

In 1832 the first of the three main parliamentary reform acts of the 19th century was enacted; and was the culmination of a political battle between the Lords and Commons, which brought the British Isles nearer to a revolution than any other event since the Civil War of the 17th century.

The two later Acts of 1867 and 1884 could be considered as more far-reaching in terms of extending the franchise to greater numbers of men and establishing the now accepted principle of a vote by "right of being" rather than of property or wealth; but the 1832 Act was far more important, in that it breached the four centuries old control of large numbers of seats in the Commons by a very few, mainly titled, landowners.

This control gave rise throughout the 18th century to increasingly more vociferous talk of reform and religious equality, which would, very probably, have resulted in something at least akin to the 1832 Act, some 30 years earlier; but for the events in France starting in 1789 and culminating in the guillotining of the King. At the time, about one in five of all Europeans were French, making her by far the largest country in the region and giving a high degree of outside importance to the vast social changes within her borders. The rapid progression from absolute to constitutional monarchy, to abolition and at least theoretical equality for all, must have had a shattering effect on everyone in Europe from peasants to Kings. This demonstration that the "order of things" was not after all God given and unchanging, must have been disturbing and very largely unwelcome to the vast majority, who were at least secure in a known order, and had never even considered that real change could or would happen. It is almost impossible for us today to think ourselves into the parochial and hierarchical pattern which governed everyone from birth to death; but at least everyone had the comfort of knowing exactly where they stood, with only a very few crossing the social boundaries.

France changed all that and whilst it might have seemed very desirable at first, the chaos, retribution, and wars which attended the early 1790's quickly demonstrated that perhaps the established order wasn't too bad after all.

In England the first organised movement for reform had arisen among the Yorkshire freeholders, with the support of Whig landowners, in an attempt to abolish some of the rotten boroughs, thereby, increasing the representation in the country districts; more in an attempt to get a less corrupt and more efficient government than in any spirit of equality or democracy and to some degree, control the power of George III over the commons. This attempt was rather frustrated by the Tory leader Pitt the Younger, who established better government and tried to build on Burke's Economic Reform Bill of 1782, which lessened the worst corruption in parliament; by introducing a rather tame Reform Bill of his own. This was however defeated.

The second spearhead for reform was religious and again was not for the common good, but an attempt to gain electoral power and with enough seats force a religious equality Bill of some sort through the commons. This movement was much more revolutionary than the Yorkshire freeholders and alarmed the establishment, resulting in riots in Birmingham and Manchester. This antipathy toward reform in the working class rioters was paralleled in 1794 by the Attorney General demanding that a shoemaker, Thomas Hardy, be condemned for High Treason because he advocated "Representative Government".

It is perhaps one of the triumphs of the Jury system that the acquittal of Hardy and his fellow accused could well have saved Britain from something on the French pattern in that, although anti - revolutionary, the bulk of the population would perhaps have found it impossible to stomach the "political" conviction and hanging of men who only asked for a say in government.

The relief at this tempered public reaction to the subsequent gradual suppression of public meetings and Pitts Combination Acts banning trade unions. The war with France and its attendant spirit of patriotism provided the excuse for these repressive measures, most of which lasted until 1823; like rationing in the 1940's; long after the war had ended.

The echoes of the French revolution, with the uprisings in Greece against the Turks and in South America against their Iberian masters; involved Britain to a much greater degree in foreign affairs than in the 18th century, and this siding with these movements seems to have modified the attitude of many senior figures towards reform at home.

Before 1832 there was no uniformity in who had a vote for parliamentary seats, indeed there were almost as many methods of electing as there were seats. These ranged from payers of "Scot and Lot", to the owners of town centre freeholds or confined to the "Burgesses" (self electing; self perpetuating bodies). As bad as these were, they seemed models of democracy when compared to the "Rotten Boroughs", which were the seats on which most

reformers concentrated their efforts. The 1832 Act disfranchised most of these, but some seats very close to this description survived to be dealt with in the later Acts.

The facsimile text does not detail these, so for interest sake we have appended a list of them. An excellent example of these is Old Sarum, a collection of hovels, near Salisbury Wiltshire which, with a total population (including the parish) of 148 and a total electorate of 7; sent 2 members to parliament.

It is also interesting to note that the totally disfranchised boroughs along with the ones that lost one of their two members, accounted for about one quarter of the seats in the commons.

By 1830 there was a general movement towards reform, which seems to have stemmed from many circumstances; a general depression in trade, the poor lot of the working classes, especially in the new industrial towns, and the middle class apprehension that there could be a revolution; as had just occurred anew in France.

There was general discontent with the Tory party, and the Whigs (Liberals) took the opportunity to place itself at the head of the reform movement mainly in the persons of Lords Grey, Russell and Durham. By this means they gained the general support of the middle classes and just as importantly of the Dissenters (non-church of England). In the autumn of 1830 the Duke of Wellington lost much of the Tory hierarchy to a temporary alliance with the Whigs by his statement that the existing Parliamentary system could not possibly be bettered. In November the Duke's government lost in the reform division and the Whigs under Grey formed the new administration, thus ensuring reform but with the details still to be decided.

March 1831 saw the proposal to abolish, at one stroke all of the Rotten and Nomination Boroughs and to make the franchise dependent universally on a £10 per annum rental value of the household in the Boroughs, 40 shilling freeholders, £50 value leaseholders and £10 copyholders in the Counties.

It took fifteen months of the most concentrated political agitation in British history to get the reform accepted and into law.

The first crisis came when a general election produced a parliament which would give a 136 majority of members in favour rather than perhaps only one before the election. The second came when the Lords threw it out by a majority of 41, largely a result of the Tory's creation of new Peers as one their last acts before losing power.

The winter of 1831/32 saw great economic hardship and rampant cholera. There was universal anger and even riots at the action of the Lords, with full revolution or civil war seemingly very close. King William, who had spent a large part of his life in the navy and had come to the throne as an elderly man was eventually persuaded by Grey to create fifty new peers to get the Bill through the Lords. At the last moment he hesitated to do this and tried to get the Tories to come back under Wellington. Grey resigned and in the light of preparations for resistance in the large towns the Tory minister Peel, a more realistic man, saw that Wellington's return would bring about almost certain Civil War gave in and Grey returned in triumph with the promise that the Lords would pass the bill without the creation of the fifty new peers.

The victory was seen as a modern version of Magna Carta and as bad as the system had been in England the Scottish seats which had amounted to virtually one huge Rotten Borough, were transformed at a stroke.

The new £10 franchise gave a remarkable impetus to political thought and paved the way for successive reforms ending with the franchise as we know it today.

It is a sobering thought that had Wellington and Peel resumed Tory government at that moment, it could only have been enforced by the sword. All the major towns would have resisted, literally at the barricades and the army could only have enforced the government's will for a very limited period. It is doubtful if the monarchy could have survived such events and it is almost certain that we would now be living in some sort of Republic.

The above is only a bare outline of these momentous events, some of the most important, though little known, in recent British history; but for those interested there are numerous books carrying a full account. Two very readable ones, which could be found on the history or politics shelves of second-hand bookshops are:- HISTORY OF ENGLAND BY GEORGE TREVELYAN and A HISTORY OF ENGLAND by KEITH FELLING.

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THE NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES  
AS SET OUT BY THE REFORM ACT 1832

GENERAL.

Polling took place over two days (reduced to one in the Burghs in 1835), but spread out over a fortnight, throughout the British Isles. The figures given below for both population and electorate must be taken as approximate, and although the number of voters in comparison to the population looks, from our modern viewpoint, to be very low; it must be regarded, at 66,000 in total, against the 4,000 prior to 1832. There must also have been many men qualified to vote, who were unaware of the fact or unwilling to pay the registration/ voting fee. (The shilling applied throughout the British Isles.)

BURGH(S)

Members of Parliament were elected by registered electors (an actual register was compiled and used for the first time). It cost one shilling to register and one shilling per year thereafter. The broad qualification was occupation of a house, as either owner or tenant, of £10 per year value. Members were elected by and represented a single large Burgh or a group of smaller ones - as below.

BURGH(S)	MP's	POP'	ELEC'	BURGH(S)	MP's	POP'	ELEC'	BURGH(S)	MP's	POP'	ELEC'
Aberdeen	1	58,019	2,160	Ayr	1	22,626	623	Montrose	1	32,857	1,494
Dundee	1	45,355	1,622	Campbeltown				Arbroath			
Edinburgh	2	162,156	6,048	Inverary				Brechin			
Glasgow	2	202,426	6,994	Irvine				Forfar			
Greenock	1	25,571	985	Oban				Inverbervie			
Paisley	1	31,460	1,242	Dumfries	1	c20,000	980	Stirling	1	37,769	1,182
Perth	1	25,571	780	Annan				Culross			
Leith	1	38,086	1,640	Kirkcudbright				Dunfermline			
Musselburgh				Lochmaben				Inverkeithing			
Portobello				Sanquhar				Queensferry South			
Inverness	1	19,674	715	Falkirk	1	39,112	969	Elgin	1	20,732	777
Forres				Airdrie				Banff			
Fortrose				Hamilton				Cullen			
Nairn				Lanark				Inverury			
Kirkcaldy	1	17,083	700	Linlithgow				Kintore			
Burntisland				Haddington	1	17,755	539	Peterhead			
Dysart				Dunbar				Wick	1	21,522	681
Kinghorn				Jedburgh				Cromarty			
Wigton	1	8,675	320	Lauder				Dingwall			
New Galloway				North Berwick				Dornoch			
Stranraer				Kilmarnock	1	34,382	1,200	St Andrews	1	17,697	600
Whithorn				Dumbarton				Anstruther East			
				Port Glasgow				Anstruther West			
				Renfrew				Craik			
				Rutherglen				Cupar			
								Kilrenny			
								Pitweem			

COUNTIES

Members were elected as in the Burghs, but with the one shilling payable at the time of claiming the vote. Electors were men in the County but outside any Burgh boundary, as defined in these plans. The qualifications were - 1. Having been entitled to a vote before 1832; i.e. tenants of Crown lands of forty shillings value or £400 'Scotch valued rent'. - 2. Owners and leaseholders of £10 yearly value. - 3. Yearly tenants of £50 rent or over. - 4. Tenants who had paid £400 or more for their interest in their land.

COUNTY	MP's	POP'	ELEC'	COUNTY	MP's	POP'	ELEC'
Aberdeenshire	1	177,657	2,450	Inverness-shire	1	94,797	546
Argyllshire	1	101,973	985	Kincardineshire	1	31,431	890
Ayrshire	1	145,055	3,197	Kirkcudbrightshire	1	40,590	1,045
Banffshire	1	48,604	560	Lanarkshire	1	316,819	2,705
Berwickshire	1	34,048	1,060	Linlithgowshire	1	23,291	730
Buteshire	1	14,151	294	Orkney & Shetland	1	58,239	270
Caithness	1	34,529	270	Peeblesshire	1	10,578	360
Clackmannan & Kinross	1	23,801	878	Perthshire	1	142,894	3,134
Dumbartonshire	1	33,211	924	Renfrewshire	1	133,443	1,132
Dumfriesshire	1	73,770	1,170	Ross & Cromarty	1	74,820	516
Edinburghshire (Midlothian)	1	219,345	1,294	Roxburghshire	1	43,663	1,313
Elgin & Nairn	1	43,585	662	Selkirkshire	1	6,833	280
Fifehire	1	128,839	2,186	Stirlingshire	1	72,621	1,787
Forfarshire	1	139,606	1,340	Sutherlandshire	1	25,518	104
Haddingtonshire	1	36,145	617	Wigtownshire	1	36,258	863

FIGURES FOR POPULATION, 1831 - FOR ELECTORATE, 1832

# DORNOCH.

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SUTHERLANDSHIRE.

## REPORT on the BURGH

DORNOCH is the County Town of *Sutherland*. It is a place of no importance, having no Trade or Manufacture, and no Harbour. It has been decreasing for several years and its situation does not appear to give any probability of a change for the better

Population of the Burgh. Number of Houses in the Burgh,				Number of Houses of L. 10. and upwards in the Burgh.			ASSESSED TAXES Payable from the Burgh.
By Census 1821.	By Census 1831.	By Census 1821.	By Census 1831.	Parl. Ret. P. 32.	House Duty Returns. p. 82.	special Report.*	
630	504	137	116	—	4	9	£24.15.3

From the Rock called Craig Carnaig, (1) in a straight line to St. Michael's Well, (2) close by the Road to the Little Ferry ; thence in a straight line to the Boundary point (3) at which the Road to the Mound of Fleet leaves the Road to Bonar Bridge; thence in a straight line to the point (4) at which the course of the Black Burn joins the Dornoch Firth; thence along the Shore of the Dornoch Firth to Craig Carnaig.

The Country round is quite open, offering few points for choice in fixing the Boundary, excepting those mentioned in the Description. They are of a permanent nature, and afford sufficient space within the Limits for any Houses likely to be erected. The space included on the South-east is greater than would have been taken in, but for the advantage of obtaining the Sea as a Boundary

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\* Special Report obtained from George Murray, Surveyor of Taxes

# TAIN.

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## ROSS-SHIRE.

### REPORT on the BURGH

TAIN is situated on a bank at a little distance from the Southern Shore of the Firth of Dornoch. It has improved of late years, and may be considered in <sup>a</sup> thriving condition. Many new Houses have been built, and a good deal of ground has been feued. It possesses a good Academy, which has attracted a number of families to the Town for the education of their children ; but it has little or no Manufacture, and the sand bars on the coast deprive it of any advantage it might it have derived from its maritime situation. A new entrance into the Town from the South is contemplated.

Population of the Burgh and Parish.		Number of Houses in the Burgh &- Parish.		Number of Houses of L. 10. and upwards in the Burgh.			ASSESSED TAXES
By Census 1821.	By Census 1831.	By Census 1821.	By Census 1831.	Parl. Return, 1). 62.	House Duty Returns,, p. 8 1.	SP 'ecial Report.	of the Burgh.
2,861	3,078	583	665	72	27	52	£191. 19. 0

FROM St. Mary's Well, (1) on the North-west of the Town, in a straight line through the Ravens Well to a point (2) 500 yards beyond the same Boundary. Thence in a straight line, drawn due South-east, to the Scotsburn Road (3) thence <sup>in</sup> a straight line, drawn due East, to the Inverness Road (4) thence in a straight line drawn due North-east, to the River of Tain (5) ; thence down the River of Tain to the point (6) at which the same joins the Sea thence along the Sea Shore to St. Mary's Well.

The Country around Tain is open, and affords few well-defined points for fixing the Boundary. The Raven's Well and St. Mary's Well have been adopted, being well known objects, and the course of the River Tain has been followed for some distance. The rest of the Boundary has been formed by straight lines, in the manner detailed in the Description of the Boundaries, leaving within the limits a considerable space for the probable extension of the Burgh.

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\* Special Report obtained from George Murray, Surveyor of Taxes.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION SCOTLAND.

Copy of a LETTER from Lord Viscount *Melbourne* to Lieutenant General *Sir John H Dalrymple*, Bart. relative to the BURGHS of *Scotland*; with REPORT from *Sir John H Dalrymple*, Bart., *William Murray*, Esq., and Captain *J. W. Pringle*, R. E, in answer to said LETTER.

- No. 1. —

LETTER from Viscount *Melbourne* to Sir *J. H. Dalrymple*, Oxenford Castle, Edinburgh.

Sir,

Home Office, 8th November 1831.

FROM the time which will now elapse, before the result of the investigation carried on by the Commission under your superintendence will be required in Order to be laid before Parliament, His Majesty's Government, after an examination of several of the Plans and Reports of the different Commissioners, considers it advisable to take advantage of the intervening, to have the whole reconsidered and revised, for the purpose of attaining a greater degree of uniformity in the system followed.

Two of the Commissioners will assist you in carrying on the revision; and in general, without being controlled by local divisions or jurisdictions you will assign such Boundaries as the circumstances of each Burgh may seem to require, making sufficient allowance for the future extension of the Town.

The Boundary proposed must in every case be so described as to be quite independent of any reference to a Plain, and to be intelligible to a person acquainted with or visiting the ground, without the aid of such reference.

The Plans will therefore be required merely to enable the Government or the Legislature to judge of the eligibility of the Boundaries proposed.

The Description of the Boundary Lines must be made as concise as the circumstances will admit; and when not formed by existing objects of a permanent nature, must be so exactly defined as not to be likely at any future period to lead to difficult or doubts.

In carrying these Instructions into execution, it may be necessary that some of the Burghs should be revisited by the Commissioners. You will, therefore, proceed with as little delay as possible, in order that the whole may be ready soon after the meeting of Parliament.

The Reports of the Burghs, besides specifying the Population, and Amount of Assessed Taxes, with the Number of £10. Tenements, wherever this is easily attainable, should also give some account of the actual condition and prospects of the Town; and for this purpose the result of the Census of 1821 and 1831 should both be stated.

The information which you are called upon to furnish, being intended in the first instance for the guidance of Government, it will be expedient that where any doubt exists, which of two propose Boundaries should be adopted, both should be submitted, that it may decide which of them should be ultimately preferred.

Mr William Murray and Captain Pringle are the two Commissioners appointed to be joined with you in the execution of this duty.

I have, &c.

(Signed) *Melbourne.*

REPORT from Lieutenant-General Sir *John H. Dalrymple*, Bart., *William Murray*, Esq., and Captain J. Pringle., to the Right Honorable Viscount *Melbourne*, on the PROPOSED BOUNDARIES of the BURGHS of SCOTLAND.

MY LORD,

IN obedience to your Lordship's directions, we have proceeded to examine the Reports of the Commissioners who visited the different Burghs in Scotland, and the relative Plans prepared under their superintendence; and to make such alterations as appeared to us to be expedient. We can now have the honour to transmit to your Lordship the result of that examination for the consideration of His Majesty's Government.

All the Burghs, with only a few exceptions, have been visited twice, some of them oftener, and in every case the Plans and Reports have been carefully gone over with the Commissioners who visited them. It has been our endeavour to frame the Boundaries of the Towns on correct and uniform principles, as far as the circumstances of the different cases would admit.

In reference to your Lordship's instructions not to be "controlled by local Divisions or jurisdictions," it may be observed, that in Scotland the Elective Franchise in the Burghs does not depend on Property or other local circumstances, but is regulated solely by certain ancient Charters or usages, vesting the Right of Election in a few Individuals, who compose a close and self-elected Magistracy. It may be also observed, that the ancient Royalties of several of the Scotch Burghs, especially of the more important Towns, are of a very limited extent, when compared with the Buildings which surround them, and which are now in fact a part of the Towns themselves; and that those of some of the other contain Burghs, are disproportionally large and contain great space of open ground. In following, therefore, your Lordships instructions to "assign such Boundaries as the circumstances of each Burgh may seem to require," we conceived it to be our duty to ascertain what really and fairly ought to form the Burgh, and to settle its Boundaries upon that principle.

Proceeding to act on this system, we thought ourselves called upon to consider not merely what constituted the Town itself, but also the nature of the Population situated in the immediate neighbourhood, but beyond its actual precincts. Most of the larger Towns are surrounded by Villas, or detached Dwellings of that description, occupied chiefly by Persons who either carry on business in the Town, or who are so intimately connected with it, in various ways, that they are, in habits and character, an urban rather than a rural Population. In these cases it was thought expedient that the occupiers of such Premises should form part of the Burgh Constituency, and they have been accordingly included in the Burgh, wherever it was found practicable without extending the Boundary to an unreasonable size. Upon the same principle, Gardens and small portions of land occupied by the Inhabitants, where they are not situated at too great a distance, have been taken into some of the smaller Towns.

The Towns which are to have a separate Representative for themselves are generally in a flourishing state, and have every appearance of increasing. Liberal limits have therefore been assigned to them; and in general wherever a Town seemed to be thriving, a larger space has been allowed for its probable extension.

On looking at the Reports and Plans, it will be evident, From the very great diversity in the circumstances of the different Towns, and the nature of the surrounding Country, that it would be impossible to settle their Boundaries according to any precise or definite rule applicable to all of them, or even to the greater number.

Wherever natural or other fixed points of a permanent nature or not likely to be removed, such as the Sea Shore, Rivers, Bridges or other considerable Buildings, could be found, they have been adopted in forming' the Boundaries, and in several instances, the limits have been extended or contracted, in order to take advantage of these outlines, when they could be conveniently resorted to.

In the absence of such natural or fixed objects, straight lines have been drawn between well-marked points which can be ascertained on the ground, and will form a definite Boundary, which can be easily traced. The marches of Parishes seldom offered themselves in desirable situations; they have, however, been in some instances employed; those of private properties have been resorted to only in the cases of entailed Estates.

A short. Statement is added to each Report, as to the eligibility and permanence of the points or lines used in the Boundary proposed, and reasons are given for their selection particularly in those cases where other lines seem, perhaps, preferable on an inspection of the Plans, but which the nature of the ground rendered it very difficult or impossible to adopt.

A brief account is given of the Trade, Manufactures and general circumstance, of the different Towns, for the information of His Majesty's Government, as to their " actual condition and prospects."

Each Report also contains,

1st. A Statement of the Population and number of houses taken from the Census 1821 and 1831, distinguishing in each case, whether the statement relates to the Burgh exclusively or to die Burgh and Parish together.

2nd. A Statement of the number of dwelling-houses, and other premises within the Burgh and its suburbs, of the yearly value of £10 and upwards (separate or attached,) taken from Returns to Parliament in 1830.

3d.. A similar Statement referring to the Burgh, taken from the books of Inhabited house Duty Assessment. None of the above Returns however apply to the proposed Boundaries of the Burghs, and the Inhabited House Duty. Assessment comprehends Dwelling Houses only.

4th. In some cases, Special Reports have been procured from Magistrates, Surveyors of Taxes, Taxes, and from other sources that could be. relied on, showing the number of Dwelling-houses and other Premises of the value of £10 a year and upwards within the proposed Boundary. We have reason to believe that the Special Reports have been framed after full inquiry and investigation and that they are as accurate as could be expected in the circumstances of each case.

5th. The Amount of the Assessed Taxes payable by the different Burghs.

We have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's obedient humble Servants,

*John H. Dalrymple*

*William Murray*

*J. W Pringle.*

Edinburgh,

February 1832.