the light of continued election violence.

Yet the premeditation and organization of many riots in targeting specific people, places and events suggests that discounting election violence as purely "enjoyable circuses" is premature. Richter asserts that "For the labouring classes the prospect of happy relief from the dreary responsibility of their pedestrian lives in a boisterous outburst for which they would, in all probability, incur no personal responsibility, was too appealing to resist".¹⁶⁸ Yet the deficiency of public amusements in the Victorian era is debatable. Various studies of popular recreation during this period have suggested a gradual improvement in leisure opportunities and facilities. Peter Bailey writes that growing concern for social order and public health in the 1830s and 1840s led to the promotion of 'rational recreation' for an

¹⁶⁶ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.25.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.26.

increasingly industrial and urban population. This movement represented attempts by the middle class to reform and 'improve' popular modes of recreation for the 'labouring classes'. He writes that "popular recreations were to be improved, not through repression, but through the operation of superior counter-attractions".¹⁶⁹ Robert Malcolmson may have concluded that the public house was the most important "recreational centre for the common people,"¹⁷⁰ but other alternatives were gradually becoming available. H.E.Meller writes that in Bristol the provision of public baths, botanical gardens, tennis courts and football pitches dated from the 1860s,¹⁷¹ and in Bradford David Russell found that by 1830, "popular recreation...was taking on a more 'modern' aspect".¹⁷²

During the early Victorian period the working population of Bradford could choose from a variety of entertainment options including musical performances, regular travelling theatres and circuses and various village fairs and feasts. In addition he argues that "it must be remembered that the public house itself was not merely a source of drink and company, but acted as a focus for such diverse activities as music, botany, geology, cricket and bowls".¹⁷³ In Blackburn in 1841 the mill owners Hornby and Kensworthy opened a gymnasium for their employees which "provided for football, tennis, skittles and quoits among other pastimes".¹⁷⁴ The factory picnic or trip also became increasingly common during the second half of the century. There is no suggestion that the Victorian working class were spoiled for choice in terms of leisure time or amusements. And certainly many popular forms of

¹⁶⁹ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the contest for control, 1830 – 1885* (London, 1978), p.170.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700 – 1850* (Cambridge, 1973), p.171.

¹⁷¹ H.E.Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870 – 1914* (Cambridge, 1976), p.112.

¹⁷² David Russell, "The Pursuit of Leisure" in D.G.Wright and J.A.Jowitt, *Victorians Bradford: Essays in Honour of Jack Reynolds* (Bradford, 1982), p.200.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Derek Beattie, *Blackburn: The Development of a Lancashire Cotton Town* (Ryburn, 1992), p.118.

recreation such as cockfighting, dog fighting, bear baiting and coursing were violent in nature. In the field of mass entertainment too there was little development until the advent of organised sport later in the century. Yet as David Russell writes, "there can be no doubt that the Victorian age saw a massive expansion of recreational opportunity for a community better endowed in terms of money and free time than their immediate ancestors".¹⁷⁵

The improvement of recreational choice during the period brings into question the idea that much of the electoral violence of the period was the product of boredom. Indeed the scale of violence at each general election was the product of various converging influences: great political issues divided communities along lines of race and religion; contested elections galvanized highly politicised electorates and raised the temperature of partisan enthusiasm. In addition the inadequacies of both electoral scrutiny and community policing allowed wealthy candidates and unscrupulous agents free reign over the stage of electoral politics. Thus ambition and opportunity increased the likelihood of corruption and with it the spectre of organised intimidation and violence. Mid-century elections were public spectacles and popular entertainment as well as a mechanism for electing parliamentary representatives. The public casting of votes until 1872, lengthy campaigns, centralised polling and long-established traditions of bribery and treating further undoubtedly exacerbated the excitement and ritual of contested elections, and in some places this led to the outbreak of physical violence.

¹⁷⁵ Russell, *The Pursuit of Leisure.*, p.217.

Chapter V

Constituency Case Studies

I

The evidence presented in Chapter IV demonstrates the often serious and widespread nature of mid-Victorian electoral violence. Yet how far are the general trends shown in the tables, statistics and maps representative of what was occurring within individual constituencies? A closer examination of the causes of election disorder provides a means of testing conclusions drawn from quantitative evidence. So the following case studies allow a close insight into the character of English electoral culture, and a grass-roots perspective of the complexities that lay behind episodes of election violence.

The chosen constituencies represent, as far as is possible for such a small number, the range and diversity that existed within the English and Welsh electoral systems. Four constituency-types are included in the case studies including: one small borough, two large boroughs and one county.¹ The boroughs are drawn from mid-western, north-eastern and northern districts of England, while the county is drawn from the south of Wales. The comparative lack of county violence during the period accounts for the single county case study, whereas the three English boroughs represent the most common type of constituency during the period. The four constituencies include: the small mid-western borough of Kidderminster; the large north-eastern borough of Lincoln; the large northern borough of Bradford; and the sprawling south-coast county of Carmarthenshire.

Kidderminster in Worcestershire was a small proprietary borough with a population of 15,399 in 1861 and an electorate that numbered just 612 prior to the Second Reform Act of 1867. In the 1850s Kidderminster was largely reliant on a

¹ The boroughs are described as 'small' or 'large' according to the size of their electorates. "Small" includes boroughs with less than 1,000 voters before 1867 and less than 2,000 after; "Large" refers to boroughs with more than 1,000 voters before 1867 and over 2,000 after 1867.

single, struggling industry: carpet manufacture. The large borough of Lincoln was the county town of Lincolnshire, with a population of 20,999 (1861) and a pre-1867 electorate of 1,713. During the 1850s and 1860s Lincoln was emerging as a semi-manufacturing town in the centre of an agricultural district. The much larger urban borough of Bradford in Yorkshire was the centre of the English worsted industry and the global textile trade. In the 1860s the town had a population in excess of 100,000, and an electorate that leapt from 5,189 to 21,518 as a result of the Second Reform Act of 1867. Carmarthenshire was the third most populous county in Wales with an 1871 population of 115,710 and an electorate of more than 8,000. Although the county remained predominantly agricultural during the period, some mineral exploitation near Llanelli saw the development of a fledgling mining industry.

II

Kidderminster

The mob came up, and though Mr. Lowe was bleeding, his white hair dabbled in blood had no effect on them – they kept pelting him with cowardly ferocity and the most horrid imprecations.

Worcester Herald, 4 April 1857.²

The violent scenes that engulfed the Kidderminster election of 1857 would have surprised few contemporary Englishmen. This small proprietary borough in the west of Worcestershire was no stranger to corruption and disorder, and as the election campaign unfolded the likelihood of violence became a certainty. The contest was fought between Robert Lowe, the unpopular and aloof Liberal member and Vice President of the Board of Trade, and William Boycott, a popular local solicitor and Conservative manufacturer. Arrayed against Lowe were many of the town's non-voters, disgruntled unemployed and part-time weavers who were victims of the town's economic depression. They were as bitter at Lowe's ignorance of their condition as they were angry at his refusal to treat and bribe them. In the five years since his election to the borough Lowe had alienated himself from the constituency. An almost blind albino he had compounded his natural ability for upsetting people with a complete disregard for the borough he represented, thus when the polling day dawned on 28 March 1857 all the ingredients were present for the outbreak of serious violence.

² *Worcester Herald*, 4 April 1857, p.6.

Robert Lowe was not long returned from Australia when in 1852 he was offered the chance to contest the borough of Kidderminster. During his eight years in Sydney Lowe had earned a reputation as an eminent lawyer, politician and scholar. He was prominent in local politics and while a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council had campaigned successfully for the abolition of imprisonment for debt (1843) and the establishment of a national school system (1847). He also opposed the squatters' claims for "land aggrandizement", and through his journal the *Atlas* lobbied for responsible government and local control of colonial land. In 1848 he was elected as a popular candidate for one of Sydney's two seats in the legislative council. Despite his nomination by the city's tradesmen Lowe was not a champion of working class political aims. He was opposed to class legislation and manhood suffrage, and his refusal to support either would win him no friends among his constituents. When in 1849 he announced his decision to return to England there were few in Sydney who mourned his departure.³

Upon his arrival in England Lowe began work as a barrister on the Northern Circuit and contributed articles to *The Times*. His eloquence as a critic of Russell's colonial reforms brought him to the attention of a faction of Whigs opposed to the government. Through Joseph Parkes, the Whig election agent, they endeavoured to find him a seat in the Commons. In 1852 Lowe was introduced to Lord Ward who, Parkes knew, "could deliver the liberal vote in the Worcestershire town of Kidderminster".⁴ Ward was a Whig and a large investor in that town's struggling carpet industry. He was the architect of a recent coalition of Whigs, Radicals and Tories concerned about corruption and working-class militancy in the borough, and was searching for a liberal candidate who supported free trade and parliamentary

³ Michael Stenton (Ed), *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament* (Hassocks, 1981), pp.135-136.

⁴ James Winter, *Robert Lowe* (University of Toronto Press, 1976), p.67.

reform, and who was “not closely associated with either the Palmerston or Russell factions”.⁵ Lowe was certainly a free-trade Liberal but he was opposed to parliamentary reform and the extension of the franchise. On these points of principle Parkes convinced him to remain silent, at least for the moment, and Ward gave him his support. On 7 July 1852, despite being a complete stranger to the borough and pitted against a popular local candidate, Lowe was elected by a majority of 94 votes.

Unfortunately for Lowe his inability to compromise on political principles would bring him into conflict with his new constituency almost immediately. He was, as his biographer states, an intelligent man and an eloquent and forceful speaker; he was also “arrogant and inflexible, he did not bend to meet changing circumstances nor would he compromise with principle; conciliation was a word unknown to him”.⁶ It was only a matter of time before his true political colours were shown. His election as a popular candidate in Australia was well received by Kidderminster’s Radicals, yet unknown to them Lowe had refused to assist Sydney’s unemployed in their efforts to obtain welfare from the government. His opinion on the evils of charity would gain immediate relevance as Kidderminster slid into economic depression. Furthermore the influence of his patron was far from assured. Ward’s interest in borough politics was not due to his pre-eminence as a territorial magnate, or even his contributions to the town’s carpet mills. His influence rested on a compromise that depended on Lowe’s ability to please the various elements of the coalition. As such his silence during the debates on Lord Russell’s Reform Bill in 1852 did not go unnoticed by the Radicals.

In the 1850s Kidderminster was a volatile town with a recent history of class conflict, corruption and strike-related violence. Indeed at the election of 1841 the

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.137.

Liberal candidate Ricardo Samson reportedly spent £4,000 in one week, an exorbitant sum, and still lost to Richard Godson (Peelite) – albeit by a paltry twelve votes.⁷ In the 1850s Kidderminster was a small constituency with an electorate that numbered just over 500 voters in 1857. Carpet weaving, the dominant industry in the borough since the eighteenth century, was hard hit by an economic downturn during the Crimean War. The old carpet mills were also facing increasing competition from mechanised factories in the north. Wages were down and the number of unemployed weavers was growing. James Winter writes that “the people of Kidderminster were easily provoked to riot because their livelihoods were dependent on an industry which was particularly sensitive to any fluctuations in the economy”.⁸ Violent disturbances during strike action in 1853 and 1854 underlined the seriousness of the situation.⁹ The borough’s reputation for corruption was the result of a political struggle between Kidderminster’s traditional oligarchy (Conservative) and the emerging elites of the carpet industry (Liberal).

The compromise engineered by Lord Ward in the 1850s ensured that all but 160 of the borough’s 502 voters would support the coalition’s candidate. Robert Lowe’s election in 1852 without recourse to corruption undoubtedly put him on a collision course with those in the borough who were accustomed to receiving electoral ‘compensation.’ The town’s parlous economic condition, and Lowe’s seeming ignorance of his constituency’s plight, only added to an atmosphere of hostility towards the sitting member. His opposition to the extension of the Factory Act in 1853, which would have reduced the hours of carpet weavers, added to his unpopularity amongst the town’s unenfranchised. Furthermore his failure to give

⁷ Winter, *Robert Lowe*, p.157.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁹ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/5244 [A]. September 1854 – Strikes and disturbances provoked by importation of blackleg labour. H.O.45/5128 [B] (f.59-81). July 1853 – Request for military assistance due to strikes and unemployment situation.

willingly to local charities also told against him. In 1855 the Mayor's relief fund was keeping more than 200 families from starvation, yet applications to Lowe for assistance were met with miserly donations and lectures on the futility of charity and welfare.¹⁰ In 1855 Lowe's appointment as Vice President of the Board of Trade created a by-election in Kidderminster, and he was opposed by William Boycott, a local Conservative solicitor. Boycott's candidacy revealed first hand Lowe's unpopularity with the unemployed weavers. Violence was avoided only after Boycott withdrew from the contest, presumably due to the strength of Lord Ward's coalition. Lowe was elected unopposed but the signs were ominous for the peace of future elections.

William Boycott opposed Lowe again in 1857 and his election campaign skilfully exploited the sitting member's weaknesses. He gave generously to charities, addressed issues of local importance such as the price of bread and unemployment, and used his position as Alderman on the town council to criticise the Whig-Tory compromise that kept Lowe in power. Throughout the campaign he played on Lowe's unpopularity and contributed to a considerable amount of popular antipathy towards him. Lowe's local standing was further handicapped by his association with his patron and James Pardoe, the local Liberal leader. Lord Ward was a large investor in the town's newest carpet mills, and the power looms of his factories required fewer employees, while Pardoe was the manager of the town's largest carpet factory and head of the Liberal association in Kidderminster. He was also the chairman of Lowe's election campaign and the man who nominated him. His factory survived the depression and competition from mechanised mills by reducing wages. Consequently

¹⁰ Winter, *Robert Lowe*, p.141.

Lowe's principal supporters included two men who had contributed to both Kidderminster's unemployment level and the reduction of wages. It would not be exaggerating to say that on the eve of the election the Liberal camp included some of the town's most unpopular personalities.

For his part Lowe continued to blunder through the campaign. His election addresses ignored local issues and concentrated on Palmerston's foreign policy towards China. Indeed his only concession to the issue of unemployment was to recommend an increase in the flow of emigrants to Australia, hardly a suggestion calculated to improve his popularity! He was opposed by the town's publicans because he had refused to support their petition in 1855 for an extension to the Sunday trading hours. As a result, during the campaign the majority of Kidderminster's 150 public houses became focal centres for Boycott supporters. Furthermore his cross-party support had effectively ended the lucrative practice of treating in the borough. His unwillingness to play the part of 'beer lobbyist' earned him a dangerous enemy in the publicans. His biographer A.P.Martin characteristically blamed the beer interest for much of Lowe's unpopularity.

Further it may be remembered Lowe had opposed some Beer Bill in the House, while his pointed remarks on the malt tax and the brewing interest were not likely to be forgotten at election time in a borough blessed with such a superfluity of pothouses.¹¹

Lowe's public addresses failed to improve his position. At one noisy election meeting he lost his temper and called the crowd 'children' for not allowing him to speak. A local lawyer later commented that "the employment of the term 'children' towards the electors was calculated to irritate and annoy them and to excite the feelings of the

¹¹ Martin, *The Life and Letters*, p.157.

populace against that gentleman".¹² At the nomination an estimated crowd of 5,000 people chanted cries of 'children, children' at the sitting member and nothing could be heard beyond the hustings. This was probably just as well for Lowe chose this opportunity to reveal that he had been offered £16,000 in expenses to contest the borough of Manchester. His motives in explaining this offer, and his refusal to accept it, may have been calculated to demonstrate his loyalty to Kidderminster. Yet the arrogance with which he addressed the issue, as reported by the press, seemed rather to suggest that he could do without the borough if he so chose. At any rate the crowd were spared the details as "the uproar continued so great that the right honourable gentleman was compelled to desist".¹³ The show of hands was overwhelmingly in favour of Boycott, and a poll was demanded on behalf of Lowe for the following day. In anticipation of disorder the Mayor had earlier added seventy 'special constables' to the regular borough force of twenty, and their presence was almost immediately required, for several fights broke out as the nomination ended and more occurred as the evening progressed. That night there was an attack on the Swan Inn after it was rumoured that Lowe's supporters were holding several voters there against their will.¹⁴ As the election day dawned there must have been few in the town who believed that the polling would pass off quietly.

The polling day was fixed for a Saturday and the polling was relatively peaceful until the mills closed at two o'clock. Up to that time there had been little confrontation between voters and the unenfranchised, and only a small crowd was gathered around the principal polling booth on Blake-way Green. Once the factories shut, however, the crowd began to swell until an estimated 6,000 people surrounded the hustings.

¹² *Berrows and Worcester Journal*, 18 April 1857, p.8.

¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 March 1857, p.5.

¹⁴ Winter, *Robert Lowe*, p.143.

The *Manchester Guardian* reported that if a voter was known to be a Liberal, “the mob assailed him with groans and execrations, spat upon him, kicked and cuffed him, and subjected him to the most dastardly ill-usage.”¹⁵ Robert Lowe remained inside the polling booth for the entire day, whereas William Boycott visited periodically to loud cheers of support. The Whig-Tory-Radical compromise held firm, though, and when the result was made known at four o’clock Lowe was declared victorious by 88 votes.

The already volatile situation rapidly deteriorated and soon the mob began to pelt the polling booth with stones and pieces of brick. Boycott and his supporters allegedly offered Lowe and his committee safe passage through the crowd but they refused, ostensibly because they believed the disturbance was organised.¹⁶ Amid cries of “throw them out”, “kill the pink-eye” and “pitch the ----- out”,¹⁷ Boycott stood on the hustings and urged the crowd to disperse. He was ignored and soon after left the hustings and walked through the mob unharmed. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the departure of Boycott and his supporters “was a signal to the cowards surrounding the booth, and instantly missiles of every description, stones, brickbats, pailings and even penny pieces, were thrown at Mr.Lowe and his friends”.¹⁸

It soon became apparent that the polling booth was too dangerous a refuge. Those police constables and ‘specials’ still inside formed a ring around Lowe and his friends and they attempted to escort him through the mob. Their progress was followed by a shower of stones, so that after just one hundred metres all were injured in some way. Their passage forward was blocked and they were forced to take shelter

¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1857, p.4.

¹⁶ Winter, *Robert Lowe*, p.143.

¹⁷ *Coventry Weekly Times*, 15 April 1857, p.2. (word omitted in original source)

¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1857, p.4.

in the home of Reverend Sheppard, principal of the town's Grammar School. A local newspaper commented on what had awaited the group further down the road.

In the street called the Battery, a deep hollow way through which Mr. Lowe and his friends were to pass, heaps of stones were piled on the terrace, which would have done fearful execution. Water was kept boiling, and sinister expressions left but little doubt of the horrible use to which it was to be put; and buckets of filthy liquid had been accumulated to be discharged on the passengers below.¹⁹

Once inside the house Lowe was found to have sustained a fractured skull and serious bruising. Few of his supporters had escaped unhurt. Outside, the mob turned on the policemen and those 'specials' who had not already fled. A constable named Jewkes was dragged into the house "in a state of insensibility",²⁰ and he later died in hospital of his injuries. Shortly afterwards the mob decided that their prey had escaped to the Albert Inn and they "defiled into the town, amusing themselves by the way with occasionally smashing windows, insulting every well-dressed person they met, and lustily yelling 'Boycott for ever!'"²¹ Robert Lowe was smuggled out of town at eleven o'clock just as another disturbance threatened in front of the Lion Hotel. A body of fifty hussars from Birmingham arrived, however, and after the Mayor read the Riot Act the crowd were eventually dispersed, but not before smashing more windows and attacking any Liberals brave enough to show their faces.

The local newspapers provided full, and often conflicting, accounts of the rioting and of the trial that followed. The *Coventry Weekly Times* reported that Boycott's supporters had offered Lowe their assistance in leaving the polling booth, whereas the *Worcester Herald* wrote that Boycott had left the area despite being requested to stay

¹⁹ *Berrows and Worcester Journal*, 11 April 1857, page unknown.

²⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1857, p.4.

²¹ *Ibid.*

and calm the mob. The *Herald* quoted the Conservative candidate as saying, "Mr. Lowe and his friends might take care of themselves".²² There was also confusion over the involvement of certain prominent townspeople. Two of William Boycott's principal supporters, Alfred Talbot and Henry Chellingworth, were prosecuted for their role in the violence. Talbot was charged with leading a mob to the hustings and urging them to riot. The prosecution accused him of bringing to the hustings a crowd of people, "of different appearance to the carpet weavers".²³ Several witnesses also testified that they had heard Talbot say "go it lads" prior to the mob stoning the polling booth. Paradoxically, he was also later reported as being present with Lowe when he was stoned by the very crowd he was supposed to have incited. He also contributed £50 to a fund that was established to prosecute those arrested for attacking Lowe.

Chellingworth was similarly charged with inciting the crowd. During the trial a witness testified that he had laughed at the violence and had commented, "let everyone have a taste".²⁴ His sympathy with the rioters may have been due to his involvement in corrupt practices, as he was a local contact for the Conservative chief whip and had been involved in organising votes. In 1859 William Jolliffe wrote of Conservative chances in Kidderminster that "Mr. Chellingworth says Mr. Huddleston can get in for £500".²⁵ However the evidence against both men was circumstantial and based on conflicting testimony. The charges were eventually dismissed for lack of evidence. Indeed most of those charged with riotous offences escaped with suspended sentences after witnesses refused to come forward. James Winter writes that "Witnesses against Boycott's associates were, in some cases, jeered at in the

²² *Worcester Herald*, 4 April 1857, page unknown.

²³ *Berrows and Worcester Journal*, 18 April 1857, p.6.

²⁴ *Worcester Herald*, 18 April 1857, page unknown.

²⁵ [S]omerset [R]ecord [O]ffice, DD/HY/24 Unbundled Items, The political papers of Sir William Jolliffe, *A List of English Boroughs with names of Parliamentary Candidates and Notes, 1859*, p.202.

streets, threatened and beaten up, and when the case came to trial, the prosecutors discovered that they had insufficient evidence to make a case".²⁶ The list of warrants issued for participation in the riot included a wide cross-section of the town's population, including some who were presumably voters. Those prosecuted included 2 forge-men, 2 masons, 2 weavers, 2 innkeepers, a pump-maker, a boatman, an umbrella maker, a butcher, a railway contractor and several town councillors. There were also reports of large numbers of bricklayers and carpenters involved in the fighting. Women were also prominent; one witness stated that "there were many women there who had collected stones in their aprons, in the corners of their shawls, and in baskets".²⁷

Blame for the riot has been variously apportioned. Lowe's contemporary biographer laid responsibility for the violence at the feet of those who wished to return the borough to its corrupt past. He argued that the mob disliked Lowe because he had deprived them of "all the fierce excitement of an uncertain and hotly contested fight, during which some thousands of pounds would be spent in their midst".²⁸ He also blamed the introduction of a mob hired for the purpose of starting trouble. There is certainly evidence to suggest that this occurred. Many townspeople commented on seeing strangers in the borough on the polling day, some with cards in their hats. Reverend Sheppard remarked that "the great majority of the men immediately assailing Mr. Lowe and his friends were not from Kidderminster".²⁹ While it is possible that this was an attempt to protect the town's reputation, the result of the polling suggests that some voters at least may have been intimidated. Lowe's supporters had certainly expected a larger majority at the polls. It is likely that the

²⁶ Winter, *Robert Lowe*, p.144.

²⁷ *Coventry Weekly Times*, 15 April 1857, p.2.

²⁸ Martin, *The Life and Letters*, p.173.

²⁹ *Worcester Herald*, 4 April 1857, page unknown.

violence of the mob deterred some voters from polling. Lowe himself seems to have favoured this interpretation of events, not least because it absolved him of any personal responsibility in provoking the riot. When in 1859 he declined to contest the borough due to an adverse canvass, he blamed the forces of corruption, "Even to the Tories and the parsons it can be no source of permanent gratification to see the town fall back into the slough in which it had been for so many years wallowing when we pulled it out".³⁰

John Winter has described the riot in Kidderminster as an example of 'class conflict.' He writes that the stones which fell on Lowe's head "were painful reminders that the latent power of demos was beginning to awaken inside as well as outside Great Britain".³¹ Certainly Lowe's association with the town's factory managers and his patron made him a target for working-class frustrations, and yet he was frequently singled out by the mob for special attention despite the presence of James Pardoe in the crowd. This, as well as the personal taunts and abuse hurled at Lowe, suggest that personality as well as class conflict was at the core of the disturbance.

The events in Kidderminster in 1857 reveal the complex interplay of personalities and issues that characterised small borough elections in the mid-Victorian period. The contest demonstrated the predominance of local concerns over national political issues: Lowe's focus on Palmerston's foreign policy and his unwillingness to engage adequately with local issues therefore lost him popular support. His ignorance of the town's needs and his impatience in dealing with the subtleties of constituency electioneering alienated him from the bulk of Kidderminster's population. His seat

³⁰ Martin, *The Life and Letters*, p.173.

³¹ Winter, *Robert Lowe*, p.137.

was never in any danger as long as the Whig-Tory-Radical coalition remained unified. Yet the violence of the mob demonstrated the danger that politicians faced by ignoring the unenfranchised and their allies. Lowe's reduced majority reflected the power of the rioters to influence the outcome of the election, and although the popular candidate failed to be elected the results highlighted the weakness of Lord Ward's coalition in the face of popular pressure. Lowe recognised as much in the wake of the coalition's demise in 1859. In a letter outlining his retirement from the borough after the Conservatives decided to promote their own candidate, Lowe wrote, "I never for a moment doubted Lord Ward's goodwill...unfortunately his power is not equal to it".³²

Ultimately the violence in 1857 was the result of a combination of economic, social and political factors. In the popular mind Lowe had failed his constituency by ignoring the extent of its economic difficulties – his alliance with the employers of the town's carpet factories did nothing to improve his standing amongst the working men and the unemployed. He further alienated himself from powerful interests in the borough, who then worked hard to campaign against him. It is impossible to know whether part of the mob were hired to create a disturbance, although it is likely that any outside involvement only added to the scale of the violence. The extent of popular resentment towards Lowe and his principal supporters, and the borough's past history of disorder, meant that violence was always likely to occur. And given the ferocity of the mob it was fortunate for Lowe that he managed to escape with his life.

³² Martin, *The Life and Letters*, p.173.

III

Lincoln

The Polling — Commenced at eight o'clock on Wednesday morning...The 'fair and legitimate influence,' so frequently alluded to by the Liberals during the contest, had, during the past week, been exercised in a most extraordinary manner, many cases of gross intimidation and open bribery having been brought to our notice.

Lincolnshire Chronicle, 14 July 1865.³³

Lincoln city elections during the mid-nineteenth century were remarkably disorderly even by the standards of the period. Violence and a disregard for civic authority seem to have been perennial features of Lincoln elections, and serious rioting occurred there in 1847, 1852, 1862, 1865, 1868, 1874 and 1880. The riots that followed the by-election of 1862 and the general election three years later in 1865 therefore form part of an established pattern of disorder in this ancient borough. Radical non-electors were the principal and repeat offenders in Lincoln. In 1847 drunken radical supporters of Charles Seely (Radical) kidnapped voters on the eve of the poll, in 1852 a radical mob stormed the election headquarters of G.F.Heneage (Whig), and in 1865 they attacked the hotel of the defeated Tory candidate J.Bramley Moore and attempted to set fire to its doors. The violence of these years reflected the growing strength of radical opinion in Lincoln after 1850, and was the result of conflict between the town's established political hierarchy and an emerging commercial class of reformers and Dissenters.

³³ *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 14 July 1865, p.7.

In 1861 Lincoln had a population of just over 20,000 and an electorate of 1,713. Despite being the county town and the venue for the annual assizes, the borough had little influence over Lincolnshire politics. No member for the borough had ever been elected to a county seat and no county interest intruded on borough politics. Lincoln was an ancient cathedral town and as the seat of a bishopric the influence of the clergy was strong in the borough. Both the gentry and the clergy supported the Tories who were established in the borough's first seat. Conservative domination in the borough was also the product of bribery. Colonel Sibthorp, the eccentric Tory member for Lincoln between 1835 and 1856 was said to have retained his seat through extensive treating. Prior to 1865 the Whigs held the city's second seat through a combination of support from Conservatives and the majority of the £10 householders created in 1832. However the mostly lower middle-class householders were likely to support Liberal or Radical candidates as they became available, and by the early 1850s they were becoming increasingly impatient with the Whig-dominated Liberal Association. The borough's 690 resident freemen were also an important equation in Lincoln elections as their politics were largely determined by pecuniary considerations. The Great Reform Act of 1832 removed about 1,000 non-resident freemen from the borough, as well as introducing the £10 householder franchise. The changes increased the electorate from 1,233 to 1,713 voters, but failed to improve the tone of electioneering in the borough. The resident freemen remained and proved as venal as their disfranchised cousins.³⁴

Political conflict in Lincoln coincided with the city's economic development. Though still an important market town for the surrounding countryside, in the 1840s Lincoln was emerging as a significant industrial centre. In 1842 the iron foundry of

³⁴ J.W.F.Hill, *Victorian Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1974), pp.14 – 37. The freemen were largely implicated in the election petition of 1847 as having received bribes in return for voting for Charles Seely, Radical.

Clayton and Shuttleworth opened and in 1846 the Midland Railway connected Lincoln to Nottingham and the rest of the country. Only a decade later the borough was described by a countryman as having become a "semi-manufacturing town in the centre of an agricultural district".³⁵ As Lincoln's manufacturing industry grew so did the political aspirations of a new generation of commercial men. These newcomers included maltsters, ironmasters and corn merchants, many of whom were Dissenters, and were commonly Liberal or Radical. They found themselves in competition for local leadership with the Whigs and Tories who had combined in the 1840s over defence of the corn laws. The political divide in Lincoln, between the Whig-Tory element and the Liberal-Radicals was a bitter one, and between 1832 and 1884 only three borough elections went uncontested. The Radicals were unable, however, to make much progress in borough politics due to the strength of the Whig-Tory compromise. It was not until 1868 that the Liberals were able to capture both seats, and that was largely due to the fact that the Conservatives failed to field a candidate, after years of control of one seat.

In the 1840s and 1850s, therefore, on both the town council and in borough politics the established Whig-Tory compromise faced an emerging Liberal-Radical challenge. The municipal divisions of the city were divided between the Whigs and Tories, who controlled the upper and middle wards, and the radicals who held the lower wards. These political alignments were reflected in the borough elections, and it was often the case that parliamentary battles were really extensions of municipal conflicts. In 1847 the borough election was declared void after a petition uncovered widespread treating and bribery. This petition marked the only occasion between 1832 and 1884 that an election result was disputed in Lincoln, and it demonstrates

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2 [Reference to Peacock MS in Hill's possession].

both the strength of the liberal split in the borough and the nexus between municipal and parliamentary politics.

The 1847 election was a four-way contest between the incumbent Tory members Colonel Sibthorp and William Collett, and two Liberals E.G.B.Lytton (Whig) and Charles Seely (Radical). Sibthorp was an old fashioned Tory and a strong advocate of the agricultural interest. Collett was a banker, a railway investor and the owner of a slate mine in Ireland. Both men were elected in 1841 when feeling ran high over the corn laws, and it would prove the only time that the Conservatives would capture both borough seats. Lytton was a Whig in the reforming interest who had been Member for Lincoln between 1832 and 1837. While originally in favour of the corn laws his changing views on free trade did not endear him to the Tories. In 1847 his position was weakened further by his support of the new Poor Law. Lytton's principal supporter was William Rudgard, an influential local maltster and a former Mayor of Lincoln. Rudgard was an opponent of Seely's on the Town Council and the two had clashed repeatedly, most recently over sewerage reform. Charles Seely, who was Mayor of Lincoln in 1840, had emerged as the borough's leading radical in the early 1840s. He was the son of a London baker and a partner in a local corn merchant and miller firm. A wealthy, arrogant man who doggedly pursued a borough seat, Hill writes that in his determination to be elected he "made no attempts at conciliation; he quarrelled with the Whigs, and even his friends regarded him as selfish".³⁶ When he took over the mayoralty in 1840 he snubbed Rudgard's retirement dinner. As opponents on the town council Seely and Rudgard transferred their political enmity to the parliamentary contest.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

Ultimately Sibthorp was returned at the head of the poll, and Seely was elected ahead of Lytton and Collett. In the victory procession that followed drunken radical supporters dragged an effigy of Rudgard through the streets of the city. A petition was soon brought forward against Seely on the grounds that voters had been treated and bribed, and Rudgard was prominent amongst the petitioners. Lincoln city was no stranger to electoral corruption. Certainly no political party held the moral high ground during elections, and borough campaigns were frequently characterised by allegations of corruption levelled by one side against the other. However cooler heads commonly prevailed before a petition was brought forward, as it would not do to have the borough investigated and possibly disfranchised. Given, therefore, that corruption was not a recent phenomenon in the borough, and that no petitions had previously been presented, it is hard not to judge that personal animosity informed the 1847 election petition. Seely and Rudgard's political quarrel on the town council had thus spilled into the parliamentary arena, resulting in the very dangerous presentation of an official inquiry into Lincoln electioneering. The borough was not disfranchised, but Charles Seely was unseated and the investigating committee concluded that "a system of treating has for a long time prevailed in the city of Lincoln".³⁷

The evidence uncovered by the election petition does provide an interesting insight into the mechanics of mid-century electoral corruption. It appears that on the polling day Seely's agents were involved in offering meals and drinks to willing supporters. A witness, who was a freemen voter, described how he and several friends were met at the train station by two men named Emmerson and Gresham. They were then conveyed to the Black Goats Inn and treated to a drink and a meal. The committee inquired as to what followed,

³⁷ *House of Commons Journals*, 1846-47 (296), XIII, Select Committee on Lincoln Election Petition, Minutes of Evidence, p.5.

After drinking there some time do you remember going up to the poll?

– Yes.

Who did you poll for? – *For Sibthorp and Seely*

At the time that you went up to poll from the Black Goats, did your friends from Bramston go with you? – *We all went together; four of us.*

Did anyone take you up to the poll? – *Emmerson and Gresham went into the polling booth with us.*³⁸

These particular voters were subsequently taken to the George and Dragon where they were treated to porter and ale and two glasses of rum each. The following day they returned to the city to receive 18s each. A number of freemen voters also testified that they were treated at the Black Goats Inn. The process of corruption, at least in Lincoln, appears to have been an organised and disciplined affair. From the public house to the polling booth voters were shadowed by electoral agents who scrutinised their vote and then ‘compensated’ them accordingly. Even more surprising is that the bribes were not expected to ensure a plumper for Seely, as his agents equally provided treats to those who split their vote between Sibthorp and Seely. This arrangement likely suited Seely because neither Lytton nor Collett benefited. It does, however, reveal how desperate he was to be elected; something he failed to do in 1847 as his election was declared void due to bribery.

As in Kidderminster, election violence in Lincoln owed more to local conflicts than to national pressures. Indeed R.J.Olney writes that Lincoln was “not easily influenced by reports of agitation in London and the provincial capitals”.³⁹ Violence in Lincoln was the product of local tensions and local antagonisms. The by-election of 1862 was the result of a decision by the sitting member, G.F.Heneage (Whig), to contest the Lincolnshire borough of Grimsby. Incidentally his move there proved disastrous as he was both defeated and caught in the middle of a serious riot. Lincoln’s vacant seat

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21

³⁹ R.J.Olney, *Lincolnshire Politics, 1832 – 1885* (Oxford, 1973), p.4.

was contested by J.Bramley Moore (Conservative) and J.Hinde Palmer (Liberal). Palmer, a local barrister, was the popular candidate as he supported both the ballot and the extension of the franchise. He was supported by the iron foundry interest of Clayton and Shuttleworth, which gave him the backing of the town's radical non-electors but little else. Moore was a Liverpool merchant and ship owner. He was a staunch Tory and could count on the support of the borough's gentry and clergy. His election committee also included William Rudgard who had previously backed the Whig candidate Lytton. Moore was an unpopular candidate, possibly because he was a stranger to the borough, and his campaign was marred by allegations that he had profited from slavery. His denials obviously proved unconvincing and at the nomination, "Mr Bramley Moore was met with groans and hooting".⁴⁰

Given the borough's record of electoral disorder it is little wonder that city authorities viewed the pending contest with apprehension. In early February a public petition was presented to the Lincoln magistrates seeking an assurance that precautions would be taken regarding the election. The Mayor of Lincoln, John Torry, promptly wrote to the Home Secretary to "secure the attendance of a detachment of the military, or of an efficient body of Police Constables...on the day appointed for the election".⁴¹ Subsequently a force of some 100 constables from the County Police were drafted into the borough for election duty. They bolstered the borough force which numbered just 23 men, yet their presence was ultimately to prove both a blessing and a curse.

The election was a close-run event and Moore defeated Palmer by just 25 votes, precisely the number accredited to Rudgard's influence. In the wake of the declaration a crowd gathered outside Moore's election headquarters and began

⁴⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1862, p.3.

⁴¹ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7319 (f.2). "Letter from John Torry to Home Secretary, 9th February 1862".

breaking windows and assaulting the police. When the city Police intervened they were stoned and those who were arrested were promptly rescued by the crowd. The County Police were brought up and ordered to clear the streets, though no attempt was made to read the Riot Act. Apparently they were excessively rough in the execution of their orders, and many complaints were lodged about the degree of force used by the 'rurals'. A local newspaper described the riot in which "several persons were struck severely over their heads and bodies by the police...and many of the police were much injured. Many women and children who had congregated around the Guildhall were thrown down and trampled upon by the mob".⁴²

The involvement and behaviour of the County Police in the borough were deeply resented by the townspeople, and their departure from the town the following day signalled a resumption of the violence. This time the Mayor's house was attacked, apparently in retaliation for ordering the County Police into the city. Curiously the rioters were polite enough to allow the Mayor's wife and children time to leave the house before they "commenced breaking the windows with stones and bludgeons, and before they were satisfied that they had done a sufficient amount of damage scarcely a whole pane of glass was left in the house".⁴³ At length the military were summoned but they arrived only after the rioters had dispersed. Colonel Amcotts, the High Sheriff, anticipated further rioting and wrote to the Home Secretary that "a vindictive spirit has been awakened amongst the [rioters]...and reliable information has been received that they intend to use violence to attack the home and perhaps the life of the Chief Constable".⁴⁴

⁴² Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7319 (f.25). "Letter from Phillip Bicknell, Chief Constable of Lincolnshire, to Home Secretary, 15 February 1862". [unnamed local newspaper enclosed in letter].

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7319 (f.32). "Letter from Weston Cracroft Amcotts to Home Office, 15 February 1862".

Both the Mayor and the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire were later to blame the escalation of violence on the rioters' resentment of the County Police. However that may have just been an excuse for further rioting. At any rate the political bias of the perpetrators was obvious. The houses of Charles Ward and William Marshall were attacked, and both men were supporters of Moore. William Rudgard's house was also targeted though the crowd were prevented from reaching there. It is likely that many of the rioters were employees of the various iron foundries, the involvement of Clayton and Shuttleworth in the riots being particularly overt. They were stopped in the street by the High Sheriff during the riot, and warned that they would be held responsible for any personal injuries inflicted by the crowds.⁴⁵ Whatever their degree of complicity in the violence they were responsible for ending the rampage. A local newspaper reported that the rioters were met on the road by "members of Mr. Palmer's committee", which included Shuttleworth, who "addressed the excited throng [and] drew them away from any further mischief in that locality".⁴⁶ These allegations of bias and involvement in the riots by the iron foundries were discounted by the ironmaster John Ruston at a public meeting following the election. Certainly the extent of control that the ironmasters had over the mob is questionable, as during the riot Palmer's committee rooms were also attacked.

The Lincoln crowds would not have to wait long for another opportunity to riot. The General Election of 1865 proved an unwelcome case of *déjà vu* for the city. In a repetition of events in 1862 the Mayor's house was attacked and Moore found himself again besieged in his hotel by an angry crowd. The Liberals were in a strong position in the months leading up to the election. The borough's two sitting members Charles

⁴⁵ Hill, *Victorian Lincoln*, p.34.

⁴⁶ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7319 (f.25). "Letter from Phillip Bicknell to Home Secretary, 15 February 1862". [unnamed local newspaper enclosed in letter].

Seely (Radical) and Moore (Conservative) stood in defence of their seats, and the Liberals brought in a second candidate in the person of E.Heneage (Whig). The Conservatives did not field a second candidate. Heneage's father had been a member for Lincoln between 1852 and 1862. He favoured liberal solutions to the question of church rates and the extension of the franchise, and stood as a supporter of Palmerston.⁴⁷ Rioting was anticipated and the new Mayor of Lincoln, Richard Harvey, organised a detachment of Kings Hussars to be present in the borough. This decision instantly made him unpopular with the radical rioters, and both Seely and Heneage later denounced the presence of the military as an insult to the city.

On the polling day voting was brisk at the borough's eight booths. The foundries were closed and the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* described how "the streets were filled with ardent admirers of the several candidates, the Radical section becoming in the course of the afternoon, so excited that the tradesmen of the city took the wise precaution of closing their establishments".⁴⁸ Amid allegations that the Liberals had bribed and intimidated voters, Moore failed to retain his seat, being defeated by 105 votes. Seely was elected at the head of the poll, closely followed by Heneage. At the declaration Seely described the attendance of the soldiers as "an unnecessary act on the part of the Mayor".⁴⁹ Heneage complimented the crowd on their good behaviour and then called on them "to show by not kicking up a row that they did not require any soldiers to keep them in order".⁵⁰ His speech was greeted with loud cheers and laughter, but that evening a serious riot broke out and a great deal of damage was done. The rioters, who were mostly radical non-electors tried to set fire to the doors

⁴⁷ Hill, *Victorian Lincoln*, p.35.

⁴⁸ *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 14 July 1865, p.7.

⁴⁹ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7691 (f.58). "Extract from Seely's speech sent to Home Secretary by Richard Harvey, 14 July 1865".

⁵⁰ *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 14 July 1865, p.7.

of Moore's hotel.⁵¹ This time the Riot Act was read and the soldiers were called out to restore order. In a letter to the Home Secretary after the election Richard Harvey lamented the mob's propensity for violence.

In the election of 1862 the then Mayor John Torry's authority was disregarded, his house partially demolished and he himself had to seek safety by flight, and I the Mayor of 1865 have had my house injured, and my windows smashed, and but for the timely arrival of the military I do not doubt but that it would have been gutted and personal violence afforded to myself and family.⁵²

Although the troops proved more restrained than the County Police in 1862, their conduct was also called into question. Heneage accused the Captain in charge of the Hussars of allowing "a parcel of drunken [soldiers] to gallop (sic) on the footpath and indiscriminately cut at everyone".⁵³ There was obviously some truth to these allegations as Harvey himself had been concerned for the soldiers' sobriety. He even visited their inn at four o'clock on the morning after their arrival to prevent any sale of liquor to them. He told the Home Office that he remained there until nine o'clock, "so that I might be sure they would enter the Barracks, and be placed without interruption, under the immediate command of their own Officers".⁵⁴ The basis for Seely and Heneage's criticisms of the Mayor are difficult to discern. There was little likelihood that Seely and Harvey had opposed each other on the town council. Both men were municipal reformers and had voted together over the adoption of the Local Government Act of 1858.⁵⁵ Perhaps they realised that the presence of the military had provoked the anger of the parochial Lincoln crowds. At any event Harvey's response to the allegations that he had acted improperly was to ask the Home Office to

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7691 (f.43). "Letter from Richard Harvey to Sir G.Grey, 20 July 1865".

⁵³ *Ibid.*, (f.64). "Letter from Captain E.Walker, XVth Kings Hussars to R.S.Harvey, 15 July 1865".

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, (f.43). "Letter from R.S.Harvey to Sir.G.Grey, 20 July 1865".

⁵⁵ Hill, *Victorian Lincoln*, p.167.

establish an impartial inquiry into the riots. However there is no record that such a commission was ever established, and ultimately the Lincoln magistrates upheld his actions.⁵⁶

The advent of Reform in 1867 and the triumph of Liberalism at the 1868 General Election failed to curb the riotous instincts of Lincoln's radicals. In 1866 the prospect that Gladstone's reform bill would raise the borough electorate to 1,377, of which 62% would be working class, cheered the radicals into believing they could throw off the Whigs for good.⁵⁷ However the defeat of Gladstone's government, in which the Whig E.Heneage played a part, resulted in public protests and a widening of divisions between Whigs and Radicals. In 1867 a Tory government passed the Second Reform Act and the borough electorate rose to 4,157. It was obvious that working-class voters would now dominate the constituency. Both Seely and Heneage were put forward by the Liberal Association in 1868, although the inclusion of the latter upset the new voters. Large public meetings were organised at which Palmer was endorsed as a popular candidate. In the confusion surrounding which Liberal candidate would be officially supported Heneage withdrew from the contest. The Conservatives failed to field a candidate for the first time, perhaps in recognition of the fact that the power of the clergy and gentry was likely to be swamped by a tide of working class voters. Seely and Palmer were therefore elected unopposed, only the second such outcome in the borough since 1832. The election of 1868 must certainly have been one of the purest elections in the borough's recent history. The new working class voters had effected the defeat of the Whigs without recourse to their newly found privilege of voting.

⁵⁶ Home Office Disturbance Papers, PRO Class H.O.45/7691 (f.45). "Letter from Lincoln magistrates to Home Office". The letter states that "the Mayor is entitled to the confidence of the Bench of Magistrates for the manner in which he has acted and that an expression of such confidence in the Mayor is hereby accorded to him".

⁵⁷ Hill, *Victorian Lincoln*, p.35.

Palmer himself knew nothing of his election until it was thrust upon him. He had been nominated in absentia and was elected without being aware that he was even in the running. He found himself Member for Lincoln without contest, without expense and without consultation.⁵⁸ The election of two Radical members resulted in celebrations that soon led to disorder. Hill writes that “a vast crowd occupied the centre of the city for hours, and lighted tar barrels rolled about for two nights, the police office and the chief constable’s house were wrecked”.⁵⁹ The *Boston Gazette* reported the cost of the riot as in excess of £300; £200 for damage and £100 for the hire of special constables.⁶⁰ Similar scenes followed the elections of 1874 and 1880. The military and borough police were called out in both cases to restore order. In 1874 the riots were likely sparked by Seely’s victory over Palmer, the former having made himself unpopular with the working class in a dispute with the iron foundry.⁶¹ In 1880 both Seely and Palmer were returned amid allegations that the Liberals had resorted to bribery.

If the Kidderminster case study highlights the frailty of a patron’s influence and the fury of the unenfranchised mob, then the Lincoln study reveals the complexities that underlay the outbreak of election disorder and the continued relevance of corruption in mid-Victorian electioneering. Both case studies demonstrate the parochial nature of constituency politics and both reveal the dangers that politicians faced by ignoring the sensitivities of non-voters. Whereas in Kidderminster violence was directly related to personality and local economic concerns, in Lincoln violence was the outcome of partisan conflict, corruption and public resentment of authority. The

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁶⁰ *Boston Gazette*, 28 November 1868, [page number’s not provided].

⁶¹ Hill, *Victorian Lincoln*, p.189.

Lincoln mob's predisposition towards violence was the result of political frustration and militant parochialism. Radical non-electors were mobilised to violence through political impotency in the face of the Whig-Tory compromise. Furthermore Lincoln's geographic remoteness was compounded by a developing industrial character that alienated it from the surrounding rural countryside. This sense of isolation was manifest in the violent resentment of outside interference in borough affairs. Not for nothing were the County Police in 1862 derisively termed "rurals". Thus the Lincoln case study affirms the view of mid-century English elections as being largely framed within a local context and little influenced by national political issues, characterised by local and personal antagonisms, occasionally disorderly and even violent, and retaining a propensity for corruption and the exercise of influence.

IV

Bradford

A considerable number of people were very much hurt; pieces of iron were thrown about that were very sharp in the points, and a good many people were cut in the faces, and one man had his eye cut out.

Bradford by-election riot, 1869.⁶²

Bradford was an archetypal industrial city of Victorian England. During the nineteenth-century rapid economic growth in this West Riding borough had transformed a previously small provincial town into a sprawling urban metropolis. By the middle of the century Bradford's adoption of mechanised fabric manufacture had placed it at the head of the English wool industry, and at the centre of the global textile trade. Between 1801 and 1861 Bradford's population increased from 13,264 to 103,778, and the borough electorate grew from 1,139 in 1832 to 21,518 in 1868. In the 1850s Bradford was regarded as the national centre of religious dissent, and the city could boast the third highest urban population of Nonconformists in the country.⁶³ As in many other boom towns of industrial England politics in the borough were largely dominated by men of entrepreneurial zeal and wealth; the champions of the new liberal economic zeitgeist.

And yet Bradford was no stranger to electoral malpractice, and borough electors faced similar types of 'extra-political' pressures brought to bear upon the Lincoln and Kidderminster voters. Even after 1867 Bradford's electoral managers

⁶² *Parliamentary Papers*, 1868-69, VIII, 'Report from the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections', p.145.

⁶³ Tony Jowitt, "The Pattern of Religion in Victorian Bradford" in D.G.Wright and J.A.Jowitt (eds), *Victorian Bradford* (Bradford, 1982), p.37.

continued to supplement newer forms of political organization with more traditional means of persuasion. Corruption and undue influence were common in borough elections, and no Bradfordian contest was complete without the liberal flow of free beer from the city's numerous public-houses. In 1867 and 1869 violence in the borough was linked to the re-emergence of local sectarian conflict and to the disintegration of a mid-century political consensus.

In the 1850s Bradford was dominated by a political equilibrium that united moderate Liberals, Radicals and free-trade Tories under the banner of progressive bourgeois liberalism. Edward West, the Mayor of Bradford in 1868, described the state of party politics thus: "We are a Radical constituency, we are not Whigs and Tories; it is merely a division among the Liberals. The Conservative element, of course, is there to aid the one side or the other, whichever they choose".⁶⁴ This consensus was made possible by the economic prosperity of the 1850s, and a softening of the Church-Chapel confrontation of the 1840s. Despite the strong presence of working-class Radicalism in the borough a, "Tory-Whig-Liberal Moderate element discouraged the election of Advanced Radicals".⁶⁵ This political consensus normally ensured that Bradford's two parliamentary seats were shared by a 'near-Tory' and a moderate Radical. A consequence of this arrangement was the lack of contested elections: between 1851 and 1865 only 2 out of 6 parliamentary elections went to the polls, in 1852 and 1859. The 1852 general election exemplified the mid-century consensus, with the borough electorate divided between a Whig-Liberal, Richard Milligan, and a free-trade Tory, Henry Wickham. The sitting Radical member, T.P.Thompson, lost his seat after Catholic voters deserted him over his support of the Ecclesiastical Titles

⁶⁴ 'Report from the Select Committee,' 1868-69, VIII, p.145.

⁶⁵ Jack Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist: Titus Salt and the Growth of Nineteenth Century Bradford* (Bradford, 1983), p.194.

bill. Milligan was elected at the head of the poll with Wickham 107 votes behind. Despite standing as a Conservative, Wickham's free-trade credentials and defence of the First Reform Bill gained him vital moderate Liberal support. He defeated Thompson by just six votes, and went on to hold the seat until his death in 1867.

Yet even amidst the apparent congeniality of Bradford borough politics there was still room for more direct methods of electoral coercion. Edward West told the Hartington Committee in 1869 that treating was notorious in the borough and that "it has been the usual practice in all elections".⁶⁶ Both municipal and parliamentary elections were open to corrupt practices. Samuel Storey, a stuff merchant and town councillor, told the Hartington Committee that at Bradford municipal elections, "there were the usual meetings at public houses, and beer more or less given out in the way of refreshments".⁶⁷ Both Edward West and Samuel Storey's evidence to the Committee provides an interesting insight into contemporary perceptions of electoral corruption and electoral law. Storey condemned what he saw as an increase in bribery and treating after 1867, urging that the law be amended to ensure that corruption at municipal elections carried the same penalties as at parliamentary elections. He stated that bribes had been paid at the 1868 municipal election with a view to influencing the parliamentary contest.

I believe that the municipal election was largely used as a means of influencing the Parliamentary election which had to take place a fortnight afterwards; there is a general feeling that they can do anything at the municipal elections; they can bribe or treat and are not responsible for anything of that sort.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ 'Report from the Select Committee,' 1868-69, VIII, p.148.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.141.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.142.

Mayor West, however, believed that the law which dealt with treating was “almost too severe”, and remarked that “I do not think that [treating] has been viewed as corruption in days gone by”.⁶⁹ His comments reflected contemporary public opinion of those suspected of electoral malpractice. Prosecutions and convictions for corruption were relatively rare as electoral offences were often viewed as only mild infractions of the law. West testified that legal action against corrupt practices was uncommon in Bradford because “public opinion will not support a man in prosecuting anybody for conduct of that description”.⁷⁰

Intimidation was a well-established practice in Bradford by the late 1860s, and few contests passed off without some allegations of undue influence being exercised over the vulnerable part of the electorate. Samuel Storey believed that a “very intimidating influence” was brought to bear upon the borough’s factory workers by, “overlookers and foremen in the various establishments”.⁷¹ However the working-class voters and the unenfranchised were not without their own weapon of influence; the shop boycott. Edward West stated that small shopkeepers and tradesmen suffered as badly as factory employees. He testified that they, “have more need of protection than the lower class; our working men are very independent, and generally speaking, they are quite independent of their masters”.⁷²

Bradford was certainly no stranger to electoral violence or working-class agitation during the nineteenth century. There were serious riots at the 1835 and 1841 general elections, and the borough was a regional centre of Chartist activity in the 1840s. However by 1850 the economic prosperity that paved the way for Bradford’s political consensus had contributed to the easing of class conflict. Elections

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.146.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.146.

subsequently became less likely to engender the bitterness of the 1830s, and the occurrence of only two contested elections between 1850 and 1867 further lessened the likelihood of serious violence. The disorder that attended the elections of 1867 and 1869 thus marks the period at which the mid-century consensus began to fail.

The late 1860s witnessed the re-emergence of sectarian conflict between Anglicans and Dissenters. The efforts of the Liberation Society further fuelled the bitterness of the Church-Chapel confrontation, and the resulting polarisation of party politics signalled the end of the liberal consensus. This period witnessed the gradual cohesion of Bradford Conservatism, with the formation of the Conservative Working Man's Association in 1866 and the Conservative Association in 1867.⁷³ The Second Reform Act further contributed to the weakening of the consensus. Post-1867 the borough electorate was increased from 5,189 to 21,518. This massive increase represented the enfranchisement of a large number of working-class voters. The Bradford Liberals reorganised themselves to meet the demands of this new electoral environment. Various local Liberal organizations such as the Registration Society, the Reform Union and the Reform League were subsequently replaced by the new Liberal Electoral Association, formed in January 1868. The immediate effect of these changes was the destabilisation of Liberalism in the borough. The moderates rejected the radicalism of the new organization, and there were divisions over labour representation and education reform.⁷⁴ Thus the bitter election contests of the late 1860s reflected the changes occurring in Bradford politics.

The Bradford by-election of 1867 was caused by the death of the Conservative member, H.W.Wickham. The election preceded the introduction of the franchise

⁷³ Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist*, p.220.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.329.

provisions of the Second Reform Act and was thus the last in the borough to take place under the conditions set in 1832. The electorate numbered 5,189 and was distributed across the borough's thirteen wards. The contest, which revealed the new division in Bradford politics, was fought between an Anglican brewer and a Dissenting anti-drink campaigner. M.W.Thompson, a Whig-Moderate Liberal, strong supporter of the Church of England and the city's chief brewer, stood against Edward Miall, a dissenting anti-drink Radical, leading figure in the disestablishment movement and founder of the Liberation Society. Thompson was a local manufacturer who had been Mayor of Bradford in 1862 and 1863. He was supported by, "Tories, Anglicans, Methodists who disliked Miall, Moderate Liberals and old Whigs and naturally other brewers, publicans and many others who disliked the idea of anti-drink legislation".⁷⁵ Miall was a stranger to the borough having contested Southwark in 1845, Halifax in 1847 and Banbury in 1859.⁷⁶ In a borough with a long tradition of treating it is little wonder that Miall was popularly described as representing the "kill-joy" party. Significant political differences between the candidates were few, as they both supported free-trade, parliamentary reform and vote by secret ballot. The main points of contention were therefore religion and drink legislation. Thompson was in France during the campaign and was nominated in his absence by Samuel Storey.

There is some evidence that a disturbance was feared at the nomination day. The *Leeds Mercury* reported a request by Miall's committee to change the site of the nomination due to a preponderance of stones in the area that might, "be turned to evil account in the event of a tumult".⁷⁷ However their request came too late and the ceremony went ahead in its original location. An estimated 70,000 people attended

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.219.

⁷⁶ Stenton (ed), *Who's Who*, p.268.

⁷⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 11 October 1867, p.4.

the nomination, and while such a figure was almost certainly an exaggeration there is little doubt that an enormous crowd gathered near the hustings. Party placards soon became targets for violence, and what began as sporadic fighting between the 'Miallites' and 'Thompsonites' rapidly degenerated into, "a perfect state of riot and stone-throwing".⁷⁸ The show of hands was abandoned due to the disturbance and a poll was declared for the following day. However any hope that peace would be maintained was lost when the polling day began in much the same way that the nomination day had ended: voters were pelted with mud as they approached the polling booths and at one stage, "the mob separated into two hostile parties, and began to chase each other".⁷⁹ Miall's central committee-room was attacked by a large crowd armed with stones and lumps of coal. The *Nonconformist* blamed the riot on roughs, "devoted to the brewing interest", and described the scene inside Miall's committee-room where, "large stones and broken glass were flying about the rooms, which were crowded by Mr.Miall's supporters, and many were cut and bruised both in the face and hands".⁸⁰ The borough police eventually managed to contain the mob and several people were arrested for rioting. At the declaration of the poll a reserve of 60 police armed with cutlasses were held in readiness. There was, however, no repeat of the previous day's violence.

Thompson was elected by the modest majority of 403 votes, and his opponents immediately claimed it as a victory for the drink interest. The *Nonconformist* commented bitterly on what it described as "the Beer-Barrel Triumph",

The friends of Mr.Miall fought well and bravely; but against the crowd of influences with which they had to contend – against the unholy alliance of faithless Liberals, Tories, Church parsons, publicans, bigots

⁷⁸ 'Report from the Select Committee,' 1868-69, VIII, p.143.

⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1867, p.3.

⁸⁰ *Nonconformist*, 23 October 1867, p.873.

and fanatics, their efforts were in vain.⁸¹

However, such a view of Miall's defeat carries the obvious bias of a newspaper owned and edited by the defeated candidate. There is little doubt that public-houses were opened during the election and that beer was distributed in the form of treating. Furthermore Thompson's ownership of some 150 public-houses in the city gave added weight to the accusations of treating levelled against him. Yet Jack Reynolds argues that in attributing his loss entirely to the drink interest, Miall's supporters ignored those, "who saw the vote for Thompson as a vote against the sanctimonious kill-joy party".⁸² Miall's radical politics and militant disestablishment ideals likely helped align Bradford's Moderate Liberals and Tories against him.

The General Election of 1868 proved that the politics of coercion could still exercise an influence over an enlarged electorate. In 1867 Bradford's electorate was increased four-fold from 5,189 to 21,518, and while the electoral conditions were new, the response of the electoral managers was not. Jack Reynolds writes that "Nobody was certain how the new electorate would vote; neither side was prepared to leave the test entirely to the democratic decision of individuals, preferring to support the new system with some of the more traditional practices of English electioneering".⁸³ The local manufacturer Thompson retired in 1868 and the general election shaped as a three-way battle between the sitting member, W.E.Forster (Liberal), Edward Miall (Advanced Liberal) and Henry Ripley (Independent Liberal). Ultimately, however, the contest would prove a two-way battle between Miall and Ripley, as Forster's high profile virtually guaranteed his seat. Both Miall and Forster could rely on the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist*, p.219.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.330.

assistance of the new Liberal Electoral Association, while Miall's support continued to rest mainly with the Nonconformists. H.W.Ripley, a local manufacturer who owned a dyeing factory, and had been brought up as a dissenter, had by 1858 moved to the Anglican Church, and by 1874 was regarded as virtually a member of the Conservative party. He was never very popular in Bradford, and in 1864 he had offended working-class opinion by inviting Lord Palmerston to open the city's new Wool Exchange. His supporters included some Liberals, and Anglican and Methodist Tories.

The campaign proved the high point of Bradford corruption in the nineteenth century. The borough was virtually awash in free beer distributed from more than 300 public-houses across the city. Henry Ripley's greatest political asset was his purse, and during the election he spent over £7,000 on drinks for 'committee-men' in hundreds of public-houses. More surprising is that Miall and Forster too spent more than £3,000 between them at 62 public-houses, despite the anti-drink sentiments of the former.⁸⁴ Reflecting the fact that the business of electoral politics could not yet be seriously pursued without recourse to such practices, and that political principle had still to triumph over the realities of constituency electioneering. Violence during the election was restricted to an isolated incident in the Irish quarter of the borough where, "rioters were throwing stones through the windows of certain houses".⁸⁵ Jack Reynolds describes the first election in Bradford after the passage of the Second Reform Act,

The election campaign in fact had been in the best traditions of Eatanswill with plenty of refreshment in the various inns and public houses used by the candidates...the conduct of a number of Forster's committee men was criticised, but the misdemeanour of Ripley's

⁸⁴ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.264.

⁸⁵ *Bradford Advertiser*, 21 November 1868, p.3.

men...had been not only excessive but blatant.⁸⁶

Amidst allegations of treating and intimidation by both sides W.E.Forster was elected at the head of the poll. However in a shock to the efforts of the new Liberal organization Ripley defeated Miall by 579 votes. Reynolds argues that the Radical loss proved that Bradford's Tories were not a spent force in local politics, and when pushed could align themselves with Moderate Liberals and Whigs to reject the Radicals. However the influence of corruption cannot be overlooked. It appeared that Ripley's 'committee-men' had been somewhat heavy-handed in their approach to canvassing, especially among the working-class Irish. A petition was lodged against Ripley's election and he was unseated on the grounds that "in one ward of the said borough, inhabited principally by Irishmen of the working class, large numbers were influenced by corrupt practices".⁸⁷ Furthermore the reversed election result in 1869, when both sides agreed not to use public-houses for committee-rooms, suggests that treating was successful in swaying at least part of the electorate.

The by-election caused by Ripley's disqualification was held in March 1869. This contest proved a mirror image of the by-election of 1867. Edward Miall faced the former member Thompson, who returned to the borough as an independent Liberal. Miall was absent during the campaign, and violence attended the nomination of candidates. There was a considerable amount of bad feeling between the two parties as a result of the 1868 election and petition. However the *Nonconformist* reported that "an understanding was drawn up and signed by both sides, pledging them to the

⁸⁶ Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist*, p.331.

⁸⁷ Journals of the House of Commons, 1868-69 (124), Bradford Election Petition, p.17.

use of none but honest means".⁸⁸ Whether it was the effect of this agreement, or the fear of another petition, there was an almost complete absence of corruption or treating in 1869. Edward West commented that the contest was, "as pure an election as could possibly be; there were very few public-houses engaged".⁸⁹ Whereas the polling day was peaceful, as in 1867 the nomination again resulted in a serious riot. The likelihood of violence at the show of hands was increased when, several days beforehand, the decision was made to close the mills between 11 and 1 o'clock on the nomination day. The resulting crowd was described by the *Manchester Guardian* as being, "the largest that ever assembled on a similar occasion".⁹⁰ Thompson was accompanied to the hustings by Henry Ripley, who received an enthusiastic welcome,

Mr.Ripley was greeted with imitations of cockcrowing and shouts of "who bought the game cock?" and one facetious individual displayed...a well-executed representation of a game cock. It may be remembered that one of Mr.Ripley's supporters was said to have endeavoured to bribe a voter by purchasing a game fowl belonging to him for a large sum. The display was hailed with boisterous laughter and hooting.⁹¹

As the speeches began a Mr.Mumford, one of Thompson's supporters, was seen signalling to the crowd to move forward. A general rush towards the hustings then took place and a scene of 'frightful confusion' ensued. Mumford continued to signal to the crowd until the Mayor told him to stop, adding "You are the worst of them all".⁹² A general disturbance then erupted amongst the crowd, "between some men carrying boards; they broke the boards in pieces and armed themselves...and immediately commenced a riot".⁹³ After one hour the violence subsided and the

⁸⁸ *Nonconformist*, 17 March 1869, p.251.

⁸⁹ 'Report from the Select Committee,' 1868-69, VIII, p.148.

⁹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1869, p.3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ 'Report from the Select Committee,' 1868-69, VIII, p.145.

Mayor resumed the speeches. However, no sooner had Thompson come forward to speak than a more serious riot erupted and the entire proceedings were abandoned.

The *Manchester Guardian* reported that “numbers of men and women were knocked down by the stones. One poor woman, who found herself in the centre of a large ring, was made a target of by a number of ruffians, and received severe cuts on the head and face”.⁹⁴ The Mayor attempted to restore order but the hustings came under fire from the mob and it was soon deserted. The police intervened but were unable to contain the crowd which soon, “streamed in vast numbers into the town, and the state of things was so alarming that the shopkeepers...closed their shops”.⁹⁵ The violence appeared to have been begun with Thompson’s supporters, who were accused of bringing stones with them to the nomination. Later in the day the Mayor issued a notice that police reinforcements from Leeds and Wakefield would be present during the polling. The polling day, however, proved the quietest in recent history. The *Nonconformist* reported that “there was scarcely a drunken man to be seen in the town during the day, and no public-house whatever was engaged on Mr.Miall’s side, and very few were engaged on the other side”.⁹⁶ In what was hailed as a victory for Radicalism, Miall was elected by 1,437 votes. Furthermore the Irish electors were reported as polling almost entirely for the Radical candidate. The large margin of victory in 1869, and the reversal of Miall’s fortunes, certainly suggest that the influence of corruption and intimidation in 1868 had been substantial.

The violence displayed at the Bradford elections of 1867 and 1869 fits the pattern established in the previous case studies: all three boroughs reflect the willingness of party elites to supplement political organisation with electoral coercion, and

⁹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1869, p.3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Nonconformist*, 17 March 1869, p.249.

demonstrate the seriousness of English election violence. In addition, the polarisation of borough politics and the weakening of the mid-century consensus were due to local rifts in political and religious opinion, and not to the intrusion of national party politics. The incidence of violence in Bradford does, however, appear more spontaneous than in Kidderminster or Lincoln. The outbreak of disturbances during the nomination was more related to the large gathering of people that attended than to any form of organised intimidation. And given that Bradford's public-houses provided free beer to any and all who declared themselves 'committee-men', and that borough nominations regularly attracted enormous crowds of shouting, placard-waving partisans, the chances of violence were always going to be high. Yet it is the similarities between these three constituencies, and not the differences, that are most striking. Despite the differences in size and character, Bradford fails to provide a clear contrast to the politics of a semi-rural borough like Lincoln or a small manufacturing town like Kidderminster. It is also interesting to note that disorder involving the Irish played such a small part in Bradford in 1868, when serious anti-Murphy riots occurred just 30 kilometres away in Ashton and Stalybridge. It is likely that the numerical majority of Dissent, and the weakness of inter-party conflict helped Bradford weather the storm of Irish Church disestablishment.

V

Carmarthenshire

In Carmarthen, as in most polling places, the shops were closed, business suspended, and the town put on its holiday attire. Guildhall Square was filled by an excited concourse of persons...Every window was occupied by the fair sex, who not only watched the progress of events...but also were not backward in displaying their colours.

Carmarthenshire county election, 1868.⁹⁷

The excitement displayed in Carmarthen on the day of the 1868 county election reflected not only the anticipation of a close contest, but the *first* contest to be held in the constituency for 31 years. Not since 1837, when Colonel Trevor (Conservative) and John Jones (Conservative) were elected ahead of Sir J. Williams (Liberal), had the voters of this south-Wales county had an opportunity to exercise their franchise. For a generation before 1868 leading Whig and Tory families had engineered a consensus that usually ensured the uncontested return of two Conservatives. Indeed since 1857 David Pugh and David Jones (both Conservatives) had been returned unopposed. The four-way contest in 1868, between two Conservatives, an Independent Liberal and a Radical, thus represented a spectacular break with Carmarthenshire's traditional political arrangement. The contest also reflected in many ways the changes that were taking place in Welsh politics during the period: the election represented the first serious challenge to the Carmarthenshire aristocracy by Liberal nonconformity; the return of a Liberal and a Conservative revealed both the new electoral power of dissent, and the continued strength of aristocratic influence; and Carmarthenshire was

⁹⁷ *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 10 October 1868, [unpaged].

at the centre of allegations regarding evictions by Tory landlords, an occurrence which had a profound impact on Welsh social and political consciousness in the years after 1868.

Carmarthenshire was no stranger to election disorder during the nineteenth-century. In *An Anglican Aristocracy* Matthew Cragoe writes that between 1832 and 1895, "Carmarthenshire elections were frequently marked by outbreaks of violence",⁹⁸ and cites examples of disorder in 1837, 1868, 1880 and 1886.⁹⁹ With the exception of 1874, this list includes all contested elections in the county between 1837 and 1886. Thus Carmarthenshire reflects the general pattern of electoral violence – the years of disturbance being exactly coterminous with the years in which an election contest occurred. Events during the General Election of 1868 confirm the county's propensity for violent contests: a Liberal election meeting in Llanelly concluded with an attack on the Conservative committee-rooms; and both the borough and county polling days were disrupted by fighting between rival partisans. Indeed Carmarthenshire's previous election contest in 1837 had resulted in violence during which a local magistrate was, "thrown through the window of a public house".¹⁰⁰

The 1868 election was always likely to engender some degree of excitement. The county contest was precipitated by a local Conservative split, the campaign was dominated by the emotive issue of Irish Church disestablishment and the Liberal nonconformists, aided by the electoral increases of the Second Reform Act and the efforts of the Liberation Society, were mobilised and organised on a scale sufficient to

⁹⁸ M.Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy: The moral economy of the landed estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832 – 1895* (Oxford, 1996), p.169.

⁹⁹ Cragoe's record of violence in Carmarthenshire in 1880 was (unfortunately) found too late to be included in the statistical analysis in Chapter IV. Therefore this incident is not included in my sample of violence and does not appear in any of the maps of electoral violence.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

threaten the political status quo. Both sides were active in preparing for the contest and reports of landlord coercion and chapel influence fought for prominence in the local newspapers. The *Carmarthen Journal* modestly described the contest as likely to be “a close one”.

Whereas Wales has a rich history of popular disturbance, from food riots in the eighteenth-century to the Rebecca Riots in the late 1830s, only rarely did such disorder translate into election violence. Indeed throughout the period Welsh elections produced little in the way of serious disorder. Between 1857 and 1880 violent electioneering in the Principality was limited to two episodes in 1865 and eight in 1868. The lack of disorder can be accounted for by the low incidence of contested elections in Wales before 1868. At the general elections of 1857 and 1859 only four constituencies out of a total of 28 actually went to the polls. The high number of uncontested elections reflected the strength of consensus politics and the electoral influence of the landed elite. The concentration of electoral violence in Wales during the 1860s was the product of a convergence of social, political and religious tensions. It was during this period that the latent forces of Welsh nationalism, popular radicalism and religious dissent emerged to challenge the social and political hegemony of the Welsh aristocracy. The scale of violence in Carmarthenshire¹⁰¹ is therefore comparatively atypical of the Welsh electoral experience during the Victorian period, given that the county experienced two outbreaks of disorder while most constituencies in either England or Wales failed to record multiple episodes of election violence.

¹⁰¹ The sample records one case of borough violence in 1868 and one duplicate episode during the same election, and one case of county violence. Cragoe identifies two cases of county violence between 1857 and 1880, one in 1868 and the other in 1880.

Between the First and Second Reform Acts Welsh political representation was dominated by a ruling aristocracy. Land ownership, and thus social and political influence, was concentrated in the hands of a small Anglican oligarchy increasingly alienated from the bulk of the population by language, religion and politics. Welsh members of parliament were drawn from the nobility and gentry; their seats guaranteed by restrictive franchises and the exercise of landlord influence. However from the beginning of the nineteenth-century protestant nonconformity emerged to challenge the Anglican aristocracy's domination of politics and society. Dissent proved a popular movement in Wales because of its emphasis on the Welsh language and culture. By 1851 nonconformist chapels attracted roughly 80% of Welsh religious attendance,¹⁰² and dissent had come to, "create a fundamental line of division within Welsh life".¹⁰³

In politics the Welsh nonconformists drew on their links with English dissent and popular radicalism. Throughout the period dissenting campaigns against church rates, tithes and burial laws were being increasingly linked with, "a more general programme of radical protest."¹⁰⁴ The dissenting challenge to aristocratic authority thus evolved from a campaign for purely religious freedoms, to one of national and political recognition. And while the dissenters took the Tories as their natural enemy, they were equally opposed to the Whigs because, as Hanham writes, "on ecclesiastical questions both parties [Tory and Whig] voted together".¹⁰⁵ The Second Reform Act of 1867 further consolidated the rise of political nonconformity. The growth of the electorate coincided with an effective registration programme coordinated by the Liberation Society. From the 1850s the spread of Society branches across Wales

¹⁰² K.O.Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868 – 1922* (Wales, 1963), p.12.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁰⁵ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.171.

provided the dissenters with, "an intelligible political creed and an efficient machinery".¹⁰⁶ In addition the enlargement of the electorate placed the dissenters in a nominal majority for the first time. The increase of voters in 1867-8, and advances in registration and organization during the 1860s, provided the nonconformists with, "a unique opportunity to disturb the political balance of centuries".¹⁰⁷

Carmarthenshire was a sprawling rural constituency on the south-west coast of Wales. Agriculture was the dominant industry in the county, which stretched for 935 square miles from the heaths and moor land of the north-east to the pastoral farms of the western hinterland. The county town of Carmarthen remained the most important regional centre during the period, although Llanelly on the south-east coast was growing in prominence due to the exploitation of mineral resources. The united boroughs of Carmarthen and Llanelly returned one member to parliament. Carmarthenshire was predominantly Welsh-speaking and with a population of 115,710 in 1871 it was the third most populous county in Wales behind Glamorgan and Monmouthshire. The Second Reform Act effectively doubled the size of the county electorate to 8,026. County politics were dominated by large landowning families, the greatest of these being the Cawdors and the Dynevors. Earl Cawdor, head of the largest estate in west Wales and the leader of the Conservatives in Carmarthenshire, exercised a controlling interest over one of the county seats. In 1868 his withdrawal of support for the sitting member, David Pugh, led to the rupture of the county consensus and the capture of one seat by the Liberals.

The Carmarthenshire contest of 1868 developed as the result of Conservative disarray and Liberal opportunism. In the months prior to the election considerable

¹⁰⁶ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.17.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

doubt was held for the chances of the two sitting Conservative members, David Pugh and David Jones. Support for Pugh amongst traditional Tory voters had waned due to his increasingly Liberal views, while Jones was thought to be too ill to stand again. During his first period as a county member between 1857 and 1868 David Pugh had stood as a Liberal-Conservative. He took an independent position on religious questions and voted against Church rates. In 1868 he refused to pledge himself over the Irish Church issue. His intransigence cost him Earl Cawdor's support and the Conservative 'party' ticket. Two new Conservative candidates were rumoured to be coming forward in the event that the sitting members failed to stand: Henry Puxley, a rich Irish Tory, and Lord Emlyn, son of Earl Cawdor. Puxley owned estates in Ireland and had large copper mining interests. He held a series of election meetings in 1868 and is described by Cragoe as being the popular candidate.

Amid the Conservative disarray the Liberals decided to bring forward E.J.Sartoris, a landowner with radical sympathies. Sartoris owned land in Carmarthenshire but lived in Hampshire. Though a stranger to the constituency he was supported by an efficient registration network and, "the ultimate canvassing network in the shape of the chapels".¹⁰⁸ The contest emerged thus: David Jones stood down but transferred his interest to his brother John Jones; David Pugh stood for re-election "on 'independent' principles";¹⁰⁹ Lord Emlyn declined to contest the election; Henry Puxley stood as a Conservative in the Cawdor interest; and E.J.Sartoris stood as a Liberal.

During the campaign Puxley proved the most popular candidate. He gave almost as many speeches as Sartoris and was loudly cheered at a succession of agricultural dinners and Conservative party meetings. By comparison both Pugh and

¹⁰⁸ Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy*, p.160.

¹⁰⁹ *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 10 October 1868, [unpaged].

Jones campaigned less vigorously, with few speeches from either candidate. Sartoris, conducted an efficient campaign during which he out-spoke and out-spent his rivals. Conservative fears that the vote would be split were realised when Sartoris headed the poll with 3,280 votes, ahead of Jones with 2,942. Puxley was beaten into third place by just 114 votes. At the bottom of the poll with 1,340 votes was Pugh, whose presence had likely cost the Conservatives a seat. Liberal attention to the registration of voters after 1867 largely contributed to Sartoris' victory in 1868. In Carmarthenshire the Liberal nonconformists were able to add some 1,700 voters to the register in the months prior to the election. Puxley recognised as much when he blamed his defeat on, "the defective registration of 500 or 600 Conservative voters".¹¹⁰ The influence of the dissenting clergy in the Liberal interest cannot be underestimated. On the polling day the *Carmarthen Journal* reported that "Dissenting ministers all over the county had converted themselves into electioneering agents for the Radical candidate".¹¹¹

Violence at the Carmarthenshire county election in 1868 was preceded, and in fact precipitated, by violence at the borough contest. During that campaign Radical rioters were blamed for disorder. The first report of violence was recorded after an election meeting in Llanelly. The Liberal candidate for the borough, Colonel Stepney, had been attending a political meeting with the county candidate, E.J.Sartoris, when "a great tumult and rioting took place".¹¹² The *Carmarthen Journal* wrote that the Conservative committee-rooms at the Thomas' Arms had been attacked by a crowd allegedly incited by Stepney. It was claimed that he had contributed to the disorder by directing the crowd towards the hotel. The scale of the disorder was no doubt

¹¹⁰ *The Times*, 28 November 1868, p.3.

¹¹¹ *Carmarthen Journal*, 27 November 1868, p.3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 6 November 1868, p.5.

exaggerated as the damage only amounted to a few broken windows. This mild form of election excess gave way to more serious disorder on the borough polling day. In Carmarthen Radical partisans were again blamed for violence.

Many of the Conservative voters were chased around the town and roughly handled, and not even the recognised claims of the tenderer sex to freedom from insult could secure their protection...one poor fisherman, who dared to vote for the British Constitution, was assaulted by a band of female viragos, incited by a number of Radical myrmidons, and beaten and scratched in the face.¹¹³

Several instances of assault were reported and the *Carmarthen Journal* concluded with the statement: "One good thing has been accomplished by the Election this week; it has taught the people of Carmarthen that Radicalism has not yet renounced its love for physical force".¹¹⁴

The actions of the mob left a good deal of ill-will in the county after the borough contest, and there were rumours that a disturbance would occur during the county election. The *Carmarthen Journal* reported that Conservative workmen, "felt sorely aggrieved by the treatment they [had] received at the hands of the Radical mob on the previous Tuesday".¹¹⁵ As a result they had formed an organised body to protect themselves during the county election. Cragoe writes that the possibility of disorder was taken seriously by the Carmarthen authorities. There was some disagreement as to the best location for the polling booths as, "The Liberals favoured the Shire Hall, but the Conservatives feared that the approaches were too narrow, and that the mob which would inevitably gather would prevent 'timid voters' from casting their votes".¹¹⁶ The *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* wrote that a large number of strangers had entered the borough, and that a great deal of excitement was building in

¹¹³ *Carmarthen Journal*, 20 November 1868, p.6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 November 1868, p.3.

¹¹⁶ Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy*, p.169.

all the polling districts. These strangers may have been part of a body organised by Henry Puxley, whose committee, "engaged a number of 'lambs', including the leading professors of 'fistiana' in the neighbourhood".¹¹⁷ These men wore red armbands and on the polling day organised themselves in front of the Town Hall. Several fights broke out during the day, between Conservative and Radical supporters, and at two o'clock fighting led to "signs of a general melee".¹¹⁸ However no serious outbreak of violence was reported. There were rumours of a riot at Llanelly, though this was later proved to be an exaggeration and that the extent of the damage was that one man had been assaulted.

The General Election of 1868 has been described as a 'national awakening' in Wales, a moment of triumph for Welsh nationalism and Liberal nonconformity.¹¹⁹ Certainly in some constituencies the political change was dramatic: in Cardiganshire the Vaughan family interest failed to prevent the election of an industrialist and nonconformist, E.M.Richards; in Merthyr Tydfil Henry Richard, a leading figure in the Liberation Society, was returned ahead of the Anglican magistrate and Home Secretary H.A.Bruce; and in Carmarthenshire a 30-year old pattern of political representation was broken with the election of the Liberal E.J.Sartoris at the head of the poll. Across Wales the Liberals extended their 1865 majority with the capture of 23 seats, while the Conservatives lost ground with 10 seats. Yet while the election signalled an important break with the past, the returns did not represent a solid victory for Liberal nonconformity. Almost without exception the 23 Liberals elected were

¹¹⁷ *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 28 November 1868, [unpaged].

¹¹⁸ *Carmarthen Journal*, 27 November 1868, p.3.

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of this topic see Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, esp, pp.170 - 179; Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*; Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy*; J.Morgan, "Denbighshire's *Annus Mirabilis*: The borough and county elections of 1868" *Welsh History Review*, vii (1974), pp.63 - 87.

Whigs, and only 3 out of 33 Welsh members were active dissenters.¹²⁰ Rather than being a moment of national and political triumph, the General Election of 1868 may better be seen as straddling the period of change from one style of politics to another

The Carmarthenshire county contest of 1868 was a notable break with the past. The election of a Liberal, and a stranger, to the county represented the growing significance of issues over personalities, and the importance party organisation over local influence. The election signalled the beginning of the end for interest-based politics, and heralded the emergence of a more nationally oriented, party-based politics. However, John Jones's election reflected the continued relevance of local connections and landlord influence. Much has been written of the political evictions by Tory landlords that followed the Liberal victory in 1868. Yet Cragoe argues that genuine examples of eviction were most likely less frequent than either side alleged. In Carmarthenshire at least there is evidence that what the Liberals lacked in the way of landlord-tenant influence, they made up for in chapel influence. Mob intimidation seems unlikely to have played a significant role in either the borough or county election. Indeed the episodes of disorder that accompanied the Carmarthenshire elections of 1868 were, by contemporary British standards, relatively muted: the disturbance at the borough election amounted to the assault of a number of Conservative voters, while the county contest was disrupted by a number of mild collisions between Radical and Conservative partisans.

¹²⁰ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.25.

VI

The violent scenes depicted in the case studies represent only a small cross-section of mid-Victorian electoral disorder. A considerable number of riots and disturbances, many on a greater scale than those included here, are not discussed in detail. For example in 1868 alone a woman was killed in Newport, Monmouthshire when soldiers charged a riotous election crowd, a 63 year-old man was killed in front of the hustings during a riot in North Durham, pitched battles involving hundreds attended elections in Staffordshire and Shropshire, and in Preston, Lancashire a disturbance after the contest resulted in one man being shot in the neck (he did, however, survive!). In addition there were serious episodes of violence in election years not mentioned, particularly in 1880. The episodes of violence described here, and the catalogue of disorder outlined in Chapter IV, reveal that throughout the period English and Welsh elections could provoke serious, and sustained, outbursts of crowd violence. The case studies therefore demonstrate that electoral violence was not a spent force in English politics during the mid-to-late Victorian period, and the scale of disorder described here goes well beyond that of broken windows and fractured kneecaps.

Compared to the general patterns of violence established in Chapter IV, the constituencies examined here provide relatively atypical examples of election violence. As Table 13 (p.167) shows most English and Welsh constituencies were unlikely to produce more than one case of electoral disorder during the period. Yet Lincoln elections were violent five times between 1857 and 1880, Carmarthenshire elections ended in violence twice in 1868 and 1880, Bradford elections were violent in 1867 and 1869, and Kidderminster produced electoral disorder in 1857 and again in

1865. However this does not lessen their value as case studies. While they are atypical in the pattern of recurrent violence, they are typical in revealing the dynamics of electoral violence within the framework of constituency politics. And what is most striking about the case studies are the similarities they exhibit.

The case studies reflect the continuing role of violence at elections in the post-reform era, and demonstrate both its complexity and seriousness. In contrast to Richter and Hoppen's suggestions that violence reflected a 'simple love of disorder' or the 'letting off of steam', these brief outlines of Victorian electoral culture reveal the multi-layered nature of election disorder. Rather than limiting the cause of crowd violence to a straightforward cash transaction, drunkenness or boredom (or combinations of such), we should recognise these events as phenomena that reflect the intricacies of local politics. In Kidderminster the events of 1857 highlight the complex interplay of personalities and issues that led to violence. The riot did not develop out of the carnival atmosphere of the campaign, or as the outcome of a bored populace seeking entertainment. It is highly likely that at least part of the crowd that attacked Robert Lowe was organised for the purpose. However, it is also clear that the townspeople had genuine grievances relating to their member's attitude towards them. Lowe's failure to engage adequately with local concerns and local issues cost him dearly. In a borough with a history of class conflict and crowd violence, and at a time when wages were being squeezed and hundreds living on charity, Lowe's seeming ambivalence towards his constituents set him on a collision course with an angry populace.

In Lincoln election violence owed as much to popular resentment of civic authority as it did to radical frustration. A fierce parochialism informed the Lincoln riots: in 1862 the introduction of a county force to police a by-election led to an attack

on the Mayor's residence; and when in 1865 the military were summoned to assist the borough force, serious rioting again occurred. However, party conflict was at the core of violence in Lincoln: it was a Conservative candidate's hotel room that was repeatedly targeted by rioters. Contemporary reports identified employees of the town's iron foundries as being prominent in the disturbances. As radical non-electors their participation in the riots may have been the result of frustration at the political dominance of the Tory candidate and member, Bramley Moore.

The Carmarthenshire election of 1868 proved somewhat different from those in Kidderminster, Lincoln and Bradford; the election of E.J.Sartoris in the face of local aristocratic opposition represented a triumph of organisation over influence, and of issues over personalities. And yet the similarities between the electoral cultures of all four constituencies are still striking. Electioneering in Carmarthenshire was punctuated by much the same scenes of disorder as in England, and the outbreak of violence, as elsewhere, reflected the strength of local partisan rivalries. What limited election violence there was in Carmarthenshire during the mid-Victorian period grew out of party conflict and organised intimidation; Conservative voters and supporters were 'chased around the town' by radical partisans during the borough election, then retaliated during the county contest by organising a 'mob' of their own.

The constituency analyses presented here demonstrate that the diffusion of political principle after 1832 was not a rapid process. In contrast to Phillips and Wetherell's conclusion that "[after 1832] political principle defined in national terms by the parties in Westminster took the place of the local, factional and idiosyncratic concerns that had dominated England's unreformed political system", electioneering in Lincoln and Kidderminster during the mid-Victorian period reflected the continued

importance of local issues, local identities and local conflicts, without demonstrating much evidence of the adoption of a nationally-oriented politics of principle. Even the Carmarthenshire election of 1868, elements of which foreshadowed the emergence of a national, party based politics, still reflected the importance of local connections and landlord influence. Indeed national issues intruded not as the dominant force in these constituencies, but as one factor among many. And in the outbreak of electoral violence the influence of national political issues normally came a poor second behind a multitude of local economic, religious and political rivalries.

Chapter VI

Electoral Violence and the Pace of Political Change: A Conclusion

I

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyse mid-nineteenth century election violence in England and Wales in order to provide a better understanding of the character of Victorian electioneering, and to assess the pace of political modernisation as defined by John Phillips and Charles Wetherell.¹ The analysis provided in Chapter IV also allows conclusions to be drawn about a phenomenon that appears to defy easy categorisation.² The statistical evidence of violence, the mapping of its occurrence at general elections, and the individual case studies present a picture of mid-century politics apparently little different from older, more traditional electoral forms. Ritual, symbolism and physical force clearly remained important elements of electioneering in England at least, and in larger urban boroughs in particular. As a visible reminder of the continuity of English electoral culture, the presence of violence in the mid-to-late nineteenth century suggests a slow and disjointed process of political modernization. In Wales the lack of violence during the period is surprising, but not inexplicable. Prior to 1868 the electoral dominance of the Anglican gentry contributed to a lack of contests, and thus a lack of disorder. Thereafter, however, the frequency of contests increased and continued to rise, yet contemporary sources provide only scattered evidence of election violence.

This study has contributed in several important ways to our understanding of mid-Victorian English and Welsh election violence. In Chapter I some of the ambiguities that characterise historical perceptions of electoral disorder were outlined, including issues of scale, origin and relevance. Donald Richter describes election

¹ See J. Phillips and C. Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act of 1832", pp. 411 – 436.

² Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p. 26. Richter writes, "While the motivations of certain categories of rioters may be attributed to more or less specific sociological strains, religious and/or ethnic rivalries, and economic grievances, *most election disorders defy such generalisation* [my emphasis]".

violence as “brutal and vicious”, and focuses on events that he classed as “mob action[s] of a terrorist nature”, whereas K.T.Hoppen argues that electoral violence was “merely a general disorder” that rarely became serious. According to John Stevenson elections remained a potent source of disorder into the late Victorian period, yet Hoppen argues the decline of such violence from 1832. Both Richter and Hoppen contend that electoral disorder was most likely a product of corruption as well as public enthusiasm (“simple love of disorder” and “letting off steam”), whereas Jon Lawrence presents this type of violence as a purposeful use of physical force that was employed as part of the symbolism of political legitimacy. The ‘student of electoral tumults’ is thus left with a range of questions about the nature of this phenomenon. Did electoral violence represent a *serious* outburst of public disorder, or was it mostly ‘harmless chaff’? What did electoral disorder represent within the context of electoral politics: was it ‘artificially’ generated and therefore devoid of political relevance; was it a spontaneous outburst of ‘sheer ebullience’ with no motivation beyond boisterous entertainment; or was it a controlled and symbolic demonstration of political legitimacy? How late into the nineteenth-century did English and Welsh elections continue to experience these kinds of disruptions, and which constituencies were most at risk? And did the pattern of disorder change during the century? What then has now been revealed about the realities of Victorian election violence?

This study has identified several key features of English and Welsh election disorder between 1857 and 1880: a significant number of contested elections in England experienced some form of disorder, whereas in Wales this was comparatively rare; the scale of violence was most often ‘serious’ and required some degree of magisterial

response to bring it to an end; the frequency of violence increased during the middle decades of the period as electoral contests increased; the decline of disorder dates from the 1870s; violence in England was widely distributed and rarely occurred in the same constituency more than once; larger boroughs dominate the sample of disorder because of the frequency with which they were contested, and despite being outnumbered by small boroughs before 1867.

Mid-Victorian election violence occurred at a significant number of contested elections between 1857 and 1880. Table 8 (p.121) reveals that between 1865 and 1880 (the period with the greatest frequency of violence) a *minimum* of 10% of the total number of English and Welsh contests experienced some degree of violence.³ Indeed the frequency of disorder was usually higher, with 15.1% of contests experiencing violence in 1865, 26.4% in 1868, 11.6% in 1874 and 10.4% in 1880. These figures also demonstrate the increase in violence that occurred during the 1860s, and the gradual decline in the 1870s and 1880s. An important characteristic of election disorder was that it rarely occurred in the same location twice. Table 13 (p.167) shows that between 1857 and 1880 only three constituencies experienced more than three disrupted elections. The sample of violence is therefore not dominated by a handful of especially violent constituencies. This has important implications for a study of the causes of election disorder, which will be examined later.

The scale of violence at English and Welsh elections during the period ranged from relatively minor incidents at one end, to full scale riots and mayhem at the other.

³ If only the English figures are examined the trend appears the same. 9.2% of English contests occasioned violence in 1857, 8.3% in 1859, 14.3% in 1865, 24.5% in 1868, 12.7% in 1874 and 11.3% in 1880. For a comparison of the percentages for both England and Wales see Table 8.

However most cases of violence were serious outbursts of public disorder involving physical damage to persons and/or property. Table 9 (p.125) reveals the scale of violence during the period; a total of 63 'riots', 77 'disturbances' and 51 'incidents' occurred during campaigning across six general elections between 1857 and 1880. Both 'riots' and 'disturbances' are classified as *serious* outbursts of public violence and commonly involved destruction of property and physical assault, as well as prompting some form of magisterial response. Thus almost three-quarters (73.2%) of all cases of election violence during the period can be described as serious. 'Riots' alone accounted for one-third of the sample of disorder. The many examples of bleeding bodies, cut faces, broken heads and smashed windows belies a description of these events as mere 'enjoyable circuses'. The ten fatalities recorded during these years further highlights how serious English, and on occasion Welsh elections could become.

Importantly, in contrast to Richter and Hanham's assertion that electoral disorder was a feature of small towns and rural areas, much of the violence of the period was concentrated in boroughs rather than counties, and in large urban centres as opposed to small boroughs. Between 1857 and 1880 there were a total of 109 separate cases of borough violence compared to 47 cases of county violence. The dominance of the boroughs was partly due to the fact that they outnumbered the counties by slightly more than two to one, and because throughout the period 72.6% of boroughs were contested compared to 44.6% of counties.⁴ County constituencies were in fact *proportionately* more likely to endure violence than the boroughs, with 17.7% of contested counties experiencing disorder as opposed to 12.4% of borough

⁴ For an explanation of how these percentages were derived see footnote 23 on page 128.

contests. However the greater number of boroughs meant that much of the violence during the period occurred there.

Somewhat surprisingly the study reveals that election violence was not a feature of the small boroughs, where it is generally believed traditions of venal and corrupt politics were more likely to have persisted. Rather the sample reveals that disorder was concentrated in larger boroughs – during the period 94 ‘large’ (more than 1,000 before 1867 and more than 2,000 thereafter) and 25 ‘small’ (fewer than 1,000 prior to 1867 and less than 2,000 after 1867) boroughs experienced some degree of violence. The reality was that the smaller boroughs were not contested as often as their larger counterparts, and so were less likely to be disrupted. In the larger urban constituencies greater and more consistent efforts were needed by the political parties to mobilise the electorate, efforts generating a heightened degree of partisan conflict and enthusiasm which were frequent causes of violence. Campaign events in larger constituencies were also able to attract far bigger crowds than smaller constituencies. This is not to argue that small boroughs were politically dormant, however they appear to have lacked the frequency of contests that provided an important stimulus to electoral violence.

Map 7 in Chapter IV reveals the distribution of electoral disorder across England and Wales between 1857 and 1880. Violence in Wales was concentrated in the southern counties of Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire, with isolated cases in Denbighshire and Carnarvonshire. This pattern reflected the frequency of electoral contests. The low incidence of electoral contests in counties like Montgomeryshire, Brecknockshire and Radnorshire accounts for the lack of violence in those areas. In England, where violence was located predominantly in the North and West Midland, North Western and York divisions, the

concentration of disorder reflected the distribution of small and large boroughs. Areas with a high proportion of large boroughs experienced a greater number of electoral contests, and therefore recorded more cases of violence. Table 14 (p.169) reveals the lack of disorder in the Southern, South Eastern and Eastern divisions of England, where there was a greater preponderance of small boroughs than in the north. Map 7 shows the frequency of English electoral violence to have been concentrated in industrial districts, and correspondingly low in agricultural or rural areas such as the South Eastern or Southern divisions. This pattern exemplifies the distribution of English violence in large urban boroughs with a high population of industrial labourers, such as the potteries district and the manufacturing centres of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

A demographic analysis of electoral violence (see Table 15, p.170) failed to provide clear evidence of a link between Irish populations and violence. The North-western division, with the largest concentration of Irish immigrants of any division in England or Wales, did experience a considerable amount of violence. Yet the Northern, South Midland and London divisions had similarly large Irish populations and each failed to produce even half as much disorder as the north west. Table 15 does not discount the role of the Irish in electoral violence. Yet it suggests that on the available evidence explanations of the pattern of violence cannot take into account the presence of Irish immigrants.

The importance of effective policing in the suppression or prevention of election disorder is a debatable issue. Police forces, where clumsily used or heavy-handed in the execution of their duty, were more likely to increase violence than end it. Violence in Lincoln during the 1862 by-election was prompted after the county police were judged by rioters to have been too rough in dealing with a disorderly

election crowd. The small size of borough and county forces meant that the police were always going to be outnumbered by disorderly campaign crowds. Table 15 fails to show any definitive pattern of violence based on ratios of police to population. London, with the best figures for the country did suffer the least amount of violence during the period. Yet neither the South Midland nor Eastern divisions, with low ratios of police to population, experienced considerable amounts of violence.

The pattern of disorder did not alter substantially during the mid-Victorian period. Neither the First nor the Second Reform Act contributed to more peaceful electioneering in England and Wales, despite Roland Quinalt's argument to the contrary, indeed the increases to the electorate in 1832 and particularly in 1867, the introduction of a system of registration in the former, and the inclusion of many new working class voters in the latter were factors that helped stimulate the frequency of electoral violence. These changes motivated the political parties to capture the new, enlarged electorates, thereby contributing to the intensification of party conflict and the likelihood of violence. The timing of disorder remained relatively static throughout the period with most elections being disturbed on the polling day. In that respect John Stevenson's argument that the Secret Ballot Act (1872) reduced the opportunity for violence by removing the open hustings is wide of the mark. Indeed as late as 1880 more than one-third (38.4%) of all disorder continued to occur during the poll.⁵ The Ballot Act did, however, abolish the nomination ceremony which was a frequent cause of violence during the period.

⁵ For details see Table 12, p.130. The amount of violence occurring on the polling day may have been higher as the statistics used in Table 12 include 26 cases of disorder in which the timing was unknown.

II

This study presents a picture of mid-Victorian election violence as often serious, geographically widespread (in England), relatively unchanged in scale and timing throughout the period and explicable largely in terms of the frequency of election contests. And yet what did these events represent within the context of Victorian electoral politics? The motives of 'mobs' or individual rioters are rarely easy to discern, and generalisations about the causes of election disorder are likely to obscure as much as they reveal. After all what is true of violence in Liverpool, Lancashire is not necessarily true of violence in Sandwich, Kent. What then has been written about the origins of electoral disorder and what has this study contributed to that discussion?

As noted previously, there are several interpretations of election violence. It has either been characterised as a product of corruption and bribery, as a purposeful and ritualised aspect of electioneering, as the spontaneous outburst of a bored populace, or as a combination of all three. Richter argues that most episodes of election violence defy easy explanation and he suggests that beyond the influence of religious, economic and ethnic rivalries, "election riots seem to have occurred with the purest spontaneity, with the least degree of justifiable provocation or outrage".⁶ Therefore Richter turns to a "simple love of disorder" to explain the bulk of violence that, he stresses, owed less to specific sociological strains and more to "spontaneous outbursts of sheer ebullience". He largely discounts the importance of political conflict in the majority of election disturbances and writes that, "the difference between political candidates, many times minute or imperceptible, could hardly have constituted the

⁶ Richter, "The Role of Mob Riot", p.26.

basis for such brutal and vicious scenes of violence during the campaign and on the polling day...In short, the current of sustained, *even habitual* [my emphasis] violence and rioting burst the bounds of all ordinary discontent".⁷ Richter therefore suggests that elections provided only the opportunity and not the motive for violence.

Hoppen echoes Richter's assessment of election violence as a product of public boredom and the "letting off [of] steam". According to him Victorian electoral 'mobs' did not challenge the political status quo and sought only "participation in enjoyable circuses". Yet Hoppen also contends that electoral manipulation was at the bottom of most cases of violence and he describes English elections as being, "characterised by an atmosphere of urban mayhem and carnival underpinned by cash on the nail".⁸ Hoppen's interpretation of Victorian electoral disorder largely deprives the participants of self-determination and presents them as either thugs-for-hire or as bored spectators.

Rather than a random, spontaneous or artificially generated outburst, Lawrence argues that electoral disorder represented a "widespread acceptance of, and frequent connivance in, 'the politics of disruption'".⁹ He presents these episodes as part of a controlled display of physical force in which the disruption of campaign events, or the 'capture' of civic space, formed a ritualised aspect of constituency electioneering. As such violence was employed by politicians and partisans alike as a highly visible and symbolic expression of political legitimacy. Lawrence's interpretation, while perhaps downplaying the severity of such events, suggests a *purposeful* use of violence in which an electoral contest provided the motive and not the opportunity for disorder.

⁷ Richter, "Public Order", p.240.

⁸ Hoppen, "Grammars", p.610.

⁹ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p.183.

The case studies in Chapter V provide an insight into the relative complexity of electoral violence. The Kidderminster riot of 1857 owed much to partisan conflict, economic depression, the unpopularity of the sitting member and the introduction of an organised body of strangers to the town. Violence in Lincoln during the 1860s grew out of partisan conflict and the political frustrations of the town's radical non-electors. Militant parochialism, opposition to authority and the influence of treating also contributed to Lincoln's disturbed elections. Bradford disorder was the product of corruption (large-scale treating) and local rifts in political and religious opinion. The popularity of election events in Bradford, and the large crowds that gathered for speeches and meetings, also added to the potential for violence. In Carmarthenshire violence grew out of partisan conflict and the introduction of organised 'roughs' in the Conservative interest. This evidence suggests that the origins of electoral disorder were rarely straightforward or simple. Beyond mere outbursts of 'sheer ebullience', election riots could express genuine political grievances, and even where local political tensions or religious conflicts provide a ready answer for violence, corrupt practices could be found to have exercised an influence over disorder.

Given the apparent complexity that underlay moments of election disorder, interpretations that stress the spontaneity or randomness of violence require some assessment. Richter downplays the importance of political motivations in the outbreak of election violence and goes so far as to suggest that,

This is not to say that the rioters were necessarily aware of the underlying motives for their rowdiness...the more conscientious would hardly be willing to admit that they raised a row at meetings merely for the sake of a good time. Whether consciously or unconsciously the working class rowdy sought to rationalise or justify his conduct as fierce devotion to such commendable causes as religion, political freedoms or social justice.¹⁰

¹⁰ Richter, "Public Order", p.250.

Yet contemporary reports of violence in which indiscriminate looting and destruction of property took place are balanced by accounts in which partisan motives were clearly obvious. Attacks on committee-rooms, candidates besieged in their lodgings, the houses of prominent party supporters being targeted, successful and unsuccessful candidates pursued by 'mobs', and the partisan heckling, abuse and fighting that occurred in front of the hustings; all suggest that Victorians were passionate about their politics and were willing to engage even physically with the electoral campaign.

Furthermore, mid-Victorian election violence does not appear to have been *habitual*. Only a handful of English and Welsh constituencies repeatedly experienced disturbed elections, a situation that would undoubtedly have been reversed had a recourse to violence been a habitual aspect of electioneering. Yet does the wide distribution of disorder shown in Table 13 (p.167) provide evidence of the randomness of electoral violence? The case studies in Chapter V suggest another possibility as disorder in Kidderminster, Lincoln, Bradford and Carmarthenshire appears less the product of habitual patterns of violence, and more the outcome of specific local tensions. A complex interplay of social, economic, religious and political conflicts informed mid-Victorian constituency politics, and the outbreak of violence in any constituency depended upon the convergence of a number of factors: the length of the campaign, the bitterness of the local political divide, the candidature of a stranger, the economic condition of the constituency, traditions of treating, corrupt practices and the potential local importance of national political issues. As such the frequency of violence within an individual constituency depended upon fluctuations in the intensity of those essentially local tensions. It seems clear, therefore, that elections provided the motive rather than the opportunity for violence. Victorian campaigning undoubtedly

provided a measure of popular entertainment, but to characterize election violence as the product of 'sheer ebullience' is wide of the mark. Whether generated by partisan enthusiasm, corruption or even as part of the symbolism of party legitimacy, electoral disorder represented the violent extension of a political contest.

III

According to John Phillips and Charles Wetherell, "England's frenzy over the Reform Bill in 1831, coupled with the effect of the bill itself upon its enactment in 1832, unleashed a wave of political modernization".¹¹ However the picture of Victorian electioneering that emerges from this study is one in which political change was delayed by the strength of pre-reform electoral traditions. In describing the nature of English electioneering during the mid-nineteenth century Hoppen writes, "Locally, involvement in electoral politics tended to mean action and ritual (often violent action and ritual) rather than decision-making".¹² Certainly in that respect little had changed for more than a century, and it is startling how far descriptions of mid-Victorian elections mirror those of Hanoverian England despite the passage of reform acts in 1832 and 1867. Indeed much of the chaos and venality satirised in William Hogarth's prints of the Oxfordshire contest of 1754 can be found duplicated in particular nineteenth-century election reports.¹³ Given this apparent level of continuity in English electoral culture, what conclusions can be drawn about the pace of political modernisation; that development which John Phillips and Charles Wetherell have argued began to rapidly change the face of English electoral politics after 1832?

¹¹ Phillips and Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act", p.412.

¹² Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p.257.

¹³ See for example *Chairing the Members* (1754) in which corruption, intimidation, treating, rioting and chairing are all displayed.

Phillips and Wetherell argue that the First Reform Act *quickly* replaced the Hanoverian political system with “an essentially modern electoral system based on rigid partisanship and clearly articulated political principle”.¹⁴ They argue that “persistent flaws” should not obscure the new political realities that were ushered in with reform in 1832. Yet how far should those ‘flaws’ be ignored when they stand at odds with a picture of post-reform politics as inclusive, principled and partisan? This study has highlighted the largely parochial nature of a significant portion of the mid-Victorian electoral system. Phillips and Wetherell stress that in the wake of the Great Reform Act, “political principle defined in national terms by the parties in Westminster took the place of the local, factional and idiosyncratic concerns that had dominated England’s unreformed political system”.¹⁵ And yet a quarter of a century later electoral politics in a number of English constituencies continued to revolve around the influence of local personalities, local political, economic and social tensions, corruption, electoral tradition and a recourse to the coercive or symbolic implications of physical force and violence.

The pace of English political modernization after 1832 has been challenged by Jaggard in a study of electoral politics in seven Cornish small boroughs between the First and Second Reform Acts.¹⁶ He argues that,

Cornwall’s small boroughs as well as family and proprietary boroughs elsewhere illustrate how voters’ preferences were the outcome of a mixture of factors including questions of principle, electoral history, the power of patrons, and local circumstances. Furthermore, after 1832 the speed of political modernisation was a function of the relative strength of these varied factors, which was slower in many smaller boroughs.¹⁷

¹⁴ Phillips and Wetherell, “The Great Reform Act of 1832”, p.412.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.415.

¹⁶ Jaggard, “Small Boroughs”, pp.622 – 642. ‘Small’ boroughs refers to those with fewer than 1,000 voters prior to 1867.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.642.

Yet the evidence of election violence presented here suggests that a slow pace of modernisation was not restricted to the smaller boroughs. Indeed the majority of Victorian election disorder occurred in the larger boroughs, where party organisation might be expected to have been more advanced, and where the type of principled, partisan politics that Phillips and Wetherell describe could have had a chance to flourish. Indeed their conclusions about the pace of political modernisation are based on evidence drawn almost exclusively from larger boroughs.¹⁸ Thus in a number of mid-Victorian English constituencies, of the very type in which Phillips and Wetherell found a "new view of principle and principled behaviour"¹⁹ after 1832, electoral politics continued to resonate to older electoral tunes in which notions of party, principle and organisation were subsumed in favour of a reliance on ritual, symbolism and action.

This thesis has identified the portion of the English electoral system that experienced violence during the mid-Victorian period. In Wales violence was largely muted as opportunities for electoral contests were stifled by the political hegemony of the landed aristocracy. In England the continued presence of violence beyond the first threshold of reform in 1832, and into the post-1867 era, reflected the strength of pre-modern electoral traditions and priorities. Caroline Jackson describes the mid-Victorian period as characterised by a dichotomy between two competing forms of politics; one that looked backwards to the past, and one that looked forwards to the future. Within such a framework violence remained as a visible expression of an

¹⁸ Phillips and Wetherell, "The Great Reform Act of 1832", p.421. They used data drawn from 12 large boroughs and 1 small borough. The size of the electorate (in 1857) for each borough is provided in brackets: Beverley (1,136), Bristol (12,612), Colchester (1,282), Hull (5,494), Lewes (724), Liverpool (18,314), Maidstone (1,611), Newcastle (1,365), Northampton (2,375), Norwich (6,175), Shrewsbury (1,617), Southampton (3,508) and Yarmouth (1,308).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.425.

older style of politics. The nineteenth-century proved "a crucial transitional period between the comparatively narrow (yet lively) electoral world of the eighteenth-century and the broad democracy of the twentieth".²⁰ And as we have seen, in the mid-Victorian period the diffusion of political principle, voter partisanship and party organisation was at times slowed by, amongst other factors, the repeated occurrence of electoral violence.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.553.

Appendix

The appendix includes all cases of election violence referred to in the thesis as 'the sample'. Each episode has been categorized according to the following criteria: (i) the county in which the constituency was located; (ii) the location of the violence, normally a borough name but in some cases this records a county town; (iii) the year in which the violence occurred; (iv) the type of constituency involved, either borough or county; (v) the scale of the violence, either 'riot', 'disturbance' or 'incident'; and (vi) the timing of the episode, if known. The size of the electorate involved is also recorded, whether borough or county, and the source in which the episode of violence was located is also provided. For easy identification all duplicate episodes of violence have been highlighted and are in italics. In the constituency description category cases of county violence are in bold type. The numbers provided in the far left column are for reference purposes only.

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|-------------------|---------------|------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|------------------------------|
| 1 BERKSHIRE | Wallingford | 1857 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 371 | | The Times |
| 2 ESSEX | Harwich | 1857 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 313 | | The Times |
| 3 GLOUCESTERSHIRE | Tewkesbury | 1857 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 371 | | B&WJ.1857 April 4. |
| 4 LANCASHIRE | Rochdale | 1857 | Borough | Disturbance | Meeting | 1255 | | NLH, 1857 April 4 & Hoppen |
| 5 LANCASHIRE | Bolton | 1857 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 1933 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 6 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE | Nottingham | 1857 | Borough | Incident | Declaration | 5650 | | The Times |
| 7 SUSSEX | Brighton | 1857 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 3936 | | The Times |
| 8 WARWICKSHIRE | Coventry | 1857 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 4982 | | CWT, Supplement March 18 |
| 9 WORCESTERSHIRE | Kidderminster | 1857 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 502 | | MG, Coventry Weekly Times |
| 10 YORKSHIRE | Beverley | 1857 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 1136 | | S/C.1857 Petition Mf.62.28-9 |
| 11 YORKSHIRE | York | 1857 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 4236 | | Nonconformist |
| 12 YORKSHIRE | Sheffield | 1857 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 6874 | | The Times |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 13 DORSET | Lyme Regis | 1859 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 264 | | The Times |
| 14 LANCASHIRE | Salford | 1859 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 4222 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 15 LANCASHIRE | Bury | 1859 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 1289 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 16 LANCASHIRE | Bury | 1859 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 1289 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 17 LANCASHIRE | Oldham | 1859 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 2151 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 18 MIDDLESEX | Finsbury | 1859 | Borough | Disturbance | Meeting | 21951 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 19 OXFORDSHIRE | Banbury | 1859 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 672 | | Victorian Banbury-B.Trinder |
| 20 WILTSHIRE | Calne | 1859 | Borough | Riot | Declaration | 174 | | Bridlington Free Press |
| 21 YORKSHIRE | Beverley | 1859 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 1210 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 22 YORKSHIRE | Hull | 1859 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 5526 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 23 YORKSHIRE,W.R | Leeds | 1859 | County | Incident | Meeting | | 40476 | Manchester Guardian |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|---------------------|------------------|------|------------|-------------|-------------|------|------|----------------------|
| 24 BERKSHIRE | Reading | 1860 | Borough BY | Incident | Polling Day | 1451 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 25 YORKSHIRE, E | Beverley | 1860 | Borough BY | Incident | Declaration | 1210 | | The Times |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 26 LEICESTERSHIRE | Leicester | 1861 | Borough BY | Riot | Unknown | 4207 | | The Times |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 27 LINCOLNSHIRE | Grimsby | 1862 | Borough BY | Riot | Polling Day | 4348 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 28 LINCOLNSHIRE | Lincoln | 1862 | Borough BY | Riot | Polling Day | 1435 | | Home Office Papers |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 29 BERKSHIRE | Maidenhead | 1865 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 7647 | Nonconformist |
| 30 BERKSHIRE | Windsor | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 651 | | Times |
| 31 CAMBRIDGESHIRE | Cambridge | 1865 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 1769 | | Nonconformist |
| 32 CUMBERLAND | Carlisle | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 1304 | | Times, CENA |
| 33 CUMBERLAND | Carlisle | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 1304 | | CENA |
| 34 DEVON | Tavistock | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 426 | | C&DH |
| 35 GLOUCESTERSHIRE | Cheltenham | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Canvass | 2793 | | Cheltenham Examiner |
| 36 GLOUCESTERSHIRE | Cheltenham | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Meeting | 2793 | | Cheltenham Examiner |
| 37 LANCASHIRE | Rochdale | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Unknown | 1358 | | Richter, 1965 Thesis |
| 38 LANCASHIRE | Oldham | 1865 | Borough | Incident | Unknown | 2285 | | Hoppen, 1994 Article |
| 39 LEICESTERSHIRE,N | Leicestershire,N | 1865 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 6348 | HLT |
| 40 LINCOLNSHIRE | Lincoln | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 1713 | | Home Office Papers |
| 41 LINCOLNSHIRE | Grantham | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 755 | | Noncon, C&DH |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|--------------------|---------------|------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|------------------------------|
| 42 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE | Nottingham | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Meeting | 5934 | | Nonconformist |
| 43 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE | Nottingham | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 5934 | | Nonconformist |
| 44 PEMBROKESHIRE | Pembroke | 1865 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 1433 | | The Welshman |
| 45 PEMBROKESHIRE | Haverfordwest | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 669 | | The Welshman |
| 46 SUSSEX | Lewes | 1865 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 676 | | Times |
| 47 WARWICKSHIRE, N | Atherstone | 1865 | County | Incident | Polling Day | | 3740 | Quinalt, 1974 in Stevenson&Q |
| 48 WARWICKSHIRE, N | Nuneaton | 1865 | County | Incident | Polling Day | | 3740 | Quinalt, 1974 in Stevenson&Q |
| 49 WARWICKSHIRE, S | Leamington | 1865 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 2550 | Quinalt, 1974 in Stevenson&Q |
| 50 WARWICKSHIRE, S | Warwick | 1865 | County | Incident | Unknown | | 2550 | Quinalt, 1974 in Stevenson&Q |
| 51 WILTSHIRE | Chippenham | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 392 | | Times, Non, C&DH |
| 52 WILTSHIRE | Cricklade | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 2029 | | Times |
| 53 WORCESTERSHIRE | Kidderminster | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 612 | | Times |
| 54 WORCESTERSHIRE | Dudley | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Unknown | 1358 | | C&DH |
| 55 YORKSHIRE, WR.S | Rotherham | 1865 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 19908 | Nonconformist |
| 56 YORKSHIRE, WR.S | Huddersfield | 1865 | Borough | Riot | Unknown | 2138 | | C&DH |
| 57 YORKSHIRE, E | Hull | 1865 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 5566 | | HLT |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 58 ESSEX | Colchester | 1867 | Borough BY | Incident | Unknown | 1405 | | Proceedings of the H.C. |
| 59 YORKSHIRE, WR.N | Bradford | 1867 | Borough BY | Riot | Nomination | 21158 | | Select Committee 1868-9 |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|--------------------|-------------------|------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------------------------------|
| 60 CAMBRIDGESHIRE | Cambridge | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 4000 | | Gloucester Journal |
| 61 CAMBRIDGESHIRE | Whittlesey | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 9502 | The Times |
| 62 CARMARTHEN | Llanelly | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 3286 | | Carmarthen Journal |
| 63 CARMARTHEN | Carmarthen | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 3286 | | Carmarthen Journal |
| 64 CARMARTHEN | Carmarthen | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 8026 | Carmarthen Journal |
| 65 CARNARVONSHIRE | Carnarvon | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 3376 | | C&DH |
| 66 CHESHIRE | Birkenhead | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 5892 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 67 CHESHIRE | Birkenhead | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 5892 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 68 CHESHIRE, MID | Sandbach | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 7158 | Manchester Guardian |
| 69 CUMBERLAND | Carlisle | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Unknown | 4537 | | CENA |
| 70 CUMBERLAND, E | Cumberland, E | 1868 | County | Riot | Declaration | | 6672 | Manchester Guardian, G.J |
| 71 DENBIGHSHIRE | Ruthin (Denbigh E | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Unknown | | 7623 | C&DH |
| 72 DERBY, E | Clay Cross | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 4550 | Derbyshire Courier |
| 73 DERBY, S | Ripley | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 7873 | DC, Richter |
| 74 DEVON, S | Hatherleigh | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 8047 | The Times, GJ |
| 75 DURHAM, N | Durham City | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 10576 | Manchester Guardian |
| 76 GLAMORGANSHIRE | Cardiff | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Unknown | 5388 | | BDP, The Cambrian |
| 77 GLAMORGANSHIRE | Aberdare (Merthy | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 14577 | | Bristol Daily Post |
| 78 GLOUCESTERSHIRE | Cheltenham | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 3536 | | Gloucester Journal |
| 79 GLOUCESTERSHIRE | Coleford | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 11463 | Gloucester Journal |
| 80 ISLE OF WIGHT | Newport | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 3807 | Hansard(3)1870.Vol.202 p.1355 |
| 81 KENT | Gravesend | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 2722 | | Select Committee 1868-9 |
| 82 KENT, W | Bromley | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 8828 | Home Office Papers |
| 83 LANCASHIRE | Blackburn | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 9183 | | MG, CJ |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|-----------------------|----------------|------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|----------------------------------|
| 84 LANCASHIRE | Bury | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 5587 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 85 LANCASHIRE | Wigan | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 3939 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 86 LANCASHIRE | Warrington | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 4470 | | MG, Warrington Guardian |
| 87 LANCASHIRE | Preston | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 10763 | | MG |
| 88 LANCASHIRE | Bolton | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 12650 | | MG |
| 89 LANCASHIRE | Salford | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 15862 | | MG |
| 90 LANCASHIRE | Ashton-u-Lyne | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 4822 | | MG, Hanham |
| 91 LANCASHIRE | Stalybridge | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 5338 | | Select Committee 1868-9 |
| 92 LANCASHIRE | Manchester | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 48256 | | Gloucester Journal |
| 93 LANCASHIRE,S | Blackburn | 1868 | County | Riot | Nomination | | 19340 | Manchester Guardian |
| 94 LANCASHIRE,S.W | Wigan | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 19218 | Nonconformist |
| 95 LEICESTERSHIRE,N | Shepshed | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 6348 | Derbyshire Courier |
| 96 LEICESTERSHIRE,S | Hinckley | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 8306 | MG, Times, GJ |
| 97 LINCOLNSHIRE | Lincoln | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Declaration | 4243 | | J.F.Hill (Victorian Lincoln)p.34 |
| 98 LINCOLNSHIRE | Boston | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Nomination | 2527 | | Boston Gazette |
| 99 LINCOLNSHIRE,S | Lincolnshire,S | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Declaration | | 10493 | Boston Gazette |
| 100 MIDDLESEX | Finsbury | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Meeting | 33601 | | Alcester Chronicle |
| 101 MONMOUTHSHIRE | Newport | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 3731 | | MG, Home Office Papers |
| 102 MONMOUTHSHIRE | Blanaevon | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 7971 | Manchester Guardian |
| 103 MONMOUTHSHIRE | Pontypool | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 7971 | The Times |
| 104 MONMOUTHSHIRE | Abersychan | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 7971 | The Times |
| 105 MONMOUTHSHIRE | Tredegar | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 7971 | The Times |
| 106 NORTHAMPTONSHIRE | Peterborough | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 2461 | | Boston Gazette |
| 107 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE | Nottingham | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 14168 | | The Times |
| 108 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE,N | Mansfield | 1868 | County | Riot | Nomination | | 5205 | MG, Times, DC |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------------------------------|
| 109 SHROPSHIRE | Church Stretton | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 5847 | MG, Staffordshire Advertiser |
| 110 SOMERSET | Bristol | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 21153 | | MG, Times, GJ |
| 111 SOMERSET | Bristol | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 21153 | | BDP |
| 112 STAFFORDSHIRE | Tipton (Wednesb.) | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 14277 | | Staffordshire Advertiser |
| 113 STAFFORDSHIRE | Stafford | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 3152 | | SA, Stafford Petition |
| 114 STAFFORDSHIRE | Wednesbury | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 14277 | | Staffordshire Advertiser |
| 115 STAFFORDSHIRE | Lichfield | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 1320 | | Staffordshire Advertiser |
| 116 STAFFORDSHIRE, W | Wolverhampton | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 9942 | MG, The Times |
| 117 STAFFORDSHIRE, W | Brierly Hill | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 9942 | MG, The Times |
| 118 STAFFORDSHIRE, W | Rowley | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 9942 | Manchester Guardian |
| 119 STAFFORDSHIRE, W | Cradley-Heath | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 9942 | Manchester Guardian |
| 120 SUFFOLK | Ipswich | 1868 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 5352 | | IE & ESM |
| 121 SUSSEX | Horsham | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Nomination | 799 | | Richter, 1965 |
| 122 WARWICKSHIRE, S | Leamington | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Declaration | | 6205 | Boston Gazette |
| 123 WARWICKSHIRE, S | Stratford-u-Avon | 1868 | County | Incident | Unknown | | 6429 | Alcester Chronicle |
| 124 WORCESTERSHIRE, E | Hales Owen | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 10313 | Manchester Guardian |
| 125 WORCESTERSHIRE, E | Redditch | 1868 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 10313 | Alcester Chronicle |
| 126 YORKSHIRE, W.R.S | Wakefield | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Nomination | 3627 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 127 YORKSHIRE, W.R | Halifax | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 9328 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 128 YORKSHIRE, E | York | 1868 | Borough | Riot | Declaration | 9088 | | MG, Staffordshire Advertiser |
| 129 YORKSHIRE, W.R | Bradford | 1868 | Borough | Incident | Declaration | 21158 | | Bradford Advertiser |
| 130 YORKSHIRE, W.R | Barnsley | 1868 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 19908 | Manchester Guardian |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 131 YORKSHIRE, W.R | Bradford | 1869 | Borough BY | Riot | Nomination | 21158 | | 1868-9 Select Committee p.143 |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|----------------------|------------------------|------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------------------------------|
| 132 YORKSHIRE, N | Ripon | 1871 | Borough BY | Riot | Polling Day | 1025 | | Nonconformist |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 133 CORNWALL | Penryn & Falmour | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 1860 | | MG, 9 Feb 1874, p.8 |
| 134 DERBYSHIRE, EAST | Chesterfield | 1874 | County | Incident | Polling Day | | 4836 | MG, 11 Feb 1874, p.6 |
| 135 DERBYSHIRE | Derby | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Declaration | 11316 | | MG, 6 Feb 1874, p.7 |
| 136 DURHAM, NORTH | Hetton | 1874 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 12153 | MG, 11 Feb 1874, p.7 |
| 137 DURHAM, NORTH | Seaham | 1874 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 12153 | MG, 11 Feb 1874, p.7 |
| 138 GLOUCESTERSHIRE | Cinderford | 1874 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 11463 | Nonconformist |
| 139 LANCASHIRE | Liverpool | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Declaration | 54952 | | MG, 7 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| 140 LANCASHIRE | Stalybridge | 1874 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 5129 | | MG, 5 Feb 1874, p.8 |
| 141 LANCASHIRE | Warrington | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 5022 | | MG, 3 Feb 1874, p.8 |
| 142 LINCOLNSHIRE | Lincoln | 1874 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 4689 | | Nonconformist |
| 143 NORTHAMPTONSHIRE | Peterborough | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 3056 | | Nonconformist |
| 144 NORFOLK | Norwich | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Canvass | 15166 | | MG, 4 Feb 1874, p.8 |
| 145 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE | Nottingham | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 16154 | | MG, 6 Feb 1874, p.6 |
| 146 OXFORDSHIRE | Oxford | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 5680 | | MG, 3 Feb 1874, p.8 |
| 147 STAFFORDSHIRE | Wolverhampton | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Meeting | 23257 | | The Times |
| 148 STAFFORDSHIRE | Wolverhampton | 1874 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 23257 | | MG, 6 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| 149 STAFFORDSHIRE | Wednesfield (Wolverh) | 1874 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 23257 | | MG, 6 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| 150 STAFFORDSHIRE | Willenhall (Wolverham) | 1874 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 23257 | | MG, 6 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| 151 STAFFORDSHIRE | Wednesbury | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 20357 | | Staff. Chief Constable Report |
| 152 STAFFORDSHIRE | Stoke-on-Trent | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 19129 | | Staff. Chief Constable Report |
| 153 STAFFORDSHIRE | Stoke-on-Trent | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Meeting | 19129 | | MG, 5 Feb 1874, p.8 |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-----------------------------|
| 154 SUFFOLK | Ipswich | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 6619 | | The Times |
| 155 WORCESTERSHIRE | Bewdley | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 1082 | | MG, 2 Feb 1874, p.8 |
| 156 WORCESTERSHIRE | Dudley | 1874 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 5578 | | Journal of House of Commons |
| 157 WORCESTERSHIRE, E | Lye | 1874 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 11105 | MG, 13 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| 158 WORCESTERSHIRE, E | Hales Owen | 1874 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 11105 | MG, 13 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| 159 YORKSHIRE, W.R | Castleford | 1874 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 19908 | MG, 14 Feb 1874, p.7 |
| 160 YORKSHIRE, W.R.S | Barnsley | 1874 | County | Disturbance | Polling Day | | 29922 | MG, 11 Feb 1874, p.6 |
| 161 YORKSHIRE, W.R.S | Sheffield | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Meeting | 36701 | | Nonconformist |
| 162 YORKSHIRE, W.R.S | Sheffield | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 36701 | | MG, 13 Feb 1874, p.7 |
| 163 YORKSHIRE | Hull | 1874 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 22026 | | MG, 9 Feb 1874, p.7 |
| 164 YORKSHIRE | Pontefract | 1874 | Borough | Incident | Declaration | 2038 | | MG, 4 Feb 1874, p.5 |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 165 WILTSHIRE | Wilton | 1877 | Borough BY | Disturbance | Meeting | 1401 | | Nonconformist |
| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
| 166 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE | Great Marlow | 1880 | Borough | Riot | Declaration | 941 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 167 CHESHIRE | Chester | 1880 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 7611 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 168 CHESHIRE, M | Northwick | 1880 | County | Riot | Unknown | | 8963 | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 169 CHESHIRE, W | Neston | 1880 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 11097 | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 170 CUMBERLAND, W | Barrow-in-Furness | 1880 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 7496 | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 171 DEVON, E | Newton Abbot | 1880 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 10416 | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 172 DEVON, N | Exmouth | 1880 | County | Incident | Unknown | | 9496 | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 173 DORSET | Dorchester | 1880 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 817 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 174 DORSET | Shaftesbury | 1880 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 1388 | | William Saunders, 1880 |

| County | Place | Year | Election | Disorder | Timing | BOR | COU | Source |
|----------------------|------------------|------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| 175 DURHAM | South Shields | 1880 | Borough | Riot | Unknown | 9893 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 176 DURHAM,S | South Durham | 1880 | County | Incident | Unknown | | 10498 | Manchester Guardian |
| 177 HAMPSHIRE | Winchester | 1880 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 2011 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 178 ISLE OF WIGHT | Shanklin | 1880 | County | Disturbance | Meeting | | 5320 | Manchester Guardian |
| 179 LANCASHIRE | Warrington | 1880 | Borough | Disturbance | Polling Day | 5919 | | MG, Warrington Guardian |
| 180 LANCASHIRE | Ashton-u-Lyne | 1880 | Borough | Incident | Unknown | 5901 | | Nonconformist |
| 181 LANCASHIRE,S.E | Farnworth | 1880 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 20631 | Manchester Guardian |
| 182 LINCOLNSHIRE | Lincoln | 1880 | Borough | Disturbance | Declaration | 4243 | | J.F.Hill (Victorian Lincoln)p.193 |
| 183 NORTHUMBERLAND | Newcastle-u-Tyne | 1880 | Borough | Incident | Unknown | 23800 | | Nonconformist |
| 184 SOMERSET | Bath | 1880 | Borough | Riot | Declaration | 5534 | | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 185 STAFFORDSHIRE | Lichfield | 1880 | Borough | Incident | Polling Day | 1374 | | Lichfield Borough Petition |
| 186 WARWICKSHIRE,S | Leamington | 1880 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 6429 | William Saunders, 1880 |
| 187 WILTSHIRE | Swindon | 1880 | County | Disturbance | Unknown | | 7249 | Salisbury & Winchester Journal |
| 188 WORCESTERSHIRE,E | Oldbury | 1880 | County | Incident | Meeting | | 12455 | Manchester Guardian |
| 189 YORKSHIRE,W.R.S | Pontefract | 1880 | Borough | Riot | Polling Day | 2429 | | Manchester Guardian |
| 190 YORKSHIRE | Hull | 1880 | Borough | Incident | Unknown | 26193 | | Nonconformist |
| 191 YORKSHIRE,W.R.S | Rotherham | 1880 | County | Riot | Polling Day | | 26329 | William Saunders, 1880 |

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