



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

The Material Culture of Scottish Reform Politics, c. 1820 - c. 1884

Citation for published version:

Pentland, G, Roberts, M & Nixon, M 2012, 'The Material Culture of Scottish Reform Politics, c. 1820 - c. 1884', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 28-49.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Journal of Scottish Historical Studies

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Pentland, G., Roberts, M., & Nixon, M. (2012). The Material Culture of Scottish Reform Politics, c. 1820 - c. 1884. *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 32(1), 28-49

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF SCOTTISH REFORM
POLITICS, c.1820–c.1884

MARK NIXON, GORDON PENTLAND AND
MATTHEW ROBERTS

Historians of nineteenth-century politics are only just beginning fully to appreciate the potential of material objects to illuminate (rather than just illustrate) political culture. They have been slow to follow in the footsteps of their counterparts working on the long eighteenth century, who have been far more receptive to the methodologies and perspectives of the burgeoning field of ‘material culture studies’, a receptiveness that stems, perhaps, from an earlier interest in the commercialisation and commodification of politics.¹ It could be argued that historians of Victorian politics have little need to incorporate material culture into their research as they enjoy an embarrassment of text-based riches – the papers of individuals and organisations, the extensive Victorian press, printed memoirs and pamphlets, to name but a few of the most mined sources. Even where such printed sources might fruitfully be viewed through a material culture lens – as, for example, with various forms of ‘ephemera’, such as bill posters and cartoons, whose role in creating a public spectacle was as important as their textual content – the response from historians has been uneven.² It is easy to

¹ J. Brewer, ‘Commercialisation and Politics’, in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982), pp. 197–262; D. Drakard, *Printed English Pottery: History and Humour in the Reign of George III, 1760–1820* (London, 1992); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995); A. Bermingham and J. Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800* (London, 1995). For recent examples of work informed by ‘material culture studies’ see: M. Katz-Hyman, ‘Doing Good While Doing Well: The Decision to Manufacture Products that Supported the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in Great Britain’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 29, 2 (2008), pp. 219–31; M. Pittock, ‘Traacherous Objects: Towards a Theory of Jacobite Material Culture’, *Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, 34, 1 (2011), pp. 39–63.

² See, however, the suggestive arguments made in J. Thompson, ‘“Pictorial Lies”? Posters and Politics in Britain, c.1880–1914’, *Past and Present*, 197 (2007), pp. 177–210.

see why some theorists of material culture have described history as a branch of archaeology that specialises in one kind of source – the document.³

Thanks to the methodologies and insights of the ‘new political history’, with its close attention to the techniques and technologies of political communication, historians of nineteenth-century politics have, in recent times, become far more aware of the continued importance of verbal and visual communication.⁴ Much work, however, remains to be done. To date, there have been no comprehensive, comparative or fully contextualised studies of the material culture of British popular politics. Previous work has been confined to particular movements, episodes, symbols, objects and personalities. With the exception of work by two of the present authors and one article on the commemoration of the Scottish political martyrs, the material culture of Scottish politics is virtually *terra incognita*, despite the richness of the sources on which such work might be based.⁵ The present article makes no claims to comprehensiveness. Rather it is offered as a preliminary response to the questions: what might a material culture of nineteenth-century politics look like; what sources are available for a study of this kind; and how can work in the field of material culture studies be used to shed new light on popular politics?

The project on which this article is based is a collaborative one between the present authors, whose aim is to undertake comparative research on the material culture of English and Scottish popular politics. While the comparative dimensions of the project are still in their infancy, a preliminary case study of the Scottish movement for parliamentary reform has been completed. Three ‘flashpoints’ of the parliamentary reform movement were selected and each author has taken overall responsibility for one of these: Gordon Pentland for the period from the Radical War of 1820 to the passage of the 1832 Reform Act (Scotland); Matthew Roberts for Chartism; and Mark Nixon for the demonstrations surrounding the Third Reform Bill in 1884. As will be made clear below, the article itself has been structured thematically, rather than chronologically, around these three flashpoints as a means to bring more sharply into focus particular issues and perspectives associated with material culture and its study.

³ I. Hodder and S. Hudson, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 13.

⁴ For a critical introduction and overview of the ‘new political history’ see M. Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832–1914* (Basingstoke, 1998), esp. Introduction. Key works include: J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 107–16; N. Mansfield, ‘Radical Rhymes and Union Jacks: a Search for Evidence of Ideologies in the Symbolism of Nineteenth-Century Banners’, *Manchester Papers in Economic and Social History*, 45 (2000), pp. 1–33; P. A. Pickering and A. Tyrrell (eds), *Contested Sites: Commemoration, Memorial and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2004); R. McWilliam, ‘The Theatricality of the Staffordshire Figurine’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 10, 1 (2005), pp. 107–14.

⁵ G. Pentland, ‘“Betrayed by Infamous Spies”? The Commemoration of Scotland’s “Radical War” of 1820’, *Past and Present*, 201 (2008), pp. 141–73; M. Nixon, ‘Material Gladstones’, in R. Quinault, R. Swift and R. Windscheffel (eds), *William Gladstone: New Studies and Perspectives* (Aldershot, 2012); A. Tyrrell and M. T. Davis, ‘Bearding the Tories: The Commemoration of the Scottish Political Martyrs of 1793–94’, in Pickering and Tyrrell, *Contested Sites*, pp. 25–56.

It is worth stating at this stage some of the premises with which we began this exploration. First and foremost, we believe that in engaging with material culture historians can do more to recover the experience of politics in Victorian Britain. This article argues that taking the material culture of politics on its own terms opens up a fruitful new approach to ‘history from below’ and allows historians to probe what Victorian Scots felt and saw in politics, rather than what they heard and read.⁶ James Vernon hinted at these opportunities in referencing the work of the anthropologist Victor Turner on ‘social drama’ and usefully highlighted public performance as operating ‘between two poles, the emotional and the cognitive, with both working on and informing each other to make the message more compelling’.⁷ The efficacy of material objects stemmed in large part from their appeal to the visual senses. Research has shown that a significant proportion of human communication is non-verbal, and that sight is the sharpest of all the human senses.⁸ Similarly, research in the field of mnemonics going as far back as Cicero’s writings in the first century BC has shown that ‘things that have actually been seen are more “easily retained in the mind” than “perceptions received by the ears or by reflection”’.⁹

This article aims to open up some of these opportunities by first briefly discussing the key theoretical and methodological contexts for the study of material culture. Our initial survey of Scottish museums—ranging from the National Museums of Scotland to local authority museums, clan societies and private collections—has highlighted the survival of a rich and diverse treasure trove of objects relating to politics. While we utilise some of these surviving objects, one focus of the present article is on the question of whether it is possible to write the history of material culture when that material culture no longer physically exists. In arguing that this *is* possible we hope to demonstrate the potential of material culture for historians working in other fields who may not have a rich set of physical objects with which to work. As such, what follows is partly a discourse on historical method.

The article goes on to pose a number of exploratory questions, with a view to sketching a possible research agenda rather than providing neat conclusions. It should be noted here that we by no means see these as the only questions worth addressing nor do we want to suggest that they represent entirely discrete lines of analysis. Instead, they are offered as heuristic devices, which we hope might stimulate further thought and research. First, how was material culture displayed or used and what meanings did it hold for those who owned, used and displayed

⁶ Archaeologists have led the way in demonstrating how material culture offers a voice to the illiterate and the marginalised in literate culture. See J. Deatz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York, 1977).

⁷ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 110.

⁸ Pittock, ‘Traucherous Objects’, p. 40.

⁹ F. Harwood, ‘Myth, Memory and the Oral Tradition: Cicero in the Trobriands’, *American Anthropologist*, 78 (1976), p. 793 quoted and cited in N. Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1997), p. 12.

it? Secondly, who made different objects and for what purposes? While it is clear that both activists and savvy entrepreneurs (and sometimes these were one and the same thing) were involved in the production of political objects, historians might fruitfully ask when and how a market for the material culture of politics emerged. Finally, the article raises some questions about the survival, re-use, and collection of the material culture of politics.

I

The theory and methodology of material culture have been developed within two cognate disciplines, those of archaeology and anthropology. Although it is impossible here to give a full account of the richness and variety of approaches to material culture to be found in these disciplines, some of the key insights that archaeologists and anthropologists might offer historians should be outlined. Traditionally, many archaeologists interpreted material culture as a passive reflector of the societies of which it was a part, whether by production, trade or use. The 'new archaeology' of the 1960s and 1970s sought to read back behind the society to the system within which objects operated. Since the 1980s, however, new approaches have been developed which question these assumptions. Ian Hodder's *Symbols in Action* (1982) inaugurated a 'post-processualist' archaeology, which sought, among other things, to insert an appreciation of the role of agency, culture and history into the study of past societies. This included an interest in their role in the relationship between behaviour and material culture.

Similarly, within anthropology and the social sciences, the term 'material culture' was traditionally used to mean the material elements or traces of culture, that is, to describe the things themselves. This is still useful, and indeed the term is used to mean the material remains of the past throughout this article. Nevertheless, anthropologists have interrogated the term far more than this might suggest, in recent years preferring to stress that 'material culture' refers to the culture of which things are an essential part. The emphasis on the cultural aspects of material culture entails a turn away from the objects themselves and has useful implications for historical practice. Thus, the material culture of nineteenth-century politics might be seen not as the political objects of the nineteenth century, but rather as the political culture in which those objects were produced, consumed, exchanged, adapted and so on. In part, this helps the student of material culture to place the material culture of the past within a wider practice of cultural history – indeed making it an essential aspect of any cultural, or indeed social, history.

In recent years, however, theoretical approaches to material culture have seen further questioning of some of the principles and conceptions of this earlier work.¹⁰ For instance, where earlier work had sought to move from the social

¹⁰ For the idea of a 'quiet revolution' in anthropology see A. Henare, M. Holbraad & S. Wastel (eds), *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically* (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 1–31.

(of the material) to the materiality of the social, there is increasing doubt as to whether the social and the material can be readily distinguished from one another in the first place. For some archaeologists the object is now its meaning, or rather the object *is* meaning. From this perspective, we might argue that a demonstrator carrying a banner is no longer viewed as a political subject carrying a political object, for the two together (including clothing and other adornment) are a single political subject/object or, rather, a political ‘thing’ – as indeed is an entire march, which is both a series of political things together, and a single political thing. It may be said that this ‘thing’ is not material but rather ideal. Certainly, it is a further assumption of this kind of work – and has been within post-processualist archaeology since its inception – that the material world can only be said to exist as it is perceived, a principle associated with Idealism since its development by those German philosophers such as Herder, Fichte and Schiller with which we associate the birth of the historical method.

The question remains how it is possible to adopt a material culture practice within the discipline of history and, in particular, in nineteenth-century studies. Clearly, there are practical problems associated with discovering the material remains of the past, which we shall return to below. Furthermore, there are the problems of discovering the contexts within which, in more traditional terms, the objects were used, displayed or otherwise operated. This return to traditional terms reminds us that deconstructionist accounts do not remove these problems, nor do they wish away historical practice.

One potential answer to the question of practice in the light of this theory, which has received some attention in recent years, has been a phenomenological history. In large part, this has been inspired by phenomenological archaeology, which has the benefit for historians of incorporating such matters as the geographical (in archaeological terms, landscape) within which, or of which, material culture is a part.¹¹ As yet largely undeveloped in material accounts of the past, landscape analysis could play a significant part in our growing appreciation of such matters as display and use of political material culture, in particular in demonstrations, meetings, hustings and other moments that witnessed the political appropriation of public space.¹² Phenomenological accounts stress the role of sensation and experience in both individual and social accounts of human lives. Thus, it is necessary to consider how Victorians encountered or experienced political culture, certainly in terms of what they saw – arguably the most important sense for experiencing political material culture – but also, for example, touch and hearing for those witnessing or participating in political activity. The discovery of these experiences through immersion in contemporary accounts of the events

¹¹ For an overview of the field from an archaeologist’s perspective, see J. Thomas, ‘Phenomenology and Material Culture’, in C. Tilley et al (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London, 2006), pp. 43–59.

¹² For a notable exception, however, see K. Navickas, ‘Moors, Fields, and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1800–1848’, *Northern History*, 46, 1 (2009), pp. 93–111.

and our own experiencing of the material remains are the points of beginning for material culture accounts of the past.¹³

The position adopted in this article is one which derives from these theoretical insights, but which attempts to make adjustments for the needs and challenges of our discipline. The article does not aim to be too prescriptive about what a material culture account of nineteenth-century politics might look like, but it does seek to clarify some important points. A material history must not be a formalist one, that looks solely to the object and what we might ‘read’ from it, although an element of formalism is likely to be necessary. Certainly, the banner and the banner carrier (and any other material such as clothing and badges associated with the carrier), and perhaps also the context of the moment of banner carrying, should be treated as a ‘thing’, as should the banner, the banner maker, and the moment of production. The article thus proposes one way of rethinking popular politics, based on the premise that material culture *is* political culture. Moreover, while the following sections suggest some of the apparently discrete ways in which historians might consider material culture, this should not override the importance of interrogating material culture as a whole – a network of things, actions and moments.

II

Historians of popular politics can learn much about the material culture of popular politics from conventional textual sources. Sticking for the moment with the example of the countless banners displayed at reform demonstrations throughout Britain across the nineteenth century, it is clear that most of these banners have not survived – as the National Banner Survey conducted by the People’s History Museum has confirmed.¹⁴ Fortunately for the historian, the press often contained detailed reports of the banners that were displayed at demonstrations (often running to multiple columns), including details of inscriptions and images, size, colour, material, who carried them, and even whether the banner had been used before. From the second half of the nineteenth century the press also began to include prints and photographs of demonstrations, which featured banners and other items of material culture that were on display. A notably rich and detailed ink sketch published in the Glasgow gossip magazine *Quiz* (see figure 1) of that city’s franchise demonstration shows a man carrying a banner with the words ‘Kilsyth Miners/We Come from the Bowels of the Earth to Demand our Rights’; this appears to be a banner that is now in the collection of North Lanarkshire museums.¹⁵ To these depictions can be added unpublished sources, including

¹³ For an example of an explicitly Heideggerian phenomenological approach in Victorian studies, see I. Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (Oxford, 2008).

¹⁴ N. Mansfield, ‘Radical Banners as Sites of Memory’ in Pickering and Tyrell (eds), *Contested Sites*, pp. 81–101.

¹⁵ *Quiz*, 13 Sept. 1884; North Lanarkshire Museums, CUKDM 1977/070.2.

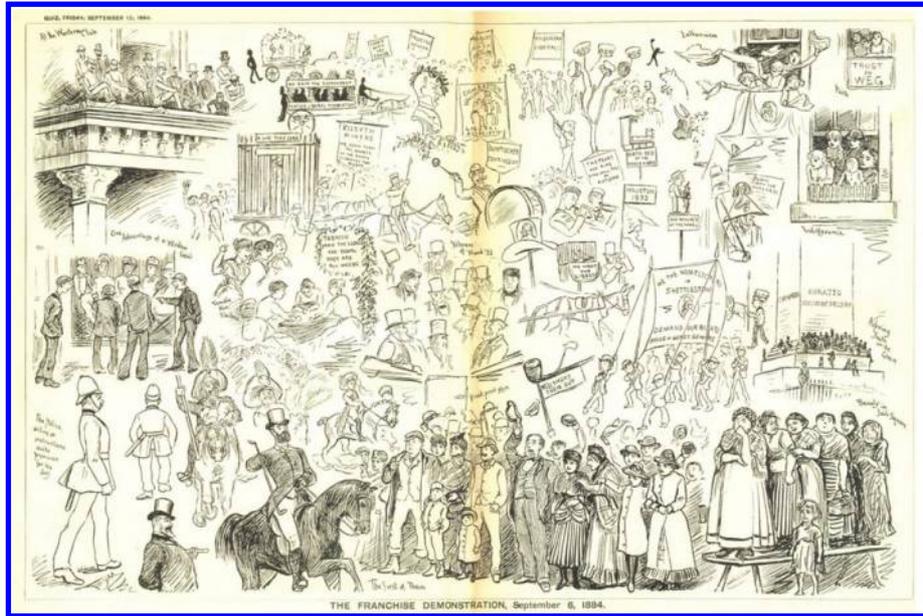


Figure 1. Double page spread from the Glasgow magazine *Quiz*, 12 Sept. 1884, illustrating the material culture on show at that city's franchise demonstration. Sketch signed by 'Twym' [AS Boyd]. Composite image by Kevin Kerrigan.

photographic collections and sketches or other artistic representations. Many of the 1884 demonstrations were photographed, including those at Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Wishaw.¹⁶ A pencil sketch of the Dundee demonstrations shows street decoration, banners and bannerettes, trade models such as beds, and a small boat on a truck, representing the House of Lords as a 'Ship of Fools'.¹⁷ These published and unpublished sources allow us to observe these material objects in their performative context. In the case of flags and banners, this was provided by the public processions and demonstrations that were such a regular feature of popular reform politics, but also extends to aspects such as spectators and street decoration as well as the immediate environment.

Such sources may be of particular use for objects less likely to have survived and for more ephemeral material acts. For example, press reports show that trades models were present at all of the 1884 franchise demonstrations (as, indeed, they had been in 1830–2 and 1866–7), but very few have survived.¹⁸ Even if they have

¹⁶ Aberdeen Central Library; Mitchell Library, Glasgow; Motherwell Heritage Centre.

¹⁷ Dundee Central Library, Local Studies Department print collection, GB 615/PR 129.

¹⁸ For surviving examples, see the Hawick Waulking Mill model on display at Hawick Textile Townhouse, Scottish Borders Council Museum & Gallery Service, HAK 6274; the small potter's kiln model on display at the People's Palace, Glasgow, Glasgow Museums, OG.1949.78; and the steam hammer tableau in the collections of the McManus Galleries, Dundee, McManus Galleries & Museum, 1984–371.2. See also the single sheet featuring a poem – 'The Banner of Reform' – and the words 'Printed at the Bo'ness Franchise Demonstration'; the local printers processed with a printing

survived, we may require verbal or visual depictions to recover their operation as political acts; the sight of sawyers processing with a small sawmill on a lorry, cutting up logs with the words 'House of Lords' painted on them appears to have been common, but irrecoverable through the surviving objects themselves.¹⁹ These ephemeral, 'live' political acts may have been amongst the most powerful experiences of the demonstrations. A decorated cow, with a boy dressed as a highland laird on its back and its reins held by Glasgow butchers is shown in a photograph of 1884 in the collections of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.²⁰

The potential of the textual approach to material culture can be seen from descriptions of the processions and demonstrations organised by Scottish radicals and reformers. One of the grandest processions was organised by the Chartists of Aberdeen to welcome the hugely popular radical MP, T. S. Duncombe, who visited the town in November 1843. Representatives of the local trades and radical associations made up what the report in the *Northern Star* described as 'one of the most splendid processions ever exhibited in this part of the country'.²¹ At the head of the procession were the bakers 'in full regalia, dressed in suits of rich pink muslin, and wearing splendid turbans'. This sartorial excess was not simply for decorative purposes; rather, it supplied the means for the bakers to assert, celebrate and dignify their labour. The bakers held aloft a 'sheaf of wheat, a loaf of bread, and several other emblems of the craft'. Representatives of the other trades on parade cut similar striking appearances. Even the bodies of working men on these occasions were inscribed with symbolic meaning. In language that anticipated John Ruskin's idolisation of the working man's body, the *Northern Star* observed how the fleshers 'were a set of well-matched muscular-looking men, and had a beautiful effect'. On a number of occasions, the *Northern Star* referred to the beauty of those on display (a common feature in reports of this kind), a beauty that was enhanced by splendid attire and 'beautiful silk sashes'.²² Through elaborate ritual displays of labouring skill, radical processions served to visualise and thus realise the dignity, skill and respectability of labouring men, and, by extension, their fitness for the franchise.²³

press on a lorry, producing copies of the sheet and handing them out to the spectators and other demonstrators, Falkirk Council Archives, a 5.23.

¹⁹ *Berwickshire News*, 21 Oct. 1884; Falkirk Council Archives, a 5.23, *Bo'ness Reform Demonstration* [souvenir publication].

²⁰ www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell/image.php?i=14262&r=2&t=4&x=1, accessed 11 Jan. 2012. A decorated bullock was also paraded by the Stirling Fleshers, while the Perth Butchers paraded two bullocks labelled Salisbury and Northcote and a goat labelled Churchill, see *Stirling Observer*, 25 Sept. 1884; *Perthshire Advertiser*, 13 Oct. 1884.

²¹ *Northern Star*, 4 Nov. 1843. The following description is based on the report in this issue of the *Northern Star*.

²² For other examples, see *True Scotsman*, 3 Nov. 1838, 6 July 1839; *Scottish Patriot*, 26 Sept. 1840; *Northern Star*, 13 Nov. 1841.

²³ Similar points are made on the debate preceding and surrounding the Second Reform Act in K. McLelland, "'England's greatness, the working man'", in C. Hall, K. McLelland and J. Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (2000), pp. 71–118.

Displaying material objects, it could be argued, gave the rank and file of a political movement an opportunity to reflect back to the leadership their grievances and goals and to stamp something of their identity on to the movement. The 1884 franchise demonstrations, many of which were organised by local Liberal Associations and were officially intended solely to maintain pressure for the passage of the Franchise Bill, often featured radical anti-Lords sentiment, which appears to have greatly concerned the Liberal leadership. Surviving banners include legends such as ‘The Lords soon shall know/The death knell’s rung for their overthrow’, ‘Our legislators should be chosen by the people for the people’ and ‘The House of Lords must be ended’.²⁴ By carrying banners with phrases stating, often in quite violent language, the need for the abolition of the House of Lords, the demonstrators were able to have their message heard by the party representatives, including cabinet ministers, who spoke from the platforms at the demonstrations. Late in the campaign, Gladstone found himself impelled to speak to gatherings of workers to defend the principle of the Upper House, often to catcalls.²⁵ This radical appropriation of semi-formal Liberal party political activity through the use of material culture by activists without a voice in party structures offers a material strategy in place of, or in contrast to, the rhetorical strategies of high politics.

Similarly, material culture could be used to give voice to those for whom conventional but privileged access (oratory and the printed word) to the public political sphere may have been limited, even in a democratic movement. For example, in formal political campaigns, material culture might be the only way women could show public support for radical politics. The huge Glasgow franchise demonstration in 1884 was ticketed, with tickets distributed through trades unions and political associations. As a result, very few, if any, women would have been able to play a part in the main procession. They could, however, make themselves seen and heard as both spectators of the procession and in the audience of the platform meeting on Glasgow Green. The *Quiz* sketch mentioned above shows women in attendance, some of whom are waving handkerchiefs and hanging messages (‘Trust in WEG’) from their windows. These women thus became a part of the event: political bodies within the greater mass of the demonstration. Moreover, it may be possible to use material culture to show support for a male-led campaign while also causing a message of relevance to women’s radicalism to be brought into the arena. The 1839 Hamilton women’s banner presented to the local Radical Association included the words ‘God and our Rights’ and ‘Universal Suffrage’.²⁶ Also used in later campaigns, the lack of the word ‘manhood’ in the second phrase on the banner is noteworthy.

²⁴ City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries, HH 5806/1/98; Scottish Borders Council Museum & Gallery Service, Banner 2; North Lanarkshire Museums, CUKDM 1977/070.3

²⁵ Nixon, ‘Material Gladstones’.

²⁶ *Hamilton Advertiser*, 16 Aug. 1884.

Gift-giving was an important ritual in radical demonstrations and meetings across this period and was often performed by women. A number of historians have explored the meanings involved in the common ritual of women presenting flags, banners and caps of liberty to male radicals in 1819.²⁷ Chartist leaders such as Feargus O'Connor and the liberated Chartist prisoners George White, Peter Murray McDouall and John Collins were formally presented with gifts, usually tartan clothing (a way of celebrating not only Scottishness, but also the weaving industry, in which women often formed a majority of the workforce). The presentation of tartan thus brought together strands of class, gender and nation. When Collins and White visited Dundee, the Female Chartist Association presented them with tartan waistcoats during an evening of festivities.²⁸

Material culture could also be used to celebrate and promote a distinctive Scottishness. Returning to the bakers at the Aberdeen procession to welcome Duncombe, their banners situated Chartism within a distinctly Scottish tradition: 'Motto—Chartism. Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled. Reverse—Scotland free, or a desert.'²⁹ Indeed, the most cursory glance at the material culture of Scottish Chartism suggests that the movement frequently displayed what has variously been termed a 'low-key nationalism' or 'Unionist-nationalism'.³⁰ References to Wallace and mottos such as 'Let Scotia's sons her rights defend' and 'Scotland free or a desert' featured from time to time on Chartists' banners just as they had in the earlier Reform Bill demonstrations.³¹ Like all potent icons and rituals, Wallace was symbolically syncretic and was far more frequently used in nineteenth-century politics to underline the distinctive Scottish contribution to an integrative and British political tradition than to articulate a separate Scottish one.³² During the agitation of 1819, for example, the Calton Unions of Glasgow uncomplicatedly carried an elaborate flag depicting 'Wallace pushing his sword through an enemy

²⁷ See especially, J. Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 122 (1989), pp. 100–7; A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 159–64; M. L. Bush, 'The Women at Peterloo: The Impact of Female Reform on the Manchester Meeting of 16 August 1819', *History*, 89, 294 (2004), pp. 209–32. For examples from Scotland in 1819 see reports of meetings at Kilsyth and Glasgow in *Caledonian Mercury*, 4 Nov. 1819 and *Scotsman*, 6 Nov. 1819.

²⁸ *Northern Star*, 14 Nov. 1840.

²⁹ *Northern Star*, 4 Nov. 1843.

³⁰ M. Pittock, *Scottish Nationality* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 93; G. Morton, *Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Linton, 1999). While these authors have different interpretations of nationalism, both terms cited essentially describe a distinctive and assertive Scottishness existing within a framework where the dominant political language was Unionist and British.

³¹ *Scottish Patriot*, 17 Oct. 1840; *Northern Star*, 24 Oct. 1840, 6 Nov. 1841.

³² Pittock, *Scottish Nationality*, pp. 90–1, 96; Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty', p. 84. For a discussion of these issues during the earlier reform agitation see G. Pentland, 'Scotland and the Creation of a National Reform Movement, 1830–32', *Historical Journal*, 48, 4 (2005), pp. 999–1023. For the commemoration of Wallace and his 'political usability' see G. Morton, *William Wallace: Man and Myth* (Stroud, 2001) and E. J. Cowan (ed.), *The Wallace Book* (Edinburgh, 2007).

to Scottish freedom' alongside banners depicting English radical leaders, such as Major Cartwright and Francis Burdett.³³ In the Aberdeen Chartist procession in which Wallace featured, he was joined by 'A Beautiful Garland, representing the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle entwined' and an image of Britannia.³⁴ Material culture did not require association with Scottish heroes to assert a Scottish identity. The inscription on a banner belonging to the Dunkeld Radicals, displayed at a Chartist procession in Perthshire in November 1838, read 'Clannan Gael et guailibh a cheil' (Scots shoulder to shoulder).³⁵ At processions and demonstrations it was not uncommon for Chartists to appear dressed in highland costume, beating drums, playing bagpipes and brandishing claymores—evidence of the Chartist appropriation of the 'highlandism' that became so prominent in nineteenth-century Scotland and resonated well beyond the highlands.³⁶

Material culture could also serve to carry a distinctly local element into the national framework. The representatives of the village of Condorrat who were among the Dunbartonshire contingent at the 1884 Glasgow franchise demonstration carried a gun and scaffold bible associated with their local hero John Baird, executed at Stirling for his part in the 1820 Radical War.³⁷ The weavers of Strathaven carried relics of their executed hero of 1820, James Wilson, at both the county demonstration at Hamilton and the Glasgow demonstration, and decorated the village monument to Wilson during their own local demonstration.³⁸

Perhaps more prominently, districts associated with seventeenth-century Covenanting activity could draw on local memories as well as the political associations of those events. One visitor to the area around Drumclog in 1846 remarked on how many stories were associated with the battlefield and the wider area: he was shown the spot where dragoons were buried and where a local hero, Finlay of Lesmahagow, had attacked Claverhouse with a pitchfork; in villages he was shown those streets or closes through which the soldiers passed on their retreat to Glasgow. As well as sites and stories the visitor was struck by the sheer volume of surviving material culture, remarking how: 'Throughout the district various relics connected with the event are carefully preserved'. These included the knife used to free Claverhouse's prisoners from their bonds; a drum; a small black bottle;

³³ *Scotsman*, 6 Nov. 1819.

³⁴ *Northern Star*, 4 Nov. 1843.

³⁵ *Perth Chronicle*, 25 Oct. 1838.

³⁶ For the appearance of material objects such as bagpipes, blue bonnets and tartan at Chartist processions outside the highlands see, for example, *Scottish Patriot*, 7 Nov. 1840 (Aloa); *Northern Star*, 23 Oct. 1841 (Cumnock); *Northern Star*, 6 Nov. 1841 (Aberdeen); *Northern Star*, 17 Oct. 1840 (Kilmarnock); *Northern Star*, 22 Nov. 1840 (Montrose); *True Scotsman*, 22 June 1839 (Fifeshire). A good introduction to 'highlandism' is C. Withers, 'The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands' in I. Donnachie and C. Whatley (ed.), *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (1992), pp. 142–56.

³⁷ *Lennox Herald*, 13 Sept. 1884.

³⁸ *Hamilton Advertiser*, 25 Oct. 1884. For the role of 1820 within radical and reform politics more generally see Pentland, "'Betrayed by infamous spies'".

guns; and numerous swords, banners and flags.³⁹ At Strathaven, the reform jubilee to celebrate the passing of the 1832 Reform Act (Scotland) began on the field of Drumclog, where the banner from that battle, which was in the possession of the weavers' friendly society, was prominently displayed; in 1884 we find the weavers still carrying 'the treasured flag of Drumclog' alongside the Wilson material at the Glasgow demonstration.⁴⁰ In one remarkable demonstration at Lesmahagow in 1884, the United Free Church, which hosted the event, was decorated with many 'relics' of the 'killing times' as well as the names of every local family who could prove their descent from seventeenth-century Covenanting families. The 'relics' included the Priesthill, Tanhill and Waterhead swords.⁴¹ This material culture of Covenanting and the Radical War demonstrated local adherence to traditions of radicalism, as communities displayed pride in their families' and towns' involvements in past struggles, and established their right and duty to be at the forefront of contemporary campaigns.

Ritual display of material objects in processions and at demonstrations helped to create collective identities and sustain group loyalties by incorporating the rank and file in symbolically empowering ways. The display of material culture helped to generate emotional bonds, common feelings and strength – particularly important for oppositional movements like Chartism. The inscriptions and images emblazoned on the banners were saturated with empowering messages: 'The Charter to gain, this is our determination', 'Universal Suffrage and No Surrender'.⁴² At a radical demonstration in Roxburghshire, held in July 1839, the banner of the Kelso Working Men's Association featured an image of a giant, who, as the *True Scotsmen* observed, was 'emblematical of the people'. The giant 'had burst its chains, and dashed to the earth the oppressor, upon whose neck he had his foot'.⁴³

Neil Jarman has shown in relation to loyalist and nationalist parades in Northern Ireland that visual displays are occasions when 'the collective focus is on the idealised community [...] momentarily realised during the parade [...] made visible and physical, in total and uninhibited control of the public spaces'.⁴⁴ Yet radical processions were more than just brief moments of ritual social inversion. The transient nature of the ritual was transcended by its prefigurative dimensions. Take the Chartist processions as an example. The well-fed, toned and richly clothed bodies of the masses, the exhibiting of the fruits of honest labour, the symbolic social harmony and equality conveyed by the trades processing alongside one another, the democratic messages trumpeted by the banners and

³⁹ *Hogg's Weekly Instructor*, 3 Oct. 1846.

⁴⁰ *Scotsman*, 18 Aug. 1832; *Hamilton Advertiser*, 30 Aug. 1884. The Drumclog banner is now in the collections of South Lanarkshire Museums, JHM:1983:87.

⁴¹ *Hamilton Advertiser*, 25 Oct. 1884.

⁴² *Northern Star*, 4 Nov. 1843.

⁴³ *True Scotsman*, 6 July 1839.

⁴⁴ Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, p. 108.

the triumphal millenarianism of the occasion presented a vision of what a post-Charter world would look like. If Chartists struggled fully to articulate in words the lineaments of a post-Charter world this linguistic deficiency was partially compensated for by the hyper-materiality of the Chartist experience. The symbolism of the material objects on display were part of the armoury (literally in some cases) through which political movements asserted their control over a public space. It was surely no coincidence that radical processions were often headed by armed ‘marshals on horseback’. Those present at the Aberdeen procession to welcome Duncombe ‘carried broad swords of polished steel’, one even wearing a full suit of armour.⁴⁵

It is well established that Chartism was, for the most part, a movement pursuing constitutional ends via constitutional means. It is suggestive, however, that Chartist processions and demonstrations were akin to military parades, something they shared with earlier protests in 1819 and 1820, when Loyalists had frequently commented on the ubiquitous presence of ‘flags, drums and fife’ and the unsettling adoption of the ‘regular military step’ at radical demonstrations.⁴⁶ When the Chartist leaders John Collins, Peter Murray McDouall and George White visited Strathaven to celebrate their release from prison they were met two miles from the town by a procession headed by a standard-bearer (tellingly Collins, McDouall and White travelled in a chariot). The disciplined bodies of the working men and women on display, underlined by the order and grandiosity of the procession was designed to convey power – ‘a most imposing spectacle’ was how the *Northern Star* described the Glasgow demonstration held to celebrate the visit of Collins, McDouall and White.⁴⁷

Weapons were often carried in reform demonstrations, including Covenanting swords and weapons associated with the Radical War of 1820. Moreover, the language of contemporary reports – and indeed of the historiography of political reform movements – often draws on military metaphors. Historians write of the ‘fight for the vote’ and ‘reform campaigns’. Present at the demonstrations were ‘veterans of 1832’ – usually given pride of place at the front of the processions – and sometimes, as at Dundee, ‘veterans of Chartism’.⁴⁸ Contemporary reports describe the processionists in their separate ‘contingents’, ‘mustering’ at the start of the day and ‘marching’ through the streets. This body of men, with banners, medals and ribbons, organised as if by regiment, is an army on the move, demanding their rights from those who, according to the language of the demonstrations, should face dissolution at best. The language of speech, banner and contemporary reports, the allusions of personal and collective

⁴⁵ *Northern Star*, 4 Nov. 1843.

⁴⁶ National Library of Scotland, MSS 2773, Diary of C. H. Hutcheson, 1820–48, pp. 14–17, 24; G. Pentland, *The Spirit of the Union: Popular Politics in Scotland, 1815–1820* (London, 2011), pp. 67–72.

⁴⁷ *Northern Star*, 26 Sept. 1840.

⁴⁸ For which, see A. Taylor, ‘The Old Chartist: Radical Veterans on the Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Political Platform’, *History*, 95, 320 (2010), pp. 458–76.

adornment, and the presence of both individual bodies and the corporate body of the procession might not amount to much alone and of themselves, but the whole act transmits a greater sensibility.⁴⁹

The force of this military spectacle introduces another crucial role performed by material culture: its ability to convey 'silent messages'. Murray Pittock has recently shown how the Jacobites of the mid-eighteenth century were forced to adopt a style of communication that was oblique, symbolic and indefinite as a way of minimising the risk of prosecution for sedition and treason.⁵⁰ This was also a serious risk for radicals in the first half of the nineteenth century, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Scotland where the fate of the men of 1793–4 and 1820 was emblazoned on radical consciousness. Radical reformers could not just say what they wanted with impunity. The virtue of material culture was that it afforded a greater degree of license than either the spoken or written word. During the 'days of May' in 1832, for example, when the king had accepted Grey's resignation and the reform bills seemed lost, reports of republican or ambiguous symbolism and iconography far outweighed reports of potentially seditious words. In Markinch, banners once carried in support of William IV's reforming credentials were burned; in Glasgow his portrait was removed or turned upside down; everywhere 'Let Kings beware', 'Put not your trust in Princes' and 'Remember Charles I' became prominent slogans.⁵¹ Indeed, even before this crisis, material culture suggests a route into popular political feeling that balances the more formal rhetoric reported at meetings. At the illumination that followed the first reading of the bill in 1831, for example, the journalist Peter Mackenzie noted: 'In the Burgh of Calton and its neighbourhood 54 tri-coloured flags were before mid-day seen waving in the house tops.'⁵²

Turning to Chartism, as we saw with the 'low-key nationalism' of some Chartist banners, a narrow focus on the public political language of the movement suggests that it was not, for the most part, republican. Yet this is hardly surprising when one considers the penalties for professing republicanism at this time. The most cursory study of Chartist banners, however, suggests that republicanism *was* more in evidence than a number of historians have been willing to admit, even if that republicanism was ambiguous, inchoate and co-existed uneasily with a rival popular vision of a reformed monarchy.⁵³ Indeed, the material culture of Chartism

⁴⁹ For some consideration of the genesis of the military aspects of the mass platform see S. H. Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), pp. 133–8; G. Pentland, 'Militarisation and Collective Action in Great Britain, 1815–1820' in B. Bowden and M. T. Davis (eds), *Disturbing the Peace: Collective Action in Britain and France, 1381 to the Present* (Basingstoke, forthcoming).

⁵⁰ Pittock, 'Traacherous Objects', pp. 40–4.

⁵¹ *Scotsman*, 16 and 19 May 1832; *Aberdeen Chronicle*, 19 May 1832; J. D. Burn, *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy* (London, 1855), pp. 141–2.

⁵² P. Mackenzie, *Reminiscences of Glasgow and the West of Scotland*, (Glasgow, 1875), i, p. 246.

⁵³ D. Thompson, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Power* (London, 1990), p. 98; P. A. Pickering, '“The Hearts of the Millions”': Chartism and Popular Monarchism in the 1840s', *History*, 88, 290 (2003), pp. 227–48.



Figure 2. Medallion produced for the 1884 franchise demonstration in Glasgow: obverse featuring Gladstone. Private collection.

reflects these ambiguities. This much is evident from the Aberdeen procession. For in addition to the portrait of Charles I and the image of the future triumph of democracy over kingcraft, the procession also included a woman dressed as Queen Catherine who was accompanied by an elaborate cortege. Catherine bore a 'sceptre, surmounted by a crown' and was flanked by eight archers on either side. Tellingly she was also accompanied by twelve councillors 'each bearing the Charter in his hand'. Here we see the ritual enactment of the Chartist vision of a popular monarch supported by democratic advisers as opposed to infamous 'evil councillors' (a familiar trope in critiques of royal despotism). One can only guess at the intended symbolic meaning of selecting Queen Catherine, presumably Catherine Braganza, Queen Consort of Charles II.⁵⁴

It may be that it is in the total experience of a material politics that the silent participants and material remains are given voice. To return to the 1884 franchise demonstrations, we may be able to bring together the words, objects and subjects of the events to provide a phenomenology of nineteenth-century radical politics in Scotland. A full account will require more research, but a few pointers may be made here. All of the larger, and most of the smaller, public collections in Scotland hold examples of medallions produced for the demonstrations (see figures 2 and 3). In most cases, these medallions have been holed so that they may be worn; some examples still have the pins or ribbons attached by which

⁵⁴ *Northern Star*, 4 Nov. 1843.



Figure 3. Medallion produced for the 1884 franchise demonstration in Glasgow: reverse featuring the coat of arms of Glasgow, and the maker's mark 'H & McC'. Private collection.

they were fixed to lapels and coats.⁵⁵ They have thus taken the aspect of the medal. As Nick Mansfield has shown, many reform banners of the nineteenth century incorporated a union flag in the upper corner next to the pole.⁵⁶ It has been suggested that these were included to assert the reformers' essential conservatism and their claims to being considered as part of the national body politic, but it is noteworthy that in so doing they followed a design element very common in regimental banners. As noted above, however, the 1884 banners – and other reform banners – often carried messages that were far more radical than the formal political sphere might consider acceptable. This period, of course, is one in which the volunteer regiments were very popular, and in which the citizens of any large town would have seen at least annual musterings at the principal public parks, including at Glasgow Green – sites dear to radical political activity. These medallion-medals and banners came to contemporary audiences, and come to us, as visual, or material, metaphors, connoting war.

III

While the above has offered some reflections on the display and use of material culture, asking questions about who made or produced political objects raises

⁵⁵ This was a common feature of radical and reform medallions, as evidenced also in three medallions created for John Bright's visits to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Kilmarnock to support the 1866 Reform Bill (private collection).

⁵⁶ Mansfield, 'Radical Rhymes', p. 7.

important issues about agency and the direction and crafting of political appeals and constituencies. By taking examples of the production of material culture from the beginning of our period and from the end it is possible to suggest a broadly plausible narrative. When William Rodger and William Miller, the leaders of Airdrie radicalism, were released from Hamilton tollbooth in December 1819, they were chaired to Airdrie in a parody of a successful election ritual. Reporters noticed that the two men had recycled ribbons to wear ‘the insignia of the order, displayed in the same manner as the Waterloo medal’.⁵⁷ This use of materials in creative protest would not have been out of place in earlier ‘pre-modern’ movements, a clear example of the ‘mutable semiotics of clothing’ that has recently been underlined as central to Hanoverian politics.⁵⁸ The common material culture of everyday life was abundant in the popular politics at the beginning of this period and furnished an emblematic language of wide applicability and ready comprehension.⁵⁹ For example the paraphernalia of taxed items was common, as at Rutherglen, where ‘suspended from a stick across the pole of this flag, were inverted gill and half-mutchkin stoups, tea-pots, torn spleuchans, and broken tobacco pipes.’⁶⁰

The community dynamic to the production of this material culture was clearly crucial. Making a banner could form part of the associational culture of a political movement, and in the case of popular movements such as Chartism it was an opportunity for working men, women and perhaps even children to demonstrate and contribute a range of skills, foremost of which was needlework, a degree of literacy, and a knowledge of the movement’s objectives. The quantity and quality of banners was taken as evidence of the strength of Chartism in the localities. Reporting on a meeting in favour of the Charter in Galashiels, the *True Scotsman* noted approvingly that ‘Most of the banners had been made for the occasion by the active and spirited young men of the town’.⁶¹ We also know that a number of Chartist banners were made by women and then presented to male Chartists. The women of Hamilton presented a large green flag with the inscription of ‘God and our Rights’ to the Hamilton Radical Association on 10 June 1839 (the event was recorded on the reverse of the flag).⁶²

Nearer the end of the nineteenth century, reformers keen to attend the grand reform demonstration in Hawick in September 1884 were apparently spoiled for choice in finding a supplier for such wares, which were professionally produced

⁵⁷ *Scotsman*, 18 Dec. 1819.

⁵⁸ K. Navickas, “‘That sash will hang you’: Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780–1840”, *Journal of British Studies*, 49, 3 (2010), pp. 540–65.

⁵⁹ D. Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 55–60.

⁶⁰ *Spirit of the Union*, 30 Oct. 1819. See also *Caledonian Mercury*, 15 Nov. 1819.

⁶¹ *True Scotsman*, 3 Nov. 1838.

⁶² *Northern Star*, 10 Oct. 1840.

to suit a range of budgets:

HAWICK FRANCHISE DEMONSTRATION.
SIMPSON & SONS, JAMAICA STREET, GLASGOW, are celebrated for the
supply of all kinds of BANNERS, FLAGS, ROSETTES, &c. at much lower
price than any other house in the trade.
SATIN RIBBON ROSETTES.
1s. 6d., 2s. 6d., and 3s. 6d. a dozen.
ORDER EARLY.⁶³

Such examples seem to suggest a move from community-based, self-made or adapted material artefacts to professionally—and commercially—produced ones made available within a sophisticated market place. Such a narrative is plausible and clearly has much merit. It should not, however, be overstated: John Brewer pointed out a long time ago the sophisticated market forces at work during the Wilkesite protests of the 1760s and 1770s.⁶⁴ It seems that, outside of London, community efforts and the role of the market existed in symbiosis to forward the production and distribution of political material culture. In November of 1819, for example, George Webster, a cotton spinner, attended one of the mass meetings for radical reform at the behest of the magistrates. In his report, he made much of the visual content—as newspapers often did, counting the number of flags and banners and their contents—but he also alluded to how the flags had been created: ‘That the contributions for purchasing Flags &c were previously collected by men and girls who went from house to house for the purpose of making the collections’.⁶⁵ Such testimony certainly reveals the powerful community dynamic behind early-nineteenth-century radicalism, but the collection of subscriptions for a flag suggests that a market was already in existence.

Similarly, further research might suggest that we should not overstate the shift towards mass production and commercialisation. Nick Mansfield has argued that there was a trend towards professionally-produced radical banners from as early as the late 1830s.⁶⁶ Yet banners—which were expensive to produce and required certain key skills—might be unrepresentative of wider material culture, where adaptation and parody might have continued to play an important role.⁶⁷ And even in the case of banners, the potential for groups to continue to make their own material culture and imbue it with meaning is clear from a description of the great

⁶⁴ Brewer, ‘Commercialisation and Politics’, pp. 197–262.

⁶⁵ National Records of Scotland, Crown Office Precognitions, AD 14/19/312, f. 5, Declaration of George Webster, 8 Nov. 1819. Webster may well have been referring to the elaborate banner bearing a portrait of Major Cartwright, which had been noticed in the press as well as by others who had been questioned.

⁶⁶ Mansfield, ‘Radical Rhymes’, p. 18.

⁶⁷ The *locus classicus* for the serious study of banners remains J. Gorman, *Banner Bright: An Illustrated History of Trade Union Banners* (Essex, 1986). Some of the arguments made are questioned in excellent and recent exploratory work by N. Mansfield (cited in fn. 4).

reform demonstration in Glasgow in October 1866. Amid a carefully rendered description of all of the specialised political and trade banners and artefacts, which clearly demonstrated the intrusion of the market (where demonstrations were not only dependent on material culture derived from the market but provided opportunities for trades to market their own wares) the reporter noticed a group of young women: ‘who, with the help of a red petticoat rigged on a staff, with appropriate garniture of herrings, had improvised a procession of their own [. . .] Their object seemed to be to represent the peripatetic fish trade—their feeling apparently being that an important branch of local industry had been improperly overlooked in the procession.’⁶⁸

Indeed, as late as 1884, banners were being created in the local community, albeit with contributions from professional trades that may have been within a commercial relationship. The Dicksons and Laings banner from Hawick has ‘A. Jardine HK Sept 20th/84’ painted in one corner; although it may not be possible to prove a definite attribution, a painter named Jardine is listed in the town in that year’s Post Office Directory. Banner production could also be linked to sites of commercial production while still being community products. At the Deanston Mill, near Doune, Perthshire, banners were produced by weavers outside working hours in readiness for the Stirling franchise demonstration.⁶⁹

IV

As examples of adaptation throughout this article have made clear, material culture was not, however, always created anew. Indeed, the re-use of material culture was an important feature of nineteenth-century reform campaigns. All of the movements considered drew on previous campaigns, mobilised this pre-existing material culture, and, in turn, had their own objects used by subsequent reformers. These material ‘remains’ extended to bodies (such as the ‘veterans’ of previous campaigns) as well as to sites of memory (such as fields and public parks which had hosted previous campaigns). Principally radicals appear to have used objects that brought either past subjects—such as the personal items of named heroes—or past campaigns into the present. Political movements, like nations, legitimised themselves through the invention of tradition. Central to this inventing, or imagining process was the construction and performance of social memory—that collective understanding of past events that ‘recounts a sense of origin and distinctiveness’. Political movements draw on and adapt social memories to justify and explain what is happening in the present. As theorists of memory have argued ‘memory is not simply a repository for sensory data that are merely stored away [. . .] remembering must be an active process, in which

⁶⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Oct. 1866.

⁶⁹ *Perthshire Advertiser*, 17 Sept. 1884.



Figure 4. Memorial stone to William Paterson and John Barrie, or Burrie, Strathaven Cemetery. Photograph by Gordon Pentland.

memories have to be worked on and used in order to be maintained’ – hence the importance of ritual occasions such as processions.⁷⁰

Covenanting played a prominent role in this re-use and adaptation of material culture. In 1832, when a monument to two martyrs shot in 1685 was renewed in Strathaven, an inscription was added to the pedestal (see figure 4) highlighting the link: ‘Renewed by the Reformers of Avondale at the passing of the Reform Bill – ANNO DOMINI. 1832.’⁷¹ When Collins, McDouall and White visited Scotland, for example, to celebrate their release from prison, the Chartists of Kirkintilloch displayed several Covenanting relics in the procession organised to welcome the liberated patriots. At the head of the procession was a ‘muscular young man [...] carrying the sword of Captain Patton, one of the leaders of the Covenanters, with which (according to history) he made eighteen tyrants kiss the dust in one day’. Also on display was the Bible that Patton gave to his wife from the scaffold when he was about to be executed. This Bible was ‘now in the possession of John Howie, a descendant of that family [...] He is a staunch Chartist’.⁷²

⁷⁰ This and the previous quotation are taken from Jarman, *Material Conflicts*, pp. 4, 6.

⁷¹ J. H. Thomson, *The Martyr Graves of Scotland* (Edinburgh n.d.), pp. 249–50.

⁷² *Northern Star*, 24 Oct. 1840.

Similarly, Chartists frequently re-used banners from the Reform Bill agitations of 1830–2 and a battle-axe was even displayed at one Chartist demonstration in Aberdeen with the inscription ‘A Relic of 1832 – A Reform Bill Argument’.⁷³ The Chartists thus associated themselves with a previous campaign that had ended in success, and which had been led by men who had ultimately been judged worthy of the franchise. By appropriating the material objects of the Reform Bill campaign, the Chartists were seeking to legitimise their demands and tactics. The violence associated with the axe – symbolic of both the physical force elements within the Reform Bill demonstrations and in Chartism – was legitimised through its connection with moderate, constitutional and ‘respectable’ middle-class leadership during 1830 to 1832.

The 1884 demonstrators sought out and carried a great deal of 1832 material, and that date appears to have played a major part in their thinking.⁷⁴ However, they also brought out material from other struggles, many with particular local associations. It was suggested above that the weapon and handkerchief associated with James Wilson carried by the Strathaven weavers, and the weapon and bible associated with John Baird carried by the Condorrat contingent at the Glasgow demonstration, played a part in determining a local identity within a national movement; they also drew on the national or wider implications of the Radical War. Such objects in the context of 1884 carried at least two potential meanings: they allowed for the 1820 radicals to be domesticated as late nineteenth-century Liberal reformers; but they also allowed the men of 1884 to fashion a radical self-image.

Such re-use could also be accompanied by the modification or ‘editing’ of existing material culture. At the ‘national’ franchise demonstration at Edinburgh, for example, the local branch of the Associated Carpenters and Joiners of Scotland carried a banner made for the 1866 ‘reform Procession’ (‘Russell Gladstone & Bright/The Friends of the People’) and another made especially for 1884, but stitched onto a ‘No Taxes on Knowledge’ banner dated to the 1830s.⁷⁵ At the same demonstration, the bookbinders carried a banner first used in the 1873 demonstration against the Criminal Law Amendment Act, with Gladstone’s name overlaid on the original motto ‘Mundella / A Friend To His Country and Loyal To His Queen’.⁷⁶

The 1884 material itself was re-used in subsequent years, as attested to by the Kilsyth banners, which were adapted so that the calls to reform the House of Lords in response to their rejection of the Franchise Bill could be co-opted by supporters of Lloyd George in his battles with the upper house. These objects,

⁷³ See, for example: *Perth Chronicle*, 31 May 1838; *Scottish Patriot*, 26 Sept. and 17 Oct. 1840.

⁷⁴ At Hamilton, the local committee sought, and obtained, special permission to use the same fields, the South Haugh, on which the 1832 celebrations had taken place, *Hamilton Advertiser*, 9 Aug. 1884.

⁷⁵ City of Edinburgh Museums, HH 5813/98, HH 5806/1/98.

⁷⁶ City of Edinburgh Museums, HH 3041/66.

then, have a complex and active heritage component, requisitioned in 1884 and then carried forward both to future demonstrations and to future generations through their donation to museums. Covenanting banners used in 1884 were appropriated and imprinted with new meanings, and a new association with reform; 1832 objects carried in 1866 and 1884 carried forward the meanings of previous struggles to be re-used and reinterpreted by later reformers. The re-use of material culture thus played an important but complex role in how nineteenth-century Scottish political movements sought legitimacy. They did so partly by espousing an identity based not only on their current campaign, but also on their perceived relationship with past and future struggles. The examination of material culture, its production, use, re-use, and survival, offers historians insights into this important aspect of popular politics.

V

This article began as an attempt to highlight and think through the opportunities that might be presented to political historians by considering material culture as source material. It is certainly not intended that this be understood as a manifesto for an all-embracing and disruptive ‘material turn’ in political history.⁷⁷ Throughout, we have been keen to refrain from forwarding definitive conclusions on the basis of what has been a collaborative surveying and sifting exercise. Nevertheless, this exercise has allowed for some tentative conclusions. First, it has shown how textual sources can be used to shed new light on Scottish political life, when historians concentrate on what such sources say about material culture. Secondly, it has introduced a body of theory derived largely from anthropology and archaeology, two cognate fields which deal with objects and the past and which should speak to historians’ aspirations to provide accounts of the past which are both synchronic and diachronic. Most importantly, they also allow us to move beyond approaches to material culture in history that aim merely to *illustrate* conclusions already made on the basis of textual sources. Indeed, it might be fruitful to move beyond the distinction between textual and non-textual sources, text and context, subject and object. Thirdly, it has allowed for the discussion of a range of examples – based loosely around the themes of display and use, production and re-use – which suggest how looking at material culture might shed new light on political culture in nineteenth-century Scotland. These discussions are by no means exhaustive, but they do, above all, demonstrate the centrality of material culture to political experience in Victorian Scotland. Arguably, material culture should thus be at least one of the central concerns of political history.

⁷⁷ For some interesting recent reflections on the relationship between material culture and history see F. Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48, 2 (2009), pp. 283–307.