REGENCY RABBLE ROUSERS:
THE IMPACT AND LEGACY OF
THE CATO STREET
CONSPIRACY

by

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ABSTRACT

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What were the reasons behind the virtual disappearance of the Cato Street Conspiracy from historical discussion and debate as well as from public consciences? This thesis poses the question: How could a group whose activities had been closely watched for several years by government officials and deemed dangerous enough for these government officials to plant spies within their ranks, not receive the same historical treatment as those who were responsible for the Gunpowder Plot of 1605? This study maintains that both the Cato Street Conspirators and the Gunpowder Plotters set out to do the same thing: they desired to

create such a devastating blow against the government that it would be stopped dead in its tracks at which time they could set up a provisional government that would be for and of the people.

The main focus of the thesis is to detail the origin and evolution of the group that was responsible for the Cato Street Conspiracy; the study additionally explores the legacy of this group. The thesis reevaluates the available primary sources, such as trial records and materials housed in the National Archives of the United Kingdom from the Home Office and the Treasury Solicitor's Office, in addition to numerous secondary sources.

This study concludes that the Cato Street Conspiracy did not capture the attention of historians in the way that previous and more well-known plots did for several reasons. The Cato Street Conspiracy, for one thing, was a conspiracy against the cabinet rather than an attack against the monarchy. By the early nineteenth-century the king was merely a figurehead and parliament and the Privy Council ran the government, which meant that grievances were directed at them rather than the King.

The Cato Street Conspiracy was also overshadowed by the controversy surrounding the Queen Caroline divorce affair that began in June 1820. In addition, a lack of contemporary remembrance of the Cato Street Conspiracy can be attributed to the fact that the newspapers shied away from extensive reporting of the Cato Street Conspiracy, the trial and

the executions because of recent restrictions on civil liberties in the wake of the Peterloo massacres.

Finally even among other radicals, the Spenceans were deemed to be extremists. Radical groups who made the most arguable case for reform tended to be those who advocated non-violent parliamentary reform. These groups did not want their agendas to be tainted by association with the Cato Street Conspirators and the violence they advocated.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SOURCES AND INTERPRETATIONS

On the evening of February 23, 1820, in a barn loft near Edgeware Road in London, a group of two-dozen men waited for a signal to begin what they had dubbed their "West End job".[1] This group called itself the "Society of Spencean Philanthropists." The leader of the group, Arthur Thistlewood, believed that with this one event they would change the course England was on by creating the "Government of the People of Great Britain,"[2] which would take power out of the hands of Parliament and the landed elite and place it into the hands of the people.

The details of this "job" were fairly straightforward: the group would arrive at the home of the Lord President of His Majesty's Privy Council, Lord Harrowby, who hosted a dinner for the rest of the King's Cabinet and the Prime Minister. Once they gained entrance into his home they would murder the entire cabinet before taking to the streets of London to storm the Bank of England and the Tower of London. Borrowing from the revolutions in America and France a generation earlier, Thistlewood and his colleagues expected that by taking control of these symbolic

[1] M J Trow, *Enemies of the State: The Cato Street Conspiracy* (South Yorkshire, Pen & Sword Books, Ltd, 2010), 130.
[2] Trow, *Enemies of the State*, 8.

institutions, the flame of revolution would be ignited and spread quickly throughout the country.[3]

The Home Secretary, Viscount Sidmouth, had known about the activities of the group for several years. Through the network of spies he quietly embedded in various radical associations, Lord Sidmouth was able to keep an eye on the Spenceans and knew of the planned assassination attempt from its earliest beginnings. At roughly half past eight, George Ruthven, a former government spy employed by Sidmouth, arrived at the loft with thirteen members of the Bow Street Runners[4], and ascended the stairs to the loft where the group was hidden. A short, violent scuffle ensued. After the arrival of the Coldstream Guards[5], twelve of the men were captured. Thistlewood fled after stabbing a would-be enforcer in the heart with a sword, but was arrested later after a fellow conspirator, George Edwards, betrayed his hiding place. The men were taken to the Tower of London, where they awaited a grand jury hearing. Ultimately the men were tried and found guilty of the crime of treason. Five of the

[3] The National Archives: Historical Manuscript Commission, February 24, 1820. HO 44/5/204. Statement of George Edwards.
[4] The Bowstreet Runners were an early incarnation of the London Police force. Please see page 66 of this thesis for complete discussion of The Bowstreet Runners.
[5] The Coldstream Guards, which formed during the English Civil war, is an important part of the Monarch's household troops. Please see page 66 of this thesis for complete discussion of The Coldstream Guards.

conspirators were executed on May 1, 1820, while another four were sentenced to transportation for life.[6]

Unlike reform-minded English people who had strategized about politics before this group, and ones that would follow, the men of the Cato Street Conspiracy (denoted hereafter as CSC) were mostly forgotten to history. After initial contemporary discussion of the failed plot, the CSC was not mentioned in scholarly literature until the 1880s. Since that time the CSC has been discussed only briefly in books on the origins of working class Britain or as part of a brief description of early events in the reign of George IV. Among political historians the story of the Cato Street events is overshadowed by lengthy discussions of the arrival of George IV's estranged wife Queen Caroline from continental Europe, and Caroline's attempt to take her place as Queen consort. For some historians of radicalism prior to the middle of the twentieth century, the Cato Street conspirators seemed perhaps not radical enough to bear much consideration, or else so transitory and unsuccessful that they were unworthy of lengthy discussion.

Relegation of the Cato Street conspirators to the ranks of the unsuccessful, does not address the question of why the activities of this group have been marginalized to the footnotes of history by other

[6] *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 April 2011), April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al. (t18200416-1)

scholars, such as those interested in government policy during the conservative era after 1815. How could a group whose activities had been watched for several years and deemed so dangerous that the Home Secretary planted spies within their number not receive the same historical treatment as those who were responsible for the Gunpowder Plot of 1605? Had the understanding of radical behavior and the definition of treason changed so much in the two hundred years between the two plots that their place among the public and scholars would be completely different? Or was it that, much like radical organizations in 1960s and 1970s America, the "Society of Spencean Philanthropists" was just one of many groups attempting to make their mark on the political landscape in England?

The focus of this study is to answer these historiographical questions and others by looking at the evolution of the "Society of Spencean Philanthropists" (hereafter identified as "SSP"). The SSP was a group that continued the efforts of its namesake, Thomas Spence, on behalf of what today is called agrarianism[7]. The society experienced defeat on February 23, 1820; thereafter it had become a violent anti-parliamentary revolutionary organization. This study will discuss Thomas

[7] Agrarianism is a social or political movement designed to bring about land reforms or to improve the economic status of the farmer. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word was first used in 1808 by W. Taylor in *Monthly Magazine*.

Spence, the origins of his agrarian movement, and the evolution of the SSP after his death. The early leadership of the SSP will be considered, including a brief look at Thistlewood and how he took control of the group.

In order to understand the development of the SSP, one must grasp the desperate economic situation of agrarian workers and some consumers during the Regency Period. Thus this study provides a brief review of those economic pressures that gave rise to movements such as Thistlewood's and Spence's. Although the conservatism of British government during the 1810s is well known, how did that conservative outlook manifest itself in regard to the SSP? The SSP is much less frequently studied than trade unions (which did have economic goals but also cherished urban-oriented agendas) or explicitly political groups. The sources consulted for this thesis consider bureaucrats' and law enforcers' actions—actions that make clear that the SSP is less easily categorized as either economic or political.

Early in this project, a search for primary sources on the SSP yielded little beyond the trial documents connected to the Cato Street Conspiracy. The author of this study only recently discovered that the British National Archives at Kew holds a large number of manuscript pages on these subjects of the SSP and the CSC. Fortunately the

handwritten reports, letters and notes on the subject of this essay are now digitized and available to download from the National Archives website.

Numerous letters and reports on Spence, the SSP and the CSC that were sent to Lord Sidmouth—all available at Kew--have yielded valuable insight into the group's activities. The National Archives also holds spy reports, dating from 1816 until the group's arrest in 1820, that were sent to Sidmouth. Documents kept by the Treasury Solicitor's office in regard to the group's activities at Spa Fields in 1816 are available as well. These documents on the activities of the group show just how much government leaders were concerned with growth of the group's influence.

The present study contends that these primary sources offer a wealth of knowledge that greatly expands scholars' understanding of this subject. Now, as a result of this research, scholars of radical movements can appreciate how closely the government was watching the Spenceans and for how long. The trial documents, on which most historians focus, do not discuss how involved Lord Sidmouth and John Stafford (who supervised the spy network during this time) were in tracking the activities of Thomas Spence, the Spenceans and Thistlewood. The Home Office documents that detail exactly what information Sidmouth and his office were received from John Castle and George Edwards, two of the spies that Sidmouth placed within radical groups, still exist.

These primary documents show how concerned the government was with groups like the Spenceans and others. The primary documents do not say “we, the government, were interested in these groups because…” but the fact that these records exist--and the number of such records that there are—at least to show the fact that the leaders of the United Kingdom were concerned with groups like the Spenceans.

Other valuable primary sources are the writings of the group’s founder and namesake, Thomas Spence. He left behind a small library of propaganda that called for the peaceful nationalization of land. While his works are important and interesting to read, this study will not analyze all of Spence’s works; that would be too large a task for the present format. Instead his works will be surveyed in order to understand the early mission statement of the SSP and to show in what ways the group strayed from Spence’s original beliefs. Spence’s writings are available to download online through the British Museum as well as other websites such as Google books and http://thomas-spence-society.co.uk, which has transcribed all of Spence’s available works. Google books has made pamphlets and the autobiographies of Spence’s co-radicals Thomas Preston, Dr. James Watson, and Arthur Thistlewood, accessible in digital format.

The last major primary source utilized in the thesis comes from the records of the Central Criminal Court in London, also known as the Old Bailey. The CSC trial documents are available in digital format through the Old Bailey website. The documents are available in original manuscript form, in addition, the documents have been transcribed exactly how they appear on the original manuscripts.

The trial documents retrieved for this study concerning the Cato Street Conspiracy are extensive. They provide a thorough record of the trial of the five men who were ultimately executed and the four who were sentenced to transportation for life. The trial records include the charges against the defendants, as well as eyewitness reports of the conspirators' activities in the days surrounding the assassination attempt. The eyewitness reports came from lodge keepers, maids, shoemakers and milkmen. The witnesses were people who allegedly saw the men in and around Cato Street immediately before their arrests. In addition the court documents list the fate of each of the men who were accused, tried, and convicted.

Historical study of the CSC over the past 190 years has been sparse, at best. There were several "official" versions of the events of the trial but the writers used the Newgate Calendar and great amounts of hearsay as their sources. The actions of the CSC did not garner much

immediate response from the radical community. Percy Shelley had written a critique of the spy system the previous year; Lord Byron wrote 'Marino Faliero' while Charles Lamb wrote 'The Champion'. Both were thinly veiled references to the execution of the Cato Street Conspirators in May 1820, but there is no further literary mention of the group or government actions towards the group until George Borrow's novel The Romany Rye in 1857. In his book, Borrow romanticizes Thistlewood "as a tragic hero that was kindhearted and brave yet simple, who was used by the government for a nefarious plan to back-up their recent acts".[8]

During the first half of the twentieth century, scholarship on the CSC was relegated to anthologies on English history. Nearly all of the books that mention the CSC do nothing but relate the events quickly, after discussing the Regency of Prince George and before they discuss the trial of Queen Caroline and other troubles that occurred during the brief reign of King George IV. Most histories portrayed the events of the CSC as nothing more than an isolated incident perpetrated by a group of doomed idealists. This includes the highly regarded work by Elie Halevy[9] In such accounts, the conspiracy achieved nothing and was not part of anything greater.

[8] John Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 106.
[9] Elie Halevy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century: The Liberal Awakening 1815-1830* (London: Benn, 1961).

Not until the second half of the century did historians begin to take a closer look at Thomas Spence, the Spenceans and the CSC and with this new research came new opinions about the CSC among scholars began to take shape. The first and most influential of the historians to give the CSC a fresh look was E. P. Thompson. His book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, gave the nameless workers in history a voice. Thompson famously contended that the workers' "aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as causalities."[10] Thompson's landmark study contains a tone of regret that the Cato Street conspiracy ended (as did other attempted coups) in "catastrophe". Thompson also observes that the London working class radicals were "hemmed in by suspicion," "secretive," and small in scale; they failed to join their cause with the "secret industrial tradition" [Thompson's emphasis] that he admired.[11] In other words the Spenceans' lack of a sharp ideological focus, their urban radical agenda, and the plot's failure frustrated even the most talented of those historians who would chronicle radicalism in the 1820s.

[10] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 145.
[11] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 494.

Thompson's findings on Cato Street (such as they were) were followed by other books dissecting the evolution of the working class in Britain. D. G. Wright, Asa Briggs, Olive Rudkins, C. G. L. Duncann and others attempted to provide reasons behind the actions of Thistlewood and his followers by painting them as a product of the repressed environment in which they existed. In less skilled hands than Thompson, the Cato Street plotters still seemed feckless and two dimensional; the conspirators' felt that the only way to achieve their goals was to act out.

The 1970s produced two books written solely on the subject of Thistlewood and the CSC. John Stanhope (*The Cato Street Conspiracy*)[12] and David Johnson (*Regency Revolution: The Case of Arthur Thistlewood)*[13] wrote in-depth analyses of the events leading up to February 23, 1820, plus the conspirators' trials and executions. Neither book, however, did more than give a chronological breakdown of the events. In addition neither book went beyond regurgitating the trial documents and the Newgate Calendar. Johnson used a few Home Office documents but only those pertaining to the trials and immediate aftermath of the executions. By contract, this thesis will look at all available primary

[12] Stanhope, John; *The Cato Street Conspiracy*. (London: Alden Press, 1962).
[13] Johnson, David, *Regency Revolution: The Case of Arthur Thistlewood*. (Compton Chamberlayne, Great Britain: Compton Russell Ltd, 1974).

and secondary sources that can help scholars to fully understand the conspiracy's place in history.

Several authors who published during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s began to recognize that during the time period of the Spenceans and the CSC the terms "revolution" and "reform" did not have the same meanings that modern scholars assume. In Britain during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the government's wariness of reform was rooted in the fear of anything that took away their property (i.e. their wealth) and status. Malcom Thomis and Peter Holt's book, *Threats of Revolution in Britain* states that there was " no precise revolutionary movement to trace but there is an idea of revolution…elusive above all in its shape and form…It must be approached obliquely from several different angle."[14]

According to several scholars who studied English radicalism in the wake of Thompson, the radicals' focus was on parliamentary reform, which they preferred to outright revolution. The English already had a monarchical revolution in the 1640s and again in the 1680s, and now their system of government needed to be fine-tuned—even according to those who preached violence. It did not need a complete overhaul. Most

[14] Malcon I. Thomis and Peter Holt. *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1977), 1.

historians agree that the Spenceans were not upset with the king himself. Although the Cato Street plotters believed the Hanoverians had been in power too long, they were upset primarily with perceived abuses of power by the members of Parliament and the king's cabinet.

A 2000 book by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, is another source that considered the subject of radicalism in England during this period. Linebaugh and Rediker discuss the resistance to the beginnings of economic globalization that they believe was spearheaded by sailors, artisans, farmers, slaves and other members of the working classes. Their book is relevant to this essay for two reasons. First, it mentions Thomas Spence, Arthur Thistlewood and William Davidson and their involvement in this movement towards equality. Second, the book discusses Colonial Despard and his attempt to overthrow the government. The steps he planned to take in 1802 would be used followed almost exactly by Thistlewood and the members of the Cato Street Conspiracy in their attempt in 1820.

The most recent books written on the CSC are by John Gardner and M. J. Trow and were published in 2011 and 2010, respectively. Gardner's book discusses the impact that the CSC had on radical writers of its generation. He concludes that the radical reaction during this time

was not as pronounced as would be expected. Gardner believed that this muted reaction was because of the restrictions on the press imposed by the Six Acts (1819), which had followed the Peterloo Massacre.[15]

Trow's book, *Enemies of the State: The Cato Street Conspiracy*[16] portrays the conspirators more as victims of the government's desire to uphold the Six Acts than as a group with its own separate agenda or ideology. He acknowledges that the Cato Street Conspirators believed they were driven to extremes by the harsh economic conditions of the day. He also argues that the only thing that kept these men from accomplishing their goal of killing the cabinet and taking control of London was "the exact mechanics of how London could be taken from the forces that held it,[17]" and the lack of a fully executed plan of what to do with this new power once they gained control of the capital.

Some secondary sources have treated the CSC as an attempted government coup that was found out at the last minute because one of the members sold them out to government officials. Alternatively, secondary writers have painted Cato Street as a trap set by the government to weed out dangerous reform groups that could potentially incite a rebellion or even a revolution. This group of historians—that one might call

[15] Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest: Peterloo, Cato Street and the Queen Caroline Controversy*, 105.
[16] Trow, *Enemies of the State*, 130.
[17] Trow, *Enemies of the State*, 178.

conspiracy theorists in regard to this conspiracy--believe that group was influenced by a government spy to propose an act of violence so horrible that it would justify past and future repression. In particular, the government could use the failed coup to confirm the need for their passage of the Six Acts the year before.

This thesis argues that the CSC was neither completely a radical outburst nor a government plot, but rather an odd combination of the two. The present study contends that Thistlewood and his followers headed down a violent path as a result of the desperation they felt because of the difficult socioeconomic environment. The Cato Street plotters also resorted to extreme action in part because Thistlewood had an enlarged sense of entitlement and felt the government was to blame for his lack of fortune, rather than taking responsibility for his own misfortune. Thistlewood undeniably mishandled money, for example, each time he obtained it.

Evidence also exists that will prove that the government was nervous about the influence Thistlewood and his group had on other radical groups. Government ministers received intelligence that suggested that the Spenceans were more influential than they in fact were. This thesis will also discuss how much Lord Harrowby's office knew

about the group's plans and exactly how much their spy actually was able to influence Thistlewood toward such a violent path.

Lastly, the thesis will look at the legacy of the CSC. There will be a discussion of what effect, if any, this failed attempt had on politics. The CSC did not have the long-term historical effects that the Gunpowder Plot had. It did not change politics like the Chartist movement would a generation later. Still, Cato Street left an identifiable heritage. The failure of the CSC brought to the forefront the discussion of the use of spies by government agencies to infiltrate radical groups to instigate rebellion. This event also seemed to confirm that "reform by violence", as Thistlewood saw it, was not going to be successful any longer in English politics.

CHAPTER 2

ROAD TO REVOLUTION: THE MOTIVES AND PHILOSOPHIES BEHIND CATO STREET

Prior to the Glorious Revolution, opposition to royal power was opposition to the monarchy itself. By the beginning of the Regency Period, however, (1811-1820) political opposition was firmly against Parliament, which had power firmly in their hands. Opponents to "royal power" began asserting that all men should be protected by the law but at the same time be free from an arbitrary and tyrannical government.[18] Edmund Burke, through his pamphlet "Reflections on the Revolution in France," led the charge of Englishmen who used the principles of the French and American Revolutions to further their causes based on the idea of universal natural rights.[19]

Thomas Spence was one of these radical pamphleteers that flocked to London in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, in order to gain a larger audience and more supporters. Spence was born and brought up in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the 1750s. His father was a net

[18] Iain McCalman. *Radical Underground: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London: 1795-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 12.
[19] Philip Anthony Brown. *The French Revolution in English History* (London: Lockwood & Sons, 1918), 25.

maker who belonged to a fundamentalist sect known as the Glassites[20]. John Glas, the leader of this religious movement, preached much of what Spence would advocate as an adult: "simple law, no penal code, no accumulation of property… and plenty of song."[21] As a young adult, Thomas Spence ran a small school in his hometown and published occasional pamphlets. Spence was spurred to adopt the platform of land nationalization after watching the freemen in Newcastle successfully resist the threat of enclosure in 1773. [22]

Prior to Spence's departure for London in 1792 he had belonged to a group called the Philosophical Society in Newcastle; he was most active in the organization in the mid to late 1770s. In a speech he gave before the Newcastle society, he proclaimed "the country of any people…is properly their common…the first landholders [were] usurpers and tyrants."[23] This point of view and Spence's other ideas were a little too radical for this group. He believed in distributing his material among the common man, something that was frowned upon by his peers. They believed that common people would not be able to grasp philosophical

[20] Most of the sources used in this essay state that Spence's father had joined the group when Spence was a young boy and he later joined on his own accord. According to Linebaugh and Rediker, however, Spence joined the Glassites on his own as an adult.
[21] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 294
[22] TNA: PRO Enclosure Act 1773, (c. 81), Geo III
[23] Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 294.

ideas like a gentleman could. Spence believed that "all men are perfectible given certain ideal social institutions".[24]

At the core of Spence's thesis was the belief that land should be reclaimed by the people and administered by parishes. Rents collected by the parish authorities would be used to pay government expenses and maintain hospitals and schools. Whatever was left over would be redistributed among the members of the parishes. Spence "believed that land was the only permanent form of wealth, and he allowed expropriated landlords to keep their jewels, money, furniture and other movable property"[25] because he thought that in the end landlords' wealth would become reduced over time once their land was gone.

Spence also believed in universal suffrage, including women's suffrage, and voting by secret ballot. Like many radicals of the time he mistrusted the current central government and was against a standing army.[26] He wanted a guarantee that there would be income for those unable to work and protection for children from abuse and poverty.[27] He trusted that once everyone truly understood the situation of society's ills they would be willing to adopt his new plan. While Spence would later

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[24] Malcolm Chase, *'The People's Farm': English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 23-25.
[25] T. M. Parssinen, *Thomas Spence and the Origins of English Land Nationalization,* 136.
[26] McCalman, *Radical Underworld,* 18.
[27] Thomas Spence, *The Political Works of Thomas Spence.* Ed. H. T. Dickinson (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Avero (Eighteenth-Century) Publications, Ltd., 1982), 69-91.

denounce religion, his writings were packed with biblical references. At one point he equated himself to Moses. His naivety did not gain him many friends and he eventually realized that relocating to London was his only chance to have his opinion heard.

In 1792 he left his family for London, which was a hotbed of radical activity at that moment because of the ongoing French Revolution. He supported himself by selling books and his radical pamphlets from a cart. It was not long after his arrival that he became involved with the London Corresponding Society (LCS). The LCS was known as being a radical democratic[28] group and Spence thought that his ideology fit in with the group.

A few months after his arrival in London he was arrested for his involvement with the Lambeth Loyal Association, a short lived revolutionary group.[29] He was eventually released, with the Privy Council saying that it did not have enough evidence to connect him to radicalism. He was officially on the government's radar, however, and would be arrested and released periodically until 1801, when the Privy Council could finally get charges to stick.

During the period between 1792 and 1801 Spence promoted discussion in small tavern clubs, created revolutionary tokens, published

[28] Parssinen, *Origins of English Land Nationalization,* 136.
[29] NA: PRO PC 1/23/A38; PC 2/140.

pamphlets and composed songs which were sung during the tavern club meetings. All of these actions contributed to a case that the Home Office built against him. He was convicted of seditious libel in 1802 and jailed for twelve months.

By the time of his imprisonment in 1802, Spence's beliefs had become even more politically radical; he began to endorse the idea of a Federal Republic with annually elected representatives in a National Assembly.[30] He contended that reform could not happen without central authority. A central government, however, according to Spence, needed a series of checks and balances along French and American lines. His new way of thinking gained Spence more allies; by the time of his final imprisonment in 1803 he had a small circle of like-minded followers.

The actual date of formation of Spence's group is unknown. According to Home Office reports between 1807 and 1814 (the year of Spence's death), there are periodic mentions of Spence and his group of admirers. But there is no concrete evidence of a formal existence for the SSP because Spence promoted small group meetings throughout London rather than one large gathering. According to Parssinen, an "invitation that eventually turned up in the Home Office files states that that "Friends" of Thomas Spence will hold their eighth annual dinner honoring his

[30] Spence, *The Political Works of Thomas Spence.* Ed. Dickinson, 46-53.

memory on July 14, 1819"[31] which means some form of group existed in 1812.[32]

Regardless of when the group actually was formed, by the time of Spence's death in 1814, Thomas Evans who was his most dedicated follower, and the man who would "reconstitute Spence's tavern following as the Society of Spencean Philanthropists"[33] had steered the group towards what he hoped would be purpose and influence. Spence and Evans originally met when they were both part of the LCS. Evans was the practical and logical leader of the group and was constantly at loggerheads with his fellow reformers. By the beginning of 1818 Evans was firmly in the government's sights and had been imprisoned twice for suspected treasonous activities.

During the early years of Evans' relationship with Spence, his ability to organize gave structure to Spence's informal meetings. The new Spencean group became an actual society, collecting operating fees and swearing members to an oath to the ideals of Spence's plan for land reform. These were ideas Evans brought with him from his days with the LCS.[34]

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[31] Parssinen, *The Origins of English Land Nationalization,* 140.
[32] NA: HO 42/142.
[33] Thompson, *English Working Class,* 177-8.
[34] NA: TS 11/204/875 & 876

Three other men joined the SSP between 1810 and 1814. The first was Thomas Preston. According to his autobiography, Preston had once been a prosperous shoemaker but after his wife left and took their daughters with her, his businesses fell apart. He claimed that he joined the group shortly after Spence's death in 1814. Preston's loyalty to Spence had a distinctly anti-Anglican tone. He maintained, for example that even though the "Philanthropists might have been scouted by the profane, the powerful and the ignorant, they still continued to rest their pretensions on holy writ, and many passages in the Books of Leviticus, Kings, were resorted to as fitter and better guides than the casuistry of modern Bishops and Deacons."[35]

The next to join was Dr. James Watson, a Scottish apothecary-surgeon, who had been living in London for a number of years. He subscribed to the same belief--that Britain was ruled by a "vain and monstrous justice dealt out by a set of Norman Oligarchs"[36]--that Evans did.[37] Watson previously had business dealings with Evans and the next recruit, Arthur Thistlewood, which is how he became part of the SSP.

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[35] Thomas Preston, *The Life and Opinions of Thomas Preston, Patriot and Shoemaker* (London: Seale Publishing, 1817), 31.
[36] Chase, *'The People's Farm'* 83-84.
[37] The Norman Yolk was a belief perpetuated by English Nationalists who believed that the Norman Conquest of 1066 brought feudalism and "so the English groaned aloud for their lost liberty and plotted ceaselessly to find some way of shaking off a yoke that was so intolerable and unaccustomed". Mike Ibiji, *The Conquest and its aftermath.* *http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/normans/after_01.shtml*

Arthur Thistlewood was the illegitimate son of a well-to-do farmer. He received a basic education and trained for a job in land surveying but, as would happen many times in his life, he disliked this job and changed course. He became a lieutenant in the Yorkshire militia. Some of Thistlewood's stories of military service are suspect. He claimed to have fought in France during the revolutionary wars as a member of the French battalion, obtaining the rank of captain, but there is no evidence to confirm this. Another story placed him in America for a few years before returning to London. Thistlewood had a knack for marrying women with certain small but appealing inheritance prospects, but he also had a tendency to lose this money as a result of unwise investments or bad luck in gambling.[38]

Most of the information on Thistlewood's background comes from two primary sources, his trial in 1820, and Home Office reports made by various spies, or from Davis Johnson's book published in 1974. Most of the sources agree that Thistlewood was a man who thought very highly of himself and had an air of entitlement. The Home Office informers frequently noted that he always carried himself like a gentleman, even though they judged that he was not. His entire adult life seems to have been spent in an effort to "better his condition" by obtaining money. When

[38] David Johnson, *Regency Revolution: The Case of Arthur Thistlewood*. (Compton Chamberlayne, Great Britain: Compton Russell Ltd, 1974).

he did have money, he spent it or gambled it away. When he joined the Spenceans he was once again angry with the government, believing that the downturn in the economy was the source of his problems. He harbored a deep sense of entitlement that fueled his desire for reform, that would raise his fortunes again. He joined the group shortly before Spence's death. Within weeks of Spence's death, Thistlewood and Evans's son, also named Thomas, traveled to Paris to recruit radical expatriates to their cause. The two returned without success.

Meanwhile, Evans Sr. was creating a new Speancean plan. He published a revised manifesto for the group entitled *Addresses of the Society of the Society of Spencean Philanthropists.* This manifesto promised that it "would not disturb the relative classes of society, and it would retain a monarch, a pensioned and titled (but not private landowning) nobility and a paid, established clergy."[39]

Evans also implemented another tenet of doctrine that was not in Spence's original manifesto. Along with Watson, he believed that power had been out of the people's grasp for centuries. According to Evans, Alfred the Great had been the "inheritor of the Mosaic tradition" and the people's power had been stolen during the Norman Conquest in 1066. The form of government brought over by William the Conqueror began to

[39] McMalman, *Radical Underworld,* 100.

deplete the people of the rights to their land, which only got worse over time. Events such as the Magna Carta and the Glorious Revolution, which placed power in the hands of landowners, were not the cause of these troubles; they were simply a continuation of repression that had begun in 1066. This idea of the lost "Saxon Constitution" and the Norman Yoke theory was embroidered into the Spencean agrarian agenda.[40]

Reform groups during this period were eager for Parliamentary reform because archaic electoral practices allowed members of the House of Lords to maintain control of the House of Commons. Control of pocket boroughs[41] by members of the House of Lords guaranteed that their interests would be upheld and money and power would stay in the hands of the landed elite to the detriment of the rest of the nation. Evans believed that Parliamentary reform would be successful only if it was grounded in land nationalization. He believed that the lack of land reform was why the French Revolution had failed.

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[40] T. M. Parssinen. "The Revolutionary Party in London, 1816-20", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* XLV (1972): 268.

[41] A pocket borough was an election district that was controlled by, or "in the pocket" of, one person or family. The term was used by 19th-century English parliamentary reformers to describe the many boroughs in which a relatively small population was either bribed or coerced by the leading family or landowners to elect their representatives to Parliament. As a result, Parliament was controlled by the landed gentry and seats were filled by representatives who wanted to please their patrons rather than their constituents. Reforms passed in 1832 and 1867 ended this practice by widening the franchise and redistributing parliamentary seats to reflect the population shift from rural areas to the industrial towns.

Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth had begun planting spies in the rank of the Spenceans a few years earlier. The group had grown to between forty and fifty men, making it one of the largest radical groups of its time. The Home Secretary's office believed that the group was becoming influential and commanded enough power that they could rally support among fellow radicals to cause real problems for Parliament. Lord Sidmouth's fears were strengthened by reports coming in from the spies within the SSP.

The government employed nearly a dozen spies and informers who kept tabs on the Spenceans. Two of these spies, John Castle and George Edwards,[42] were important in motivating the group toward their revolutionary goals. John Castle became part of the group in October 1815 as a friend of Watson.[43] According to Henry Hunt, well-known radical speaker and early ally of the group, Castle had a record as a "thief, forger, blood-money informer, bigamist and pimp."[44] Castle tried his hardest to make it seem as though he was one with the Spenceans' cause, often making passionate and radical speeches. In one memorable

[42] NA: HO 40/9 (4); TS 11/199/868; TS 11/197/859; HO 42/158
[43] NA: TS 11/197/859
[44] Henry Hunt, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt, Esq.* (London: T. Dolby, 1820), 345.

talk he proclaimed, “May the last of the kings be strangled with the guts of the last of the priests”.[45]

It was not long after Castle’s arrival in the group that Evans began to have trouble with Preston, Watson and Thistlewood. Good harvests in 1813 and 1814 meant that the economy had made a slight improvement. Evans believed that it would be prudent for the group to wait until another time of economic trouble to strike.[46] The other men disagreed and wanted to act immediately.

Beginning in 1815, the economy took another nosedive. A volcanic eruption in Indonesia on April 5 ultimately caused horrible weather throughout the rest of the year. England suffered one of the worst harvests of the decade and snow fell in Britain in July. In addition to this weather calamity, the demobilization of soldiers in Europe brought 200,000 troops home to find no work or reduced wages for the jobs that did exist.

Thistlewood and Watson’s ire was further inflamed with the passing of the Corn Laws[47] in late 1815. Critics of that legislation in their own time (and ever since) have called the Corn Laws “one of the most divisive and

[45] NA: HO 42/160
[46] NA: HO 40/7 (2)/1996
[47] Formally known at the Importation Act 1815, 55 Geo. 3 c. 26.

class-conscious pieces of legislation ever put forward".[48] Members of Parliament were afraid that with the end of the war cheaper foreign grain, (corn to the English), would be imported and outsell their domestic grain (corn). Their fears were in fact realized, prompting Parliament to pass the legislation. While this new law protected the landowners' profits, it did not stimulate the economy. Lack of work and high grain prices thrust the economy back into the gutter where it had been only two years prior. Bread riots spread throughout London and the adjacent countryside. Watson, Thistlewood, and Preston saw this as a perfect time to spring into action. They began to plan a large-scale meeting at the Spa Fields in the borough of Islington in London that would feature the famous orator Henry Hunt.

Evans slowly started to pull away from the group as they began to make plans for the meeting in Spa Fields. He tried to dissuade several other Spencean members from further involvement with the new plan declaring it "chimerical and fanatical."[49] He knew the risk involved with the event that they were planning. Twelve years earlier, Colonel Edward Despard had been executed for his alleged involvement in and leadership

[48] M. J. Trow, *Enemies of the State: The Cato Street Conspiracy* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2010), 22.
[49] NA: TS 11/202/871

of an uprising aimed at the overthrow of the government through an uprising and coup.[50]

Edward Despard was born in Ireland to a Protestant Irish family that produced "soldiers, sheriffs and priests."[51] Despard grew up in a "country of intense social antagonism"[52] and was fully aware of the vast docial and economical dichotomy between the "haves" and the "have nots" in Ireland. At the age of fifteen, Despard enter the Fiftieth Regiment of the British army which would be sent to Jamaica the next year. Despard had risen to the rank of Captain by 1782 and had befriended the young Horatio Nelson during their service together in an expedition to drive the Spanish out of Nicaragua. Despard was appointed the "Crown's leading official in British Honduras" in 1784, but because of his "wild and Levelling principle of Universal Equality"[53] he would encounter massive problems with the white, British landowners. Lord Grenville officially removed him from office in September 1789 and he returned to England in 1790 with his "African American wife and their son".[54]

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[50] Malcolm Chase, 'Despard, Edward Marcus (1751–1803)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://libproxy.uta.edu:2422/view/article/7548, accessed 16 Aug 2011
[51] Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra,* 256.
[52] *Ibid*., 257.
[53] *Ibid., 281.*
[54] *Ibid., 281.*

Upon their arrival, Despard and his wife, Catherine, began to work towards the abolition of slavery and universal equality. They quickly discovered an ally in the working classes as the "workers had embraced the cause of abolition."[55] Like Thomas Spence, Despard joined the London Corresponding Society, but the two did not meet until Despard's arrest in 1798. Due to the suspension of habeas corpus in 1794, he was held without trial for nearly three years. During his years in prison, where he was shuffled from one jail to another, he began to devise a plan to take control of the government with the help of "slaves, industrial workers, sailors, dockworkers and the Irish."[56]

Over the next two years, Despard and his wife began to recruit allies in their fight for racial, social and economic equality. His final arrest occurred in November 1802. He was arrested in a tavern along with the forty men he had recruited to "burst the chain of bondage and slavery."[57] Despard was certain that the people of England were ripe for revolution, just as Thistlewood would believe just a decade later. Despard's beliefs were not the only thing that Thistlewood shared. His plan of attack against the government was almost exactly the same as Despard's, save for Despard's desire to kill the king rather than the king's ministers before he

[55] *Ibid., 273.*
[56] *Ibid.*, 275.
[57] *Ibid.*, 250.

led an all-out attack to control the Tower, the Bank of England and other strategic points. Unlike the Spa Fields Riots and the CSC, there was no question that Despard's plan of action was treasonous. Even with the testimony of his friend Lord Nelson, Despard, along with fifteen other men, were convicted of treason and executed on February 21, 1803. Even with the failure of the plot, Thistlewood knew in his heart that it could be a success, but Evans was not eager to follow in Despard's footsteps and become involved with such a dangerous plan. A break from the group was imminent.[58]

The Spenceans were once viewed by the government as a "small group of physical force fanatics who shared no more profound a principle than an uncritical admiration for the aims and methods of the Jacobins of the Terror.[59]" Now, however, the government believed that they were becoming a dangerous group intent to meet their goals no matter the cost. The Spenceans sent out several letters to various speakers but received a response only from Henry Hunt. Hunt was a well-known speaker on the subject of government reform, but the Spenceans were dismayed to discover that his views did not align with theirs. While they believed that land should be community property, Hunt declared "that the first thing the

[58] NA: HO 42/182
[59] Jacobins were the most famous political group of the French Revolution, which became identified with extreme egalitarianism and violence and which led the Revolutionary government from mid-1793 to mid-1794.

people had to do in order to recover their rights was to obtain a Reform of the Commons House of Parliament."[60] He stated he would not speak on their topics but would stick to a platform of Parliamentary reform.

The group ultimately consented to Hunt's conditions. They additionally secured W. Sparks and Peter Finnerty because they knew the two men would "supply the agrarian perspective lacking in Hunt's oration."[61] The first meeting at Spa Fields on November 15, 1816 saw nearly 20,000 people in attendance. In his speech Hunt spoke of reform by mental force rather than physical force. It was also Hunt's intent to bring a petition before the Prince Regent with grievances that he thought needed to be addressed. Hunt used this meeting to get a large number of signatures on a petition, which he took to Carlton House, but he was denied an audience with the Prince Regent. The Regent's refusal to see Hunt seemed to provoke public anger.

Indeed, this snub by the Regent was able to "arouse interest in the more ambitious second meeting"[62] which took place on December 2, 1816. At the second Spa Field meeting Watson and his son both spoke in an effort to rally the crowd towards a riot. The younger Watson jumped on the platform his father had been speaking on, seizing a "red, white and

[60] Hunt, *Memoirs of Hunt*, 333.
[61] NA: TS 11/197/863
[62] NA: HO 42/155

green tricolour" before shouting "If they will not give us what we want, shall we not take it!"[63] It was a call borrowed from Camille Desmoulin in the moments before the storming of the Bastille. Watson Jr. and his small group of followers "headed for the Royal Exchange and the Tower; while another led by Preston ran riot in the city, looting certain gunsmiths' premises"[64] on their way to Newgate Prison.

The group had intended to head toward Newgate Prison to release the prisoners in order to inspire citizens of London to rise up against tyranny just as the citizens of Paris had done when they stormed the Bastille nearly 30 years earlier. They believed that after a brief scuffle with government troops "mutiny would gradually spread in their ranks and the soldiers would join the insurrection."[65] The main two groups were quickly "halted by Exchange Aldermen Shaw and a mere seven constables,"[66] but not before a man by the name of Platt was injured by gunshot.

Thistlewood and his group made it to the Tower of London and demanded that it be surrendered. As Colonel Despard had believed twelve year earlier, Thistlewood was certain that the soldiers that guarded the Tower could easily be manipulated or were ready for change and only needed a leader to guide them. Thistlewood did not take into account that

[63] NA: HO 40/3(3)
[64] Chase, *The People's Farm,* 99.
[65] NA: PC 2/199/122-39.
[66] Trow, *Enemies of the State, 86.*

these men were committed to King and country, and he failed to understand that the political situation in Britain was far different from the situation in France or elsewhere in Europe.[67] This defeat was a wake-up call for Thistlewood but not because he realized that reform rather than revolution was the only possibility at this time. Thistlewood instead grasped that in order to take control of the government he would need something more. He would need a large distraction, but it would be another four years before he would be able to have that change.

In the weeks that followed the abortive Spa Fields action, Evans broke completely with Watson, Thistlewood and Preston. In and out of debtor's prison for several years, Evans and his followers attempted to resurrect the Spencean society as it had been during its early years. This new group still touted Spence's beliefs but advocated change by legislation and voting reforms.[68] Since Evans did not believe in reform by violence, as Thistlewood did, the new group became a lower priority for government informants. It was still monitored but not to the same degree as its former incarnation.

Evans' disappearance from the group could not have come at a better time for him because the riots in December 1816 had convinced Lord Liverpool that the SPS were more dangerous than the informers'

[67] Stanhope, *Cato Street Conspiracy,* 115.
[68] NA: HO 42/178

reports had been indicating. A few weeks after the riots, Parliament passed a new set of "gagging acts"[69] and Liverpool "secured the suspension once again of Habeas Corpus"[70] because he was able to make the riot look as though it was an attempt on the Regent's life.

The "gagging acts" of 1817, as they were popularly known, were officially published as one piece of legislation entitled the Treason Act 1817. The act made it a treasonable act to threaten the King or Prince Regent. The language of the preamble was instructive; the legislature was concerned not only with positive acts, but with the intent of rebels to cause harm. Parliament said:

> "Whereas by an Act passed in the thirty-sixth year of his present Majesty's reign, entitled 'An Act for the safety and preservation of his Majesty's person and government against treasonable and seditious practices and attempts,' it was amongst other things enacted that if any person or persons whatsoever, after the day of the passing of that Act, during the natural life of his Majesty, and until the end of the next session of Parliament after the demise of the Crown, should, within the realm or without, compass, imagine, invent, devise, or intend death or destruction, or any bodily harm tending to death or destruction, maim or wounding, imprisonment or restraint of the person of his Majesty, his heirs and successors…"

In other words, the crime of treason consisted of "encompassing," or in more modern language "envisioning", the death of the Regent. The

[69] The Treason Act 1817 (57 Geo.3 c.6).
[70] Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain: Visionaries, Rebels, and Revolutionaries-The Men and Women Who Fought For Our Freedoms,* 311.

treason Act did not present so much a new definition of treason; it did underline the seriousness of plotting treason, as a crime.

After the passage of the Act of 1817, in an *ex post facto* action the organizers of the meetings were arrested, except Thistlewood and Watson the younger, both of whom went into hiding. Watson was charged for his attempt to stab a man and the other men were charged with "theft of arms and ammunition[71]" but the men were acquitted. Rather than being deterred by their arrests, the plotters were even more eager to put their plan into action because of their acquittals. Additionally, the riots increased popular interest in their group. Meetings swelled from fifty participants to more than 130, which boosted the courage of the leaders to take the next step towards the implementation of the Spencean plan.[72] They began to make preparations for another mass meeting at Spa Fields.

Unfortunately for the SSP, the government believed it had enough information against the group to sustain a conviction, and arrested the leaders on February 9, just one day before another attempted coup. Watson's son evaded capture again. This time he was able to escape to United States. Thistlewood had also booked passage to United States for himself and his family, but he was arrested in April before he could set sail. His family remained in Britain while Thistlewood awaited his trial.

[71] *The Times*, January 22, 1817.
[72] NA: HO 40/3(4)/926.

Testimony was presented before the Privy Council and it was determined that there was enough evidence for a trial. Watson Sr., Preston, Thistlewood and a man named Hooper were locked in the Tower of London and charged with high treason.

The government's case against the SSP hinged on the testimony of John Castle and the reports that he gave to John Stafford, the man who supervised the spy network the Home Office had set up, about the group's activities. The men were to be tried separately. Watson's legal counsel was John Copley, who would go on to greater fame as Lord Chancellor of England three different times beginning in 1827. The future Baron Lyndhurst argued that the most devious and dangerous elements of the planned attempts were "put forward" by Castle. Copley also argued that because Castle was a government spy and since the idea to riot was his, that he should be considered an agent provocateur. Castle's past as a thief, pimp and adulterer in addition to his prior arrest for forgery where he turned king's evidence made him untrustworthy, according to the defense. The case was simple entrapment, argued defense counsel Copley, and his client Watson should be acquitted.[73]

[73] Arthur Thistlewood, *Trials of Arthur Thistlewood, gent, James Watson, surgeon, Thomas Preston, cordwainer, and John Hooper labourer, for High Treason…June 9, 1817,* (London: W. Lewis, 1817).

The jury complied. They were uneasy about Castle's testimony and the fact that he was most certainly an agent provocateur. While Castle's involvement in the Spa Field riots may have been to blame for Watson's acquittal, the perception among government officers and the public remained that the Spenceans had indeed attempted to overthrow the government and would have instituted the coup regardless of Castle's involvement. They had been planning to overthrow the government long before Castle joined the group. The government lost because they did not have enough evidence to convict the group, and because Castle was not an upstanding citizen. Placing its trust in a single questionable key witness was not a mistake that the government would make twice. From this point on, the SSP would be watched and evidence would be gathered more systematically and without reliance on a dubious informant. Sidmouth knew it was only a matter of time before the group would make another attempt at insurrection.

Following their narrow escape in early 1817, Thistlewood and company continued their plan to take over the government in the name of the people of England. Several times throughout the year 1817, the Spenceans planned to attend mass meetings that were put together by others and use the meetings as a springboard for their revolutionary plot. Each time, however, the government got wind of their plans and "moved

heavy reinforcements of police and troops into the area near the meeting";[74] this deterred the Spenceans from their planned attack.

In October 1817, Thistlewood was still an advocate for immediate action while the other leaders thought such a violent display was unnecessary because of the "improved state of the country and the increased demand for labour."[75] Watson had begun to fear being executed.[76] He began to advocate that the activities of the group should be to be reined in, which caused a rift between himself and Thistlewood. Watson's name was temporarily removed from the list of directors.

By the summer of 1818, Thistlewood's behavior had become erratic to his fellow radical and more dangerous in the eyes of the government. In May 1818 Thistlewood sent a letter to Lord Sidmouth, stating that his arrest at Spa Fields had prevented him from a paid voyage to the New World. He said this loss, in addition to the loss of money he would have made in America, had cost his family dearly and they were now in a dire situation. He demanded payment from Sidmouth in the amount of £180 plus a few household items and clothing. Sidmouth continually ignored Thistlewood's letters until he challenged him to a duel. Thistlewood was arrested on charges of harassment and, since habeas corpus had been

[74] NA: HO 40/7(1)/1939-42; HO 40/7(2)/1986 & 2011.
[75] HO 40/7(2) 2011
[76] NA: HO 40/7(3)/2023-24; HO 40/7/(1)/1949.

suspended, served nearly a year in the Horsham jail without a trial. It is unclear exactly what Sidmouth's true reasons were for Thistlewood's imprisonment but it can be assumed that he desired to see Thistlewood locked up since he had become a nuisance to Sidmouth's administration.

During Thistlewood's time in prison John Stafford, the Chief Magistrate of the Bow Street Runners, who answered directly to Lord Sidmouth, made preparations to place the spy George Edwards within the SSP. As the head of the Bow Street Runners, Stafford kept tabs on potential criminal activity. Thistlewood's desire to rid England of "every species of villainy, whether disguised in the hypocritical cant of a supercilious aristocrat, or exhibited in the more vulgar depravity of a commissioned executioner"[77] made him the prime target of the authorities. Thistlewood's self-destructive behavior was well known and Stafford "knew perfectly well that Thistlewood would hang himself and his accomplices provided he was given enough rope."[78]

During his time in prison, Watson took steps to steer the group in a different direction. In the summer of 1818, Watson supported the idea of Parliamentary representation for "non-represented people" and printed a

[77] Arthur Thistlewood, *An Interesting Correspondence between Thistlewood and Sidmouth Concerning the Property Detained, In Consequence of an Arrest, On a Charge of High Treason* (London: A. Seale, 1817), 8.
[78] David Johnson, *Regency Revolution: The Case of Arthur Thistlewood* (*Compton Chamberlayne*, Great Britain: Compton Russell Ltd, 1974), 80.

pamphlet entitled *The Rights of the People, Unity or Slavery*. He was confident that the sale of this pamphlet would be so great and his words would be held in such great esteem that the situation between the King and his people would begin to heal itself.[79]

Thistlewood was released from jail in May 1819. He immediately returned to his revolutionary ways and began to make plans for another attempt at insurrection via public meeting. Legal and social reformer Jeremy Bentham gave Thistlewood money to further his cause and it was quickly used on arms. A month after his release Edwards was introduced to Thistlewood by Preston. His fervor for revolutionary violence was matched only by that of Thistlewood.[80] There were never any suspicions that Edwards was actually a double agent because his brother had been a Spencean member and he had been introduced to the group during Spence's lifetime.[81]

On July 21, 1819, in Smithfield, the conspirators held another large meeting with hopes of being able to finish what they had started at Spa Fields. Hunt spoke again and again he tried to present the Prince Regent with a signed petition, but unlike the previous meeting, there was a large

[79] NA: HO 42/196; HO 42/179, 184, 188
[80] George Theodore Wilkinson, *An Authentic History of the Cato Street Conspiracy: With the Trials at Large of the Conspirators for High Treason and Murder.* (London: Thomas Kelly, 1820), 371.
[81] NA: HO 40/3(4); HO 40/8(4); TS 24/3/99/1.

military and police presence which deterred the group from their plans. Thistlewood had planned another meeting/attack for the first night of Bartholomew's Fair (August 24) but the tragedy at St. Peter's Field in Manchester on August 16, 1819—later known as "Peterloo"--placed authorities in London on alert. The Spencean group put their plan on hold for a little while.

Radicals in Manchester had been watching the Spenceans and their activities at Spa Fields and Smithfield. They viewed the meetings as a success and believed that they would be successful in their own peaceful meeting. Such a demonstration, they maintained, could do more for the reform movement than the violent Spenceans. In their radical newspaper *The Manchester Observer* they laid out a mission statement for the meeting at St. Peter's Fields near Manchester: "To take into consideration that most speedy and effectual mode of obtaining Radical reform in the Common House of Parliament" and bring representation to the "Unrepresented Inhabitants of Manchester." The Spenceans believed that the Manchester meeting could succeed where Spa Fields failed and they looked "with great anxiety to the Manchr. Meeting, on Monday, where

they expect the Row to begin…they will be much disappointed if that Meeting goes off quietly."[82]

Unfortunately, the meeting turned into a complete disaster. The gathering started out as peaceful and well organized. Groups of citizens marched in from their respective towns and organized themselves accordingly. By the time Hunt took the stage nearly 60,000 people were in attendance.[83] The enormous crowd unnerved local officials and a small constabulary, who felt themselves greatly outmanned. The thunderous reception that accompanied Hunt's arrival on the stage spurred chief magistrate William Hulton into action. He decided to issue an arrest warrant for Hunt. As the cavalry descended on the crowd, confusion ensued. The crowd tried to clear a path for the cavalry, which scared their horses. The cavalry interpreted the crowd's actions as an attack against them and they began using their swords and bayonets on the civilians as they tried to flee.[84]

News of the Peterloo Massacre spread rapidly throughout the United Kingdom. It was one of the first large-scale public meetings on electoral reform where journalists were present, therefore word spread to

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[82] NA: HO 42/191

[83] Estimates on the actual number that attended the meeting vary. Contemporary sources give the number as low as 15,000 to a high as 150,000. In her book on the massacre, Peterloo scholar Joyce Marlow believes that the probable number fell between 60,000 to 80,000.

[84] Joyce Marlow, *The Peterloo Massacre* (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1969), 50

London within days of the event. Most of the political writers of the day-including William Hone, George Gordon Lord Byron, Samuel Bamford (who was present at the massacre), and Percy Bysshe Shelley-all wrote scathing condemnations of the government's actions in Manchester.[85] Shelley's biting poem "England in 1819" contained a condemnation of not only local authorities' actions, but also a censure of the unreformed Parliament, debauched regency, and an out-of-touch monarchy:

> An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
> Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
> Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
> Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
> But leechlike to their fainting country cling
> Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.
> A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;
> An army, whom liberticide and prey
> Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
> Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
> Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
> A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed—
> Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
> Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.[86]

"Mask of Anarchy" is another poem written by Shelley that condemns government actions at Peterloo:

> Stand ye calm and resolute,
> Like a forest close and mute,
> With folded arms and looks which are
> Weapons of unvanquished war.
> And if then the tyrants dare,

[85] R.J. White, *Waterloo to Peter* (Middlesex: Heinemann, 1957), 185.
[86] Earl Wasserman. *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 75.

Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim and hew,
What they like, that let them do.
With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away
Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.
Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you-
Ye are many — they are few"[87]

The government stood behind the members of the cavalry, stating that the men were trying to disperse an illegal gathering. By December, Parliament had passed a group of laws, known collectively as the Six Acts[88], which effectively ended the legality of any further mass meetings or printing any radical news or opinions. Combined with the suspension of habeas corpus, the Six Acts could keep someone in jail without trial for an extended period of time. Many of the country's radical leaders-Henry Hunt, James Wroe, Samuel Bamford, John Saxton, Sir Francis Burdett, Richard Carlile, and Major John Cartwright-found themselves either on

[87] http://archive.org/stream/masqueanarchyap00huntgoog#page/n4/mode/2up (accessed April 04, 2012).
[88] The Six Acts consisted of the following acts: Unlawful Drilling Act (60 Geo. 3 and 1 Geo. 4 c.1); Seizure of Arms Act (60 Geo. 3 and 1 Geo. 4 c. 2); Misdemeanors Act (60 Geo. 3 and 1 Geo. 4 c. 3); Seditious Meetings Prevention Act (60 Geo. 3 and 1 Geo. 4 c. 6); Criminal Libel Act (60 Geo. 3 and 1 Geo. 4 c. 8); Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act (60 Geo. 3 and 1 Geo. 4 c. 9).

trial or in prison in the aftermath of Peterloo and the passing of the Six Acts. The radical reform movement had been dealt a severe blow. Thistlewood and the Spenceans began to be desperate. The group began making serious plans to rebel.

According to reports from Castle and other spies, Thistlewood first suggested the assassination of the Prince Regent, Privy Councilors and Prime Minister (or some combination of two of the three) as early as October 1817.[89] When Thistlewood became leader of the Spenceans on November 24, 1819 upon Watson's imprisonment for debt, he began to put those plans into action. In December 1819, Edwards reported to Sidmouth that the group had decided that they would go forward with their plan to assassinate the Cabinet during one of their weekly dinners; the group simply was looking for the right time to act.[90]

From the beginning of his involvement with radical reformers, Thistlewood embraced the reformist ideas that he picked up during his time in post-revolutionary France. He believed that in order for England to throw off the "repressive government" there needed to be one large-scale event, much like the storming of the Bastille. He believed that once the Spenceans had killed the King's Cabinet they would quickly be "joined by 30 or 40 thousand workingmen including working classes in Newcastle,

[89] NA: HO 42/197
[90] NA: HO 44/5/204; HO 44/6/174.

Glasgow, Newcastle, and Leeds."[91] After the assassination the group would set up a provisional government, then attack the Bank of England as they had planned during the Spa Fields Riots. Thistlewood harbored the delusion that the country was on the verge of revolution and that all it needed was one strong leader to rise up to guide them.[92]

The time for action came when they received news of death of King George III, who had died on January 29, 1820. Thistlewood believed that all of the troops would be at Windsor for the funeral of the king and would be unable to return to London to stop any attack on the city. Additionally, he believed that he and his colleagues could further disable the troops by destroying their barracks with grenades; this would keep the troops busy putting out fires rather than attending to the coup around them.[93]

For his part, Edwards stoked the fires of the Spenceans' desire for violence. Edwards was often heard bragging how easy it would be to assassinate the Cabinet[94]. Edwards busied himself verifying the date and time of the next Privy Council dinner and recruiting a number of

[91] NA: HO 44/5/290, 234, 225, 207, 275.
[92] NA: HO 44/5/204; HO 44/6/174
[93] NA: HO 44/5/275, 225.
[94] *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, William Davidson, James Ings, John Thomas Brunt, Richard Tidd, James Williams Wilson, John Harrison, Richard Bradburn, John Shaw Strange, James Gilchrist, Charles Coope (t18200416-1).

"impoverished men with little or no fighting experience"[95] to increase the numbers of the rebels.

Unbeknownst to the SSP, the announced dinner on February 23, 1820 was a setup. There was no scheduled dinner at Lord Harrowby's house on that day or any time in the near future. The actual dinners of the Councilors had been postponed in the wake of the old King's death and the illness of the new King.[96] Edwards cleared the plan with Harrowby's office. He made sure that the dinner was also announced in *The New Times,* which he hoped would help to solidify their plan by attracting more participants to the conspiracy. Edwards began making necessary preparations on behalf of the group. He secured a loft on Cato Street that would serve as the home base from which the party would travel to Lord Harrowby's house on the night of the planned attack.[97]

On the night of the attack twenty-five men crowded into the loft on Cato Street and waited to see if more men would show. Thistlewood had promised forty men could be recruited for the job. When they did not arrive, his fellow conspirators argued that it "would be useless without

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[95] John Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest,* 110.
[96] According to John Andrew Hamilton's biography of George IV, "The new king nearly died in the hour of his accession to the throne. He had been too ill to attend his father's deathbed, and the inflammation, due to a chill from which he suffered was, on the night of 1 Feb., so acute that he was in danger of suffocation, and was saved only by a bleeding so severe that it alone almost killed him." *George IV-A Short Biography* (Oxford: Oxford, University Press, 1900), 410-411.
[97] NA: HO 42/199.

forty."[98] It was at this moment that the Bow Street Runners began filing up the ladder into the loft and the group realized that the plot was over.

George Ruthven, the leader of the Runners, was the first to arrive in the loft. He immediately announced who he was and told his men to seize the plotters' weapons. Thistlewood backed into an adjacent room but as one of the Runners approached him, he leaned forward and stabbed the man in the chest. The Runner died soon afterward.

Shortly after the shooting began, the Coldstream Guards arrived under the leadership of Captain Fitzclarence. The Guards were originally supposed to meet the Runners on the street before ascending the stairs into the loft, but they had gone to the wrong street and found their way only after hearing the gunfire during the scuffle.[99] Thistlewood initially escaped but was found at 8 White Street, Little Moorfields. Edwards was the one who gave up Thistlewood's hiding place. In all, ten men[100] were arrested and held in the Tower to await trial for treason.

The next morning details of the attempted assassination plot and the perpetrators' arrest were reported in *The Times*. "Respectable citizens

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[98] *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[99] *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[100] The ten men held for trial were: Arthur Thistlewood, James Ings, Richard Bradburn, James Gilchrist, Charles Cooper, Richard Tidd, John Monument, John Shaw, and William Davidson. Robert Adams was initially arrested but quickly turned King's evidence in exchange for not being charged.

were horrified at the story while workingmen felt some sympathy for the accused" [101]. Almost immediately rumors spread that a possible agent provocateur was involved. Hopes were high among the group's sympathizers that this group of men would have the same fate as those involved in the Spa Fields meetings.

[101] T. M. Parssinen, "Convention and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848", *The English Historical Review* 88 (July 1973), 525.

CHAPTER 3

TRIAL AND EXECUTION

Less than six years after the death of Thomas Spence, the Society of Spencean Philanthropists, the group that carried his name and continued his quest for equality for all, was on its deathbed. The attempted assassination of the King's Privy Council at the hands of this group of men had been thwarted in the evening hours of February 23, 1820. The men sat in Newgate Prison and waited until the grand jury decided what to charges to bring against them. Would they be tried for treason or for something that carried a less harsh punishment? Was it a treasonable act to threaten the life of a government minister? Even though Thistlewood had once thought the group should kill the king, along with the others, the idea never progressed past his original suggestion. The Cato Street Conspiracy as it was planned on the night of February 23, 1820 was an attempt to do away with the members of the King's council. So the questions posed to the grand jury in the weeks that led up to the trial in late April 1820 were this: Were the actions of this group of men a treasonous act? What exactly was legally considered to be a treasonous act in 1820?

Five centuries earlier, Treason Acts passed during the reign of Edward III protected the reigning king or queen from the threat of a coup d'état, the threat of war waged against their rule, or the threat of death, but as central power shifted from the monarch to Parliament, the treason acts did not change to include this evolution. At a trial in 1794[102] that prefigured the prosecutions of the Spenceans, the prosecution argued that the "powers of the king were intimately tied to the powers of parliament."[103] The Attorney General stated in the earlier trial that "no man can levy war or conspire to levy war against any part of that Government without levying war against the King."[104] The grand jury in the Cato Street case in the spring of 1820 used this past case to justify the charge of high treason against the men rather than simply felony murder. They also added that while the accused did not directly threaten the life of the king, the chain of events that they would invariably set off by the attack on the ministers would without doubt lead to a threat against his life. With this decided the trial began on April 15, 1820.

In order to make sure that the outcome of this trial was different from the Spa Fields trial, prosecutors did not place on the stand their chief

[102] In 1794, thirty members of the London Coorspondance Society were arrested on suspensions of treasonable practices at a meeting they held to discuss Parliamentary reform
[103] Thomis and Holt , *Threats of Revolution in Britain,* 75.
[104] Thomis and Holt , *Threats of Revolution in Britain*, 75.

witness and government spy, George Edwards. Instead, crown prosecutors were able to turn three men into witnesses for the crown in return for their testimonies against the others. Robert Adams, Thomas Hyden and John Monument would testify in exchange for charges being dropped against them. While Edwards' name appeared on the witness list he was never called to testify. Throughout the trial all of the men accused blamed Edwards, stating that he was the instigator of the plot and demanding that he be placed on the stand so he could be questioned about his involvement in the scheme.

On the morning of April 15, 1820, the first day of his trial, Thistlewood was brought in from Newgate Prison. John Copley, 1st Baron Lyndhurst, who ironically served as the defense attorney during Watson's trial in the Spa Fields case, led this prosecution. After the jury arrived, the witnesses entered and were divided into two groups, with "the more respectable [being] placed in the Grand Jury room and those of an humbler class [remaining] in a contiguous apartment"[105]. In addition to Thistlewood, the other prisoners were brought in to watch his trial. Before the first witness was called, the charges that were finally decided on during the grand jury trial were read out against the defendants.

[105] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

Each man was tried separately; Thistlewood's was the first case to be heard. The biggest worry for the defense in regard to Thistlewood was his history as a "known agitator."[106] John Adolphus served as defense counsel for the men on trial. He did his best to discredit the crown witnesses but to no avail. Adolphus made certain that the witnesses implicated Edwards as the mastermind behind the conspiracy, although Edwards did not always get his way. Adolphus also tried to claim the men were only guilty of attempted murder and had no intention of inciting a revolution.

Adams' testimony came first. He described in detail the events of the week leading up to February 23. Hyden and Monument's testimony would come later in the trial but their remarks echoed that of Adams. Adolphus and his co-counsel, Barrister Curwood, argued that none of the men's testimony could be given any validity because as accomplices they used their testimony to buy their lives, and while "an accomplice was a necessary witness…he was not of necessity to be believed. The more atrocious the guilt in which he is steeped himself, the less worthy he was of credit."

Adams' testified that his relationship with Brunt had begun in France in 1815. Brunt was going by the name Thomas Morton at the time

[106] NA: HO 40/7(2)/2011

that Adams met him. Brunt introduced Adams to Thistlewood shortly before February 1820. Adams revealed that originally the plan had been to try to attack the men of the cabinet in their offices but decided that it would be a fruitless endeavor because "there were too many soldiers about that place".[107]

Throughout his testimony, Adams laid out the details of the group's plans to assassinate the cabinet: "at a former meeting I asked them frequently for the plan; Brunt told me two or three of them had drawn out a plan, with a view to assassinate the cabinet ministers at the first cabinet dinner they had; they scarcely ever met without that being the subject." The group had also decided that if the ministers' dinner did not happen, then they would go to each of the ministers' homes and attack them there.

Adams claimed that while he wanted to put a stop to the Conspiracy, he felt he could not. "I wished to save the trouble of being exposed in this sort of way"[108]. When asked again why he continued to come to the meetings knowing full well what was going to happen, Adams remarked that in the beginning his mind "was perverted by Paine's Age of

[107] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[108] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

Reason"[109] but once he realized the severity of what was about to happen "there had been threatening language held out by Brunt, that if any man withdrew himself he should be marked out-fear kept me to him." Adams was never tried for his involvement in the Conspiracy and not much is known of his life afterwards.

Ex-militia officer John Monument testified that he was drawn into the plot by Thistlewood. He testified that he went along with the plan only because he felt his life and family threatened. He said that his stay in the Tower "had unnerved him completely…and was allowed to turn king's evidence"[110]. He did not plan on going through with the assassination but had planned to slip away while the others made their way to the dinner. Monument stated that Thistlewood told him,

> "If I was asked who it was that led me into it and took me to the meetings, I was to say it was a man of the name of Edwards. I said 'How can I tell such a falsehood, when you know I never saw the man in my life?' He said that was of no consequence for it I was asked what sort of man he was I was to say he was not much taller than myself, of a sallow complexion and dressed in a brown great-coat."[111]

[109] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[110] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[111] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

The next group of eyewitness testimonies came from two enforcement authorities, the Bow Street Runners (hereafter referred to as BSR), and the Coldstream Guards (hereafter referred to as CG). The BSR were founded in 1749 by Henry Fielding, London's Chief Magistrate. With the help of his brother, John, the BSR quickly grew into what can confidently be called London's first police force. The BSR worked directly with the magistrate's office and the court at No. 4 Bow Street (the address which gave them their name). The BSR had entered the building on Cato Street armed with an arrest warrant from the magistrate's office. The CG dates back to the English Civil War, at which time the group was loyal to Cromwell's forces; it was an allegiance which lasted until the Protector's death. The group then threw their allegiance behind the Stuart cause and would continue to be an important part of the King's (Or Queen's) household troops through to the present day.[112]

The original plan was for the BSR to wait for the Life Guards and the CG in order to provide sufficient backup, but Richard Birnie, a magistrate with the BSR, decided that they had enough men to overtake the plotters who were hiding in the stable on Cato Street. The CG would

[112] Stanley Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780-1850*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

arrive shortly after the BSR had ascended the staircase and the shooting had begun at Thistlewood and the rest of the group.[113]

According to G. T J. Ruthven, a constable for the Bow Street Runners, when they arrived at Cato Street and entered the stable "I then went up a ladder…saw in the loft several men…I saw Thistlewood in the room…he was standing on the right-hand side of the table…he looked up, took up a sword, and then retreated towards the little room."[114] Ruthven's testimony gave insight into what kind of firepower the plotters had in their possession at the time of the ambush. According to Ruthven, there was a large cache of bayonets, pistols, boxes of ammunition, and other items. Ruthven also testified that it was Thistlewood who stabbed Richard Smithers, leading to his death. Ruthven stated that during Davidson's arrest he "damned and swore against any man who would not die in liberty's cause and he gloried in it."[115]

William Westcoat, another constable with the BSR, testified that he had been in the room when the arrests of the plotters were made. Thistlewood, he stated, "came down and turned around, presented a pistol at my head and fired at me-the pistol was fired a few yards from me, the

[113] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[114] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[115] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

ball went through my hat." He also stated that he had tried to apprehend Ings but was blindsided by a punch to the head, and Ings escaped.

John Wright testified that he entered the stable shortly after Westcoat but he was not able to make it upstairs into the loft. "I was knocked down [and] I received a stab in my side," but he was still able to search Wilson who was in possession of "cartridges…and a haversack suspended across his shoulder"[116].

Another member of the BSRs, James Ellis, gave most of the testimony that detailed the death of Robert Smithers. Once Smithers made it to the top of the ladder, Ellis states that with Smithers "going to the door Thistlewood rushed forward, and stuck him with the sword near his right breast; on that I saw Smithers' arms extended, he said, "Oh my God!" and staggered against me; on seeing that I immediately fired my pistol towards Thistlewood, but without effect."[117]

The testimony of the remaining BSRs-Joseph Champion, Robert Champion, Benjamin Gill, Williams Lee and Luke Nixon-affirms the testimony of the others. They entered the stable and tried to climb the ladder into the loft but were knocked down by someone above them as people in the loft were attempting to flee. They all heard gunfire and saw

[116] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[117] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

Thistlewood try to leave the scene. Gill was the man responsible for arresting Davidson and he tried to flee the stable. These witnesses all agreed upon the number and types arms and ammunition found at the scene and afterwards.

Testimony established that at the same time Bishop was with Thistlewood, Taunton went to the boardinghouse of Mrs. Rogers, where Brunt and Tidd had been staying prior to the failed plot. Tidd already had been arrested but Brunt was still at large. Taunton testified that Brunt said he knew nothing of the Conspiracy and that "the room did not belong to him". In Brunt's room the officers found:

> "Nine papers with rope yarn and tar in different papers, and some steel filings; in another basket there were four grenades, three papers of rope yarn and tar, two flannel bags of powder, one pound each, five flannel bags, empty, one paper with powder in it, and one leather bag with sixty-three balls in it - this was all that was in the basket; an iron pot and pike handle"[118].

Taunton testified that in Tidd's room he

> "Found a box about two feet and a half long, full of ball cartridges. I counted them - there were 965. I also found ten grenades, and a great quantity of gunpowder. I also found in a haversack 434 balls, 171 ball cartridges, 69 ball cartridges without powder, about three pounds of gunpowder in a paper, the ten grenades which I spoke of before, they were in a brown wrapper, tied up, eleven bags of gunpowder, each containing one pound, which were in flannel bags, and ten flannel bags, empty; a small bag with a powder flask,

[118] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

> sixty-eight musket balls, four flints, and twenty-seven pike-handles"[119].

The confiscated items were brought out and displayed during each man's trial.

Testimony of the CG differed from that BSR because the soldiers did not arrive on the scene until after the initial raid had taken place. Ultimately this helped ensure the safety of the arresting parties, because the CG saw the commotion outside on the ground floor that the BSR did not. By the time the soldiers arrived, several of the men attempted to flee, and several others were already under arrest. William Legge was shot at by Tidd; Legge reported that "the ball went through the sleeve of my jacket on the right arm."[120] Another soldier, John Muddox, said that he was "in the centre of the room [when] Wilson presented a pistol at my breast, it flashed in the pan, but did not go off. I made a stab at him with my bayonet and secured him, took him to the public-house"[121].

The last testimony given by a member of the Guard was by Captain Lord Frederick FitzClarence, an illegitimate son of the Duke of Clarence, who would become King William IV in 1830 upon the death of King

[119] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[120] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[121] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

George IV. Unlike the other two men of the Guard who testified, FitzClarence did not name any of the defendants; he only identified Smithers as the victim stabbed by Thistlewood. He testified that he tripped and fell over Smithers' body. Captain Fitzclarence gave no new information during his testimony nor did he name any of the accused as being on the scene.

Thistlewood's trial lasted for two days. The trials of the other men lasted one day each. Tidd and Davidson were tried together. All of the men were found guilty, with the jury deliberation lasting roughly half an hour for each trial. Before they were given sentence, each man was allowed to speak in his own defense—as was customary. Thistlewood tried to justify his assassination attempt against the Privy Council but the Lord Chief Justice would not let him finish, and stated that such "incendiary treason was not allowed in the courtroom."[122] Stanhope wrote that "Thistlewood let fly with a bombastic eulogy of rebellion and even assassination for which the tolerant judge nearly had him silenced."[123] Thistlewood held onto the hope that as in the Spa Fields Trial of Dr. Watson, the jury would find them not guilty because of Edwards' involvement. Thistlewood also demanded a mistrial because he was not

[122] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[123] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

allowed to disprove any of the information presented by Adams, Hiden or Dwyer.

Brunt blamed his actions on the despair he felt in the wake of the Peterloo Massacre coupled with his own financial situation. He stated that

> "I have been in the habit of earning three or four pounds a week, and then I never troubled myself about Government; but when I came to earn, perhaps, not ten shillings, I began to inquire why I had a right to be starved...this brought me to the conclusion of being an enemy of those men."[124]

He maintained that the conspirators never intended to harm the king but only to ease the economic situation for the betterment of the people. Brunt also stated that Edwards was the mastermind behind the whole plot.

Ings claimed that he was recruited by Edwards to take a sword to be sharpened and "I went and carried a sword to be ground for him. I left it in my own name; if I had thought there were anything of this kind going on, do you think I should have left the sword in my own name at the cutler's."[125] Ings called for Edwards to be put on trial and claimed that he would die willingly, if only Edwards were executed beside him. He maintained his innocence throughout his trial.

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[124] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[125] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

Unlike Brunt and Ings, Davidson claimed that he never had anything to do with the group at any time. Davidson was the illegitimate son of the Jamaican Attorney General and a black woman and was sent to England to study the law but lost interest and settled on cabinet making, which he was not good at. He met Thistlewood and was recruited into the group of rebels. He swore that he was at the location at Cato Street that night by accident. He stated that he was found on Cato Street with a gun because he was trying to sell it for a friend. Once evidence was produced that proved he was at Cato Street with malicious intent, his testimony became rather convoluted and erratic when he began to "quote Alexander Pope, the Book of Isaiah and other parts of the Bible." He later "hinted that he expected his colour was against him."[126] The Judge assured him that no court in Britain could possibly be guilty of something like that. Davidson also stated "I will now, give you an instance where one man of colour may be mistaken for another-as must have been my case," in an effort to convince the court that he was not the "man of colour" they were looking for. He closed his testimony with the following quote:

> "It is an ancient custom to resist tyranny... And our history goes on further to say, that when another of their Majesties the Kings of England tried to infringe upon those rights, the people armed, and told him that if he did not give them the privileges of Englishmen, they would compel him by the point of the sword... Would you not

[126] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

> rather govern a country of spirited men, than cowards? I can die but once in this world, and the only regret left is, that I have a large family of small children, and when I think of that, it unmans me."[127]

Tidd was the last to speak. He admitted that it was wrong to get involved with Brunt. Like the others, Tidd laid most of the blame at the feet of Edwards. He stated that Edwards told him they could hold illegal meetings because he had special permission since they were only discussing changes to Parliament. He ended this speech by declaring "I never knew any thing about a cabinet-dinner. It was never mentioned to me"[128] prior to his arrived on the night of February 23.

The five men whose trials have been discussed here were found guilty of high treason. Their sentence was originally to be execution by being hanged, drawn and quartered – a ferocious punishment which had been the penalty for high treason since 1351. The sentence was later commuted to being hanged and then posthumously beheaded, which was the last time this sentence would be applied for treason. The date was set for May 1st. The day before their execution the men were allowed to see their families for the last time.[129]

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[127] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[128] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[129] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).

Nearly 100,000 people came to watch the executions. While the authorities feared violence from the crowds (there were detachments of Foot Guards, mounted Life Guards and constables standing guard just in case the crowd got out of control), the huge gathering proved to be a relatively peaceful.

There was, however, general discontent within the crowd at the gruesomeness of the beheadings. The families requested the bodies be given over for private burial, but the government refused. Their bodies were buried in a hastily dug grave at Newgate and covered in quicklime. The specific location of their burial was left unmarked and the exact place is not known. The authorities wanted to make sure that there was "no trace of their end remains for any future public observation."[130]

The rest of the men arrested on the night of the failed conspiracy fared quite differently. As mentioned before, the charges against Adams, Hyden and Monument were dropped when they agreed to testify against their co-conspirators. The remaining defendants-James Wilson, John Harrison, Richard Blackburn, John Shaw Strange, and Charles Cooper-withdrew their original plea of not guilty, pleaded guilty and threw

[130] Trow, *Enemies of the State*, 171.

themselves at the mercy of the court. These men received a sentence of transportation for life.[131]

After its long voyage the ship, *The Guildford*, arrived in New South Wales, Australia on September 20, 1820. On this ship were the five men whose original sentences of execution were commuted to transportation. They had left Portsmouth on May 2, 1820, the day after the execution of the other men. They were made to witness the executions as a reminder of how close they had come to death and, it is possible, their viewing was also to remind them that this was a second chance to stay on the right path.[132]

A letter from Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies, Henry Goulburn, was sent to the Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, warning him to keep watch over the men because of their involvement with revolutionary activities. The men were sent to work at the Jail Gang at Newcastle but it was not long before the governor came to realize that his fears were for nothing. There is no record that the five men did anything against the law; in fact Strange eventually became the

[131] Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 15 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, et al (t18200416-1).
[132] George Parson. "Cato Street Conspirators in New South Wales", *Labour History*, 8 (May 1965): 3-5.

chief constable at Bathurst.[133] Except for this, there is little record of the five men after their arrival in New South Wales.[134]

The conspiracy held the last vestiges of the old British Jacobean movement that began on the heels of the French Revolution. Thistlewood's belief that this conspiracy would fix the ills that infected society hinged on the flawed understanding of exactly what Britain stood for. Days before his death Thistlewood was visited by a representative of the famed wax sculpture museum *Madame Tussaud's*.[135] The artist drew his likeness, which was later turned into a wax figure. It was placed next to the wax figure of fellow revolutionary Colonel Despard. Within two years, neither statue remained on display. The disappearance of his wax figure is symbolic of the disappearance of the SSP and CSC from public thought: The museum moved on with newer and more relevant figures, just as society's attention moved onto newer and more relevant political reformers.

[133] Parssinen, T. M. "Convention and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848", *The English Historical Review* 88 (July 1973): 504-533.
[134] Parson. "Cato Street Conspirators in New South Wales", 3-5.
[135] John Theodore Tussaud, *The Romance of Madame Tussand's* (New York: George H. Doran, Co., 1920), 210.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: THE CATO STREET LEGACY

The failure of the CSC stopped the violent, ultra-radical political movement in London dead in its tracks. If there was any question whether or not political change was possible through violence, the Spenceans' complete failure answered that query without any reservations. Certain radicals like Henry Hunt advocated demanding reform by employing more "civilized" means. Groups that had been conceived during the Napoleonic Wars --notably the Chartists--would adopt the more conventional, peaceful tactics of moderate reformers like Hunt. The violent ways of groups like the Spenceans would go out of favor, especially after the resounding convictions of Edwards and his colleagues in 1820.

The Spenceans, led by Arthur Thistlewood, were the most radical of the reform groups during this time. Thistlewood's delusion that their group would be successful was based on the belief that early-nineteenth-century London was the same as late-eighteenth-century Paris. Thistlewood did not understand that England had reached a political equilibrium of sorts, in which most citizens and certainly the government cherished political stability and contrasted English quiescence favorably with French political instability.

Thistlewood had a mistrust of virtually everyone, especially anyone who had any measure of success, from the lowliest shopkeeper all the way up to the landed elite. His monetary misfortunes, regardless of who was at fault for his situation, fueled his desire to "rescue England and deliver it into the hands of the people." Thistlewood saw the group's old ally, Henry Hunt, as a "damned coward"[136] and thought that Hunt might have been a government spy. Thistlewood's increasingly erratic behavior led the group straight into the hands of the very government officials he feared.

Perhaps if the leadership of the group had been different when George III succumbed, then maybe the group would not have ended as disastrously as it did. It could be argued that if Thomas Evans Sr. or John Watson had remained in charge of the group, the Spenceans would have realized that the country's economy was on the upswing and that violent radical action was not needed. Evans and Watson both voiced the desire to take a step back and reevaluate the group's activities after the failure of the Spa Fields Riots. Evans contended that the economic upswing in 1818 and 1819 made it unnecessary to continue to threat of violence. Evans seemed to understand that the Spenceans needed to employ different

[136] NA: HO 40/7(2)/2011

tactics if they wanted to succeed.[137] Watson's imprisonment for debt in 1819[138] spared him from being involved in the CSC but if he had not been in jail, it stands to reason that he, too, might have kept the group from proceeding in a violent direction.

Evans' and Watson's plan to wait and see may have proven a better alternative to Thistlewood's desire to act quickly. If Thistlewood had simply waited three and a half months, he may have found a country more willing to support his radical actions. The new King's estranged wife, Princess Caroline, arrived in London in June 1820, and pressed her claim to be George's consort. The king desired nothing more than to divorce his wife. Upon her return to England in June, he requested that the Pains and Penalties Bill of 1820 be introduced into Parliament in order to strip Caroline of her title and gain the divorce she desired[139]. Public opinion against the king (and government) was stronger than it had been after Peterloo and Spa Fields. Perhaps London in the summer of 1820 would have been a perfect atmosphere for Thistlewood's designs, had he been patient.

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[137] A few years after the CSC failed, Evans continued his commitment to the memory of Thomas Spence's original thesis. He printed a few pamphlets but disappeared from the record after the late 1820s.

[138] John Watson, more fearful of being executed than knowledgeable of political trends, desired to slow the threat of violence before he was imprisoned for debt in 1819. He was released from prison a few months after the execution of Thistlewood and the others. He immigrated to the United States and died in New York City in 1838, penniless.

[139] John Andrew Hamilton, *King George IV-A Short Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1900).

When research for this thesis began, a goal was to discover why the CSC had all but disappeared from historical scholarship. There were only scant mentions of the conspiracy in general historical literature. The Spenceans' plot certainly does not occupy the same place in the public consciousness that the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 did. And yet the events of 1605 and 1820 had several major elements in common. For example, both plots involved government collusion to a degree. In the earlier episode, certain government officials almost certainly had known about the Gunpowder Conspiracy but had let it proceed further than it might have.

Agent provocateurs most definitely urged the later events on. The short term impacts of both attempted assassinations were disastrous for the groups involved and their sympathizers; Catholicism was repressed in the early 1600s, just as radicalism suffered in the 1820s. The government managed to avoid creating martyrs in both situations. And yet in certain respects the situation in 1820 was vastly different from what it had been in 1605. The monarchy of George III and IV was rapidly becoming only a symbol of the British people, rather than a truly powerful head of state as it had been at the time of the Gunpowder Plot.

The documentary materials from the vast collections of Home Office records available through the National Archives website and the

trial records provided different information than a researcher originally might expect, given the paucity of scholars' discussions on the Spenceans. First of all, the primary sources that detail the government's policing of the CSC are richly detailed. The number of primary sources is not extensive, but the depth and detail contained in those sources is daunting. Months of sifting through all of the government's spy notes available through the Home Office and Treasury Solicitor made the present researcher affirm the complexity of the intelligence network that kept an eye on groups such as the Spenceans.

The government's observation of groups like the Society of Spencean Philanthropists allowed them to procure evidence of the group's wrongdoings in order to uphold the Six Acts and justify the chokehold the government had on reform groups. Such a plan to crush radicalism was not directly mapped out in any of the notes that are on file in the British National Archives. Still, the extensive and longstanding web of informants who observed radical groups clearly points to how threatening the radicals, few as they might be, were in the eyes of the government. The Spenceans did not have any real power or discernable influence, yet they created fear in the minds of government officials.

At various points, Lords Castlereagh and Sidmouth, and their advisors, were alarmed by the influence the Spenceans had on other

groups. Castlereagh, with his great interst in foreign affairs, was not concerned with what trouble the Spenceans could cause on their own but he did fear that they were part of an interconnected group of radical reformers that spanned the entire island and would embarrass England in the eyes of Europe. What Castlereagh and Sidmouth did not understand is that while other groups did watch the Spenceans and the Spenceans did have some influence, it was not to the degree that the government thought. This research posits that other radical groups kept an eye on the Spenceans, especially after Spa Fields, in order to keep their distance. They knew the Spenceans were dangerous and were headed towards disaster and they did not want to be involved.

Although there have not been many recent studies of the Spenceans and certainly of the Spa Fields and Cato Street plots, brief discussions of the conspiracy specifically and the group in general appear in a wide array of books on various topics. While the CSC is not dissected to the extent that the Gunpowder Plot has been, it is still very relevant to historians, and often mentioned in general histories of England. Those that study the history of law, economics, conspiracies, public executions and radical groups may mention the Spenceans and the CSC in passing. The CSC's fate, however, is not woven into the national history, as is the Powder Treason.

There are several reasons why the story of CSC did not remain in the public consciousness as the Gunpowder Plot had two centuries earlier. The England of 1605 was not the England of 1820. The Gunpowder Plot was an attack against the king, God's representative on earth. In 1605, an attack on the King still could be conceived—and conceived even beyond the mind of James I--as an attack on God.
In the two centuries that followed England's "deliverance" from the powder conspiracy, the country experienced a Civil War, a Protectorate, a Restoration, and a Glorious Revolution in addition to fighting in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the loss of its largest colony in the New World and the industrial, agricultural and population revolutions that were waged throughout the country between 1750 and 1820. The center of government had become, not the monarchy, but the legislature. The King had evolved into a figurehead—in fact an unpopular figurehead at times during George III's reign.

Parliament and the Privy Council ran the government, which meant that grievances were directed at them rather than the King. Since the defeated CSC did not pose the same threat to the nation's identity that the failed Gunpowder Plot did, it did not garner the same need for remembrance.

As mentioned previously, the execution of the members of the CSC happened a very short time before the return of Queen Caroline to England. The country quickly turned its attention to vindicating their queen. No matter how badly Caroline had acted in the past, the king's adamant desire for divorce captivated the popular press, interested the public, and provided a great opportunity for ambitious politicians who used the royal scandal for their own purposes.

Another reason for the lack of contemporary remembrance of the CSC can be contributed to the fact that the newspapers shied away from extensive reporting on the CSC, the trial, and the execution. There was still government suppression on newspapers through legislation such as *The Blasphemous and Seditious Act* (60 Geo. III & 1 Geo. IV c. 8) *and The Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act* (60 Geo. III & 1 Geo. IV c. 9), both being part of what was popularly, and is historically, known as the Six Acts. The arrest, trial and execution of the men of the CSC had been reported in the papers but coverage was kept to a minimum. Even radical writers such as Lord Byron and Percy Shelley were very careful to disguise their criticism of the events of the CSC. Regardless of the fact that both were out of the country during the time, their remarks on the events were not widely printed until after the Caroline affair began.

A final reason why the CSC has remained mostly invisible to the public at the time, and in history ever since, is that the members of the Spenceans and those who participated in the CSC were just two in a large group of radical thinkers and radical groups active in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Jacobin societies of the late eighteenth century evolved into groups like the London Corresponding Society. After the London Corresponding Society was disbanded, the members were still around, creating new groups including those dedicated to Catholic Emancipation. The Hampden Club, which was created in the 1810s by Major John Cartwright, began a development of groups that were geared towards the middle and lower classes. Radical newsletters in the vein of *The Black Dwarf* became popular as well as meetings led by Henry Hunt and others who were committed to reform, but reform by "Parliamentary" means.

There are certain aspects of the Cato Street Conspiracy and the trials of the Spenceans that invite further investigation. For example, Lord Sidmouth's use of spies, is undeniable yet the details of how the network of informers actually worked, remain murky. Studies of treason laws—though they do exist among legal historians—take surprisingly little notice of the Cato Street Conspiracy as a key episode, especially considering the important re-statement of treason law in the middle of this time period.

Finally, one must reiterate that despite their similarities in certain aspects, historians have noticed and described the Cato Street Conspiracy very differently from the Gunpowder Plot. One suspects that scholars are not quite able to distance themselves from the patriotic zeal associated with Guy Fawkes' failure. Thistlewood and his peers seem to have been less a threat; they were viewed as marginal individuals in their own time and thus in the historical memory.

APPENDIX

A LIST OF CHARGES LEVIED AGAINST THE MEN ARRESTED FOR SUPPOSED INVOLVEMENT IN THE CATO STREET CONSPIRACY. A LIST OF PLEAS BY THE MEN ON TRIAL. THE FINAL VERDICT OF THE COURT AND SENTENCE FOR EACH MAN ON TRIAL

This is a list of the charges that were brought against Arthur Thistlewood, Williams Davidson, James Ings, John Thomas Brunt, Richard Tidd, James William Wilson, John Harrison, Richard Bradburn, John Shaw Strange, James Gilchrist, and Charles Cooper.

Arthur Thistlewood, Williams Davidson, James Ings, John Thomas Brunt, Richard Tidd, James William Wilson, John Harrison, Richard Bradburn, John Shaw Strange, James Gilchrist, and Charles Cooper were indicted for that they, being subjects of our Lord the King, not having the fear of God in their hearts, nor weighing the duty of their allegiance, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil, as false traitors against our said Lord the King, and wholly withdrawing the love, obedience, fidelity, and allegiance, which every true and faithful subject of our said Lord the King should and of right ought to bear towards our said Lord the King; on the fifth day of February, in the first year of the reign of our said present Sovereign, Lord George the Fourth , by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and on divers other days and times, as well before as after, with force and arms, at the parish of St. Marylebone , in the county of Middlesex, maliciously and traitorously, amongst themselves and together with divers other traitors, whose names are unknown did compass, imagine, invent, devise, and intend to deprive and depose our said Lord the King of and from the style, honour and kingly name of the Imperial Crown of this realm; and the said compassing, imagination, invention, device, and intention did then and there express, utter, and declare, by divers overt acts and deeds hereinafter mentioned . That is to say:

1. Conspiring to devise plans to subvert the Constitution.
2. Conspiring to levy war, and subvert the Constitution.
3. Conspiring to murder divers of the Privy Council.
4. Providing arms to murder divers of the Privy Council.
5. Providing arms and ammunition to levy war and subvert the Constitution.
6. Conspiring to seize cannon, arms and ammunition to arm themselves, and to levy war and subvert the Constitution.
7. Conspiring to burn houses and barracks, and to provide combustibles for that purpose.
8. Preparing addresses, &c. containing incitements to the King's subjects to assist in levying war and subverting the Constitution.

9. Preparing an address to the King's subjects, containing therein that their tyrants were destroyed, &c., to incite them to assist in levying war, and in subverting the Constitution. 10. Assembling themselves with arms, with intent to murder divers of the Privy Council, and to levy war, and subvert the Constitution.
11. Levying war.

SECOND COUNT, That they, the said prisoners, being subjects of our said Lord the King, not having the fear of God in their hearts, nor weighing the duty of their allegiance, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil, as false traitors against our said Lord the King, and wholly withdrawing the love, obedience, fidelity, and allegiance, which every true and faithful subject of our said Lord the King should and of right ought to bear towards our said Lord the King, on the fifth day of February, in the first year of the reign aforesaid, and on divers other days and times, as well before as after, with force and arms at the said parish of St. Marylebone, in the said county of Middlesex, maliciously and traitorously, amongst themselves and together with divers other false traitors, whose names are unknown, did compass, imagine, and intend to move and excite insurrection, rebellion, and war against our said Lord the King, within this realm, and to subvert and alter the Legislature, Rule, and Government now duly and happily established within this realm, and to bring and put our said Lord the King to death.

1. Conspiring to devise plans to subvert the Constitution, and depose the King. (Here follows ten other Overt Acts, precisely the same as those set forth in the first Count.)

THIRD COUNT. That the said prisoners being subjects of our said Lord the King, not having the fear of God in their hearts, nor weighing the duty of their allegiance, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil, as false traitors against our said Lord the King, and wholly withdrawing the love, obedience, fidelity and allegiance which every true and faithful subject of our said Lord the King should and of right ought to bear towards our said Lord the King, on the said 5th day of February, in the first year of the reign aforesaid, and on divers other days and times, as well before as after, with force and arms, at the said parish of Saint Marylebone, in the said county of Middlesex, maliciously and traitorously amongst themselves, together with divers other false traitors, whose names are unknown, did compass, imagine, invent, devise, and intend to levy war against our said Lord the King within this realm, in order by force

and constraint to compel him to change his measures and counsels, and the said last-mentioned compassing, imagination, invention, device and intention, did then and there express, utter and declare, by divers overt acts and deeds hereinafter mentioned, That is to say,
1. Conspiring to devise plans, by force and constraint to compel the King to change his measures and counsels.
2. Conspiring to levy war.
3. Conspiring to murder divers of the Privy Council.
4. Providing arms to murder divers of the Privy Council.
5. Providing arms and ammunition in order to levy war.
6. Conspiring to seize cannon, arms, and ammunition, to arm themselves and to levy war.
7. Conspiring to burn houses and barracks, and to provide combustibles for that purpose.
8. Preparing addresses, &c., containing incitements to the King's subjects to assist in levying war.
9. Assembling themselves with arms, with intent to murder divers of the Privy Council, and to levy war.
10. Levying war.

FOURTH COUNT. That they the said prisoners being subjects of our said Lord the King, not having the fear of God in their hearts, nor weighing the duty of their allegiance, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil, as false traitors against our said Lord the King, and wholly withdrawing the love, obedience, fidelity and allegiance which every true and faithful subject of our said Lord the King should and of right ought to bear towards our said Lord the King, on the 23d day of February, in the first year of the reign aforesaid, with force and arms, at the said parish of Saint Marylebone, in the said county of Middlesex, together with divers other false traitors, whose names are unknown, armed and arrayed in a warlike manner (that is to say) with guns, muskets, blunderbusses, pistols, swords, bayonets, pikes, and other weapons, being then and there unlawfully, maliciously, and traitorously assembled and gathered together against our said Lord the King, most wickedly, maliciously, and traitorously did levy and make war against our said Lord the King within this realm, and did then and there maliciously and traitorously attempt and endeavor, by force and arms, to subvert and destroy the Constitution and Government of this realm as by law established, and to deprive and depose our said Lord the King of and from the style, honour, and kingly name of the Imperial Crown of this realm, in contempt of our said Lord the King and his laws, to the evil example of all others, contrary to the duty of

the allegiance of them the said prisoners, against the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace of our said Lord the King, his crown and dignity, That is to say, Levying war.

To which indictment they the prisoners severally and separately pleaded Not Guilty, except Wilson, who pleaded a misnomer, stating his name to be James Wilson only; another bill has since been preferred and found against him by that name.

JAMES WILSON, JOHN HARRISON, RICHARD BRADBURN, JOHN SHAW STRANGE, JAMES GILCHRIST, and CHARLES COOPER being put to the bar, and being severally questioned, declared their wish to withdraw their pleas, and to plead Guilty , stating that they threw themselves on the mercy of their Sovereign; which pleas were accordingly recorded.

On Friday, April 28, the prisoners were brought to the bar, and made most insulting speeches to the Court.
LORD CHIEF JUSTICE ABBOTT, after a most solemn address to them, passed the following sentence:
“That they be taken to the place from whence they came, and afterwards be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, where they should be severally hanged by the neck until they were dead; that their heads should then be severed from their bodies, and that their bodies be divided into four quarters, to be at the disposal of His Majesty.”

On Saturday, the learned COMMON SERGEANT (in consequence of the indisposition of the learned RECORDER.) reported their several cases to His Majesty in Council, who ordered Arthur Thistlewood, John Thomas Brunt, James Ings, Richard Tidd, and William Davidson to be executed; the remaining prisoners His Majesty was most graciously pleased to respite, all of whom, except Gilchrist, are Transported for Life. The execution of Thistlewood and the others took place on the Monday following (that part of the sentence with respect to their being drawn on a hurdle to the place of execution and the division of their bodies, being omitted.)

Source: Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0 17 April 2011), 16 April 1820, trial of Arthur Thistlewood, William Davidson, James Ings, John Thomas Brunt, Richard Tidd, James Williams

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Kathleen Beeson spent the first fifteen years of her life as a military child living in Florida, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Maine, and Puerto Rico before returning to Tennessee to complete high school. She moved to Texas in 1998 and earned her Bachelors of Arts in History with a minor in English Literature from the University of Texas in Arlington. Ms. Beeson is a member of Phi Alpha Theta and UTA's Transatlantic History Student Organization.

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