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British Online Archives (BOA) is one of the UK’s leading academic publishers and online repositories. Hosting over six million records, carefully sourced from private and public archives, such as The National Archives (UK) and British Library, our unique primary source collections cover over 500 years of world history.

They boast extensive documentation from across the globe, providing invaluable source material for students, educators, and researchers working within a range of scholarly disciplines, including history, politics, sociology, and international relations. Our fascinating digital holdings offer insights into global historical events and trends, typically through a British lens. They serve to broaden our understanding of history, and help us to make sense of contemporary social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes.

Related Collections:

Our primary source collections are organised thematically so as to enhance user experience and boost discoverability. Via careful reflection on our archival holdings, and in dialogue with scholars, we have grouped our collections under key historical themes.

Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain, c. 1714–1832, falls under the broad themes of “Culture and Society”, “Media and Communications”, and “Politics and Social Movements”. You can explore related collections, such as *British Women Trade Unionists on Strike at Bryant & May, 1888*, and *Trade Unionism and the Chartist Movement, 1833–1910*, by scanning the QR code.



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Radicalism and Popular Protest in Georgian Britain,
c. 1714–1832

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Great Britain was transformed in the Georgian period, which began with the accession of King George I in 1714. Against a backdrop of immense social and cultural change, political radicalism was fuelled by a wave of revolutions throughout the Atlantic world (in the American colonies, France, and Haiti), alongside Enlightenment ideas of liberty and egalitarianism.

The impact of wars, industrialisation, and economic change resulted in unemployment, high taxes and prices, leaving many people impoverished and desperate for change, while also defending traditional ways of life. A radical press thrived in a time of prolific popular print culture, facilitating a dialogue between the authorities and the people over rights and society in Britain. An unstable relationship between the people and the state raised issues of suffrage, citizenship, rights, class, and gender.

Comprising over 90,000 images from The National Archives (UK) and the Working Class Movement Library (UK), this fascinating collection examines stories of protest and dissent, activism and unrest, conspiracies and plots, and acts of treason and rebellion against the government and the monarchy. Exploring fundamental themes of power, rights, and representation, it spotlights times when Britain came dangerously close to revolution.

Interdisciplinary in ethos, this collection will appeal to those studying cultural history, popular politics and social movements, print culture, legal history, and the history of ideas. A timely and thought-provoking archival resource, its themes resonate with modern day popular protest campaigns concerning rights, representation, and social justice.

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“It seemed as if the sun of freedom were gone down, and a rayless expanse of oppression had finally closed over us.”

Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1844).



This wood engraving, printed on a calico handkerchief, is a representation of the peaceful Manchester reform meeting that was dispersed by the Manchester Cavalry at St Peter's Fields in 1819. A significant and poignant event in modern British history, hundreds of protesters were injured and 18 were killed. Reformers named it “Peterloo”, comparing it to the battle of Waterloo in 1815.



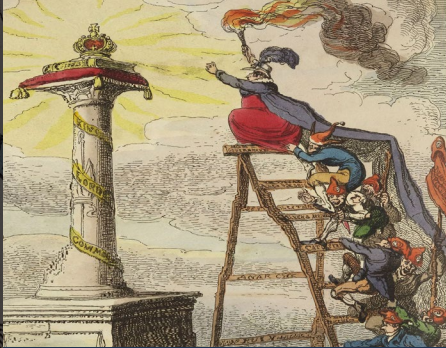
Featured are influential works of radicals and reformers, such as Thomas Paine, whose political ideas had such an impact in revolutionary America. Paine and other writers were satirised in prints and cartoons.



Writers, orators, and publishers whose work was deemed traitorous or seditious met with government repression and criminal trials. This collection features a number of verbatim accounts of such trials.



Also included are accounts of agricultural disorder and industrial grievances, such as frame-breaking and Luddism in Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, and Lancashire. Workers rebelled against mechanisation.



Satirical prints and caricatures produced by artists such as George Cruikshank offer insight into the role of wit and humour in political and social life in Georgian Britain.

This collection surveys agricultural rioting in the 1720s to protest during the 1830s, when the 1832 Reform Act quelled some calls for reform, while igniting many others. The sources celebrate the agency and contribution of all members of society, including activists of African descent, like the writer, Henry Redhead Yorke. The sources also document some of the earliest recorded independent female political activity in Britain. This collection likewise traces the beginnings of trade unionism, shedding light on early combinations of weavers and cloth workers, miners and colliers, shoemakers, and many other trades.

The sources are drawn from government papers, including records of criminal actions brought by the state in Treasury Solicitor and King's Bench papers against societies concerned about freedom of speech and parliamentary reform. Correspondence that was compiled by the Home Office and recorded in domestic state papers details cases of unrest. It also contains impounded pamphlets and papers relating to riots, disturbances, and political activism and literature.



Sources include: The National Archives (UK), Working Class Movement Library (UK)