

## WILLIAM PITT AND THE ORIGINS OF THE LOYALIST ASSOCIATION MOVEMENT OF 1792

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article presents new and conclusive evidence to resolve the long-running controversy over whether the loyalist association movement of 1792 was spontaneous or was crafted by government. It shows that Pitt and his colleagues did not know in advance of John Reeves's proposals for the Crown and Anchor association before they were published on 23 November and it suggests who Reeves's original collaborators probably were. It then goes on to show how Pitt and his cousin, Lord Grenville, confronted with many demands and proposals for associations at this time, quickly seized upon the Reeves project as the most adaptable to their own ends and produced a new draft, redefining his proposals in the directions they were prepared to see such a movement take. This they induced Reeves to publish as a second declaration on 26 November and they went on to promote as the example and inspiration for a wider association movement.*

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On 22 November 1792 the home secretary, Henry Dundas, sent an express letter from Edinburgh to the prime minister, William Pitt, in London in which he warned that

If the Spirit of liberty and equality continues to spread with the same rapidity it has done since the failure of the Duke of Brunswick's army, it will be in vain for any Military that can possibly be spared for this Country to quell that spirit which ferments at such a rate that it must break out into open sedition. The safety of the Country must I am persuaded depend on the Body of the well affected to the Constitution... in some shape or other taking an open an active and declared part to check the first appearance of Sedition.<sup>1</sup>

At this time of widespread popular discontent resulting from a combination of high food prices through corn shortages, seamen's wage strikes along the east coast, and the spread of radical associations stimulated by Tom Paine's *Rights of man* and the failure of the Prussian attempt to crush the French revolution, a loyalist counter movement emerged and took the open, active and declared part to combat sedition that the home secretary declared was necessary. Was

<sup>1</sup> London, Public Record Office (P.R.O.), PRO 30/8/157(1), fos. 142v–143. For discussion of the seriousness of the agitation see A. Goodwin, *The friends of liberty. The English democratic movement in the age of the French revolution* (London, 1979), pp. 208–67; R. R. Dozier, *For king, constitution and country. The English loyalists and the French revolution* (Kentucky U.P., 1983), pp. 26–54; K. J. Logue, *Popular disturbances in Scotland 1780–1815* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 30, 46–7, 148–51, 160–1; C. Emsley, 'The London "Insurrection" of December 1792: fact, fiction or fantasy?', *Journal of British Studies*, xvii (1978), 66–86.

it spontaneous or manufactured by government? To quote one recent commentator: 'A good deal of time has been devoted to trying to establish whether the Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers (APLP) established at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, London, on 20 November 1792, was officially inspired or whether John Reeves was acting independently.'<sup>2</sup> Another has stated that 'How much the government knew... is still shrouded in mystery.'<sup>3</sup> Thanks to documents in American archives and to the Grenville MSS recently made available at the British Library this is a mystery that can now be largely unshrouded.

The ostensible founder of the movement, John Reeves, repeatedly denied government involvement in its origins. In a preface to a published volume of the papers of his association in June 1793, Reeves asserted that '... none of the King's ministers knew or heard of this association till they saw the first advertisement in the public prints. It was planned without their knowledge and has been conducted to the present moment without their aid.'<sup>4</sup> In the following year he told William Windham that 'It began without any communication with anyone of them. Mr Pitt had the curiosity to make enquiries after it – I saw him twice or thrice upon it – and he gave us the use of the Post Office to send our packets. That is the only thing we ever had from the Government, and we were grateful for it... The truth is, that I have not been a servant of the Ministry, in this business, and they have shown they understand it so by paying no regard to me. I was employed by nobody, and nobody is pledged to avow me, or stand by me.'<sup>5</sup> Since Reeves was pressing Windham to help his advancement and Windham, who had just entered the cabinet, was in a position to tax ministers directly on this point, he could not afford to stretch the truth too far, and much less could he do so when he approached Pitt directly in the following year on the step he had just taken in inserting a proposal for an Address to the King in the *True Briton* newspaper, adding that 'I took it, as on a former occasion, without any consultation or concert with anybody at Whitehall, for the same reason as on the former occasion, namely, that the Government might have the benefit of it, if it produced any, and none of the disgrace, if such was the fate of it.'<sup>6</sup>

From John Holland Rose, who followed a discussion of the establishment of the association movement with the remark 'Far aloof from this turmoil stands the solitary and inscrutable figure of Pitt', to John Ehrman, who concluded that 'Pitt may have avoided – as on some other occasions – "any commitment" of himself', Pitt's biographers have been content to remove Pitt from any implication in its origins. Ehrman knew of no primary evidence for Pitt other than Reeves himself (in the letter to Windham cited above) and

<sup>2</sup> David Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English state in the 1790s', in *The French revolution and British popular politics*, ed. M. Philp (Cambridge, 1991), p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Dickinson, 'Popular conservatism and militant loyalism 1789–1815', in *Britain and the French revolution 1789–1815*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (London, 1989), pp. 121–2.

<sup>4</sup> J. Reeves, *The Association papers* (London, 1793), p. iv.

<sup>5</sup> Reeves to Windham, 2 Aug. 1794, British Library (B.L.), Additional MSS 37, 847, fos. 42–42v.

<sup>6</sup> Reeves to Pitt, 7 Nov. 1795, P.R.O., PRO 30/8/107, fos. 255–255v.

quotes as sounding 'nearer the mark' Tomline's statement that Pitt was not consulted upon the plan before it was proposed, however 'he considered it far better, that the measure should appear as it really was, perfectly unconnected with government'.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless other historians have remained sceptical of these disavowals. Writing almost simultaneously with J. H. Rose, William T. Laprade thought that 'there is certainly some reason to doubt whether such statements by the officials of the association as to its origins are to be taken at face value'. Writing simultaneously with Ehrman, Robert R. Dozier believed that '... the sheer coincidence that a person working for government could do exactly what the government wanted done without any "consultation or consent" rather stretches the imagination'.<sup>8</sup> Reeves had been appointed a commissioner for bankruptcy in 1780, had become counsel to the Mint and a clerk and secretary to the board of trade. In 1791 he was appointed chief justice of Newfoundland from which he returned in 1792, whereupon he was made receiver of the public offices responsible for the financing of the operations of the magistrates under the new Westminster Justices Act.<sup>9</sup> This position brought him into direct contact with Evan Nepean, under-secretary of state at the home office, who was responsible for the daily supervision of that department in November 1792 in the absence of the secretary of state, Henry Dundas, in Scotland.<sup>10</sup> Yet the doubters have found difficulty in establishing more than circumstantial evidence for direct participation by the government in the origins of the movement. While E. C. Black declared categorically that 'the decision to act was co-ordinated in advance with the ministry' and Donald Ginter that it was instituted 'with the explicit approval and active support' of the government, neither produced any collaborative evidence.<sup>11</sup> Others have been more cautious: to Austin Mitchell it was '... unlikely... that he left ministers in ignorance of his intentions'.<sup>12</sup>

The one apparently hard piece of evidence for collusion, cited by all those who have argued the matter in detail, is a letter from the marquis of Buckingham to his brother, the foreign secretary Lord Grenville, on 18 November, the published version of which is in Volume II of the Historical Manuscripts Commission's report on *The manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue, Esq., preserved at Dropmore*, and the last paragraph of which contains the statement

<sup>7</sup> J. H. Rose, *William Pitt and the Great War* (London, 1911, reissued 1934), p. 68; J. Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, Vol. II, *The reluctant transition* (London, 1983), 231 and n. 4; G. Tomline, *Memoirs of the life of the Rt Hon. William Pitt* (London, 1822), III, 463. Earl Stanhope too discussed the Association Movement as the creation of Reeves and separate from Pitt: *Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt* (London, 1861), II, 178.

<sup>8</sup> W. T. Laprade, *England and the French revolution 1789-1797* (Baltimore, 1909), p. 79; Dozier, *King, constitution and country*, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Dictionary of national biography. From earliest times to 1900*, ed. L. Stephen and S. Lea (Oxford, 1921-2), XVI, 858-9.

<sup>10</sup> P.R.O., H[ome] O[ffice Papers] 42/21, fos. 277-8, Reeves to Nepean 2 Aug. 1792.

<sup>11</sup> E. C. Black, *The Association* (Harvard, 1963), p. 237; D. E. Ginter, 'The loyalist association movement of 1792 and British public opinion', *Historical Journal*, IX (1966), 179.

<sup>12</sup> A. Mitchell, 'The association movement of 1792-3', *Historical Journal*, IV (1961), 159.

that 'We can have no difficulty about the association; but as the quarter-sessions are so late, not till the 2nd week in January, I should think that, after it has been circulating for a fortnight in the London papers, it may be advisable to get a certain number of gentlemen's and yeomen's names to an association in the same words, in the *Buckinghamshire Herald*.'<sup>13</sup> Since the first meeting of Reeves's association was not declared to have taken place until 20 November, nor was it reported in the press until the 23rd, such a statement on 18 November has been taken to imply that Grenville at least within the ministry had already formed a project to create an association, and since in Dundas's absence he had executive supervision of Nepean at the home office, who worked with Reeves, that a link might thus be established. The implications of this have been debated. Dozier surmised that Reeves may have learned via Nepean of Grenville's project and attempted to gain favour with ministers by acting first, hoping that the government would come to his aid.<sup>14</sup> Mitchell and Ehrman on the other hand have taken it as evidence that the government had prior knowledge of Reeves's scheme and was already acting upon it. However, commentators have hesitated to go further: in Mitchell's words 'The government, therefore, was almost certainly informed in advance of the intention to form an association, but whether the idea was itself suggested by members of the government or was produced by a spontaneous effort inspired either by a genuine fear, or by the desire to draw the favour of government to those participating in it, is not clear.'<sup>15</sup>

Both Ehrman and Mitchell failed to find Grenville's letter preceding Buckingham's response which might have revealed more of what was going on.<sup>16</sup> That letter is in fact among the Stowe Manuscripts at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, dated only 'Dropmore, Friday night' (i.e. 16 November), but its evidence is negative: it makes no mention of associations and betrays uncertainty rather than any immediate plan of action. After discussing the threatening foreign situation, Grenville wrote:

Our present idea is to meet Parliament in January, and I think we shall then apply for fresh powers – particularly for bringing seditious libellers to an earlier trial – and for enabling the Judges to sentence them to banishment on pain of death for the second if not for the first offence. Some ideas about the Militia are also in contemplation, but they seem attended with great difficulty.

The real thing wanted is to be able to stop the clubs which are making, particularly in London, a most alarming progress, and threaten us with a knot of Jacobins regularly affiliated thro' the Country – But how this can be done in such a Gov<sup>t</sup> as ours I am utterly at a loss to imagine.

<sup>13</sup> H.M.C. Fourteenth Report, Appendix, Part v (henceforth *HMC Dropmore*), II (London, 1894), 337.

<sup>14</sup> Dozier, *King, constitution and country*, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, 'Association movement', p. 59 and n. 19; Ehrman, *Pitt*, II, 230–1. See also Dozier, *King, constitution and country*, pp. 51–2, 57; Dickinson, 'Popular conservatism', p. 122 and n. 48; J. A. Caulfield, 'The Reeves Association: a study of loyalism in the 1790s' (unpublished University of Reading Ph.D. thesis, 1988), pp. 18–19; J. C. Mori, 'The impact of the French revolution on the ideas and policies of William Pitt, 1789–1795' (unpublished Oxford University D.Phil. thesis, 1992), p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, 'Association movement', p. 59 n. 19; Ehrman, *Pitt*, II, 231 n. 1.

Whether there is any indictment or not preferred at our Q<sup>r</sup> Sessions I should strongly recommend a charge pointing out the absolute necessity in the present time of every man applying to the next Magistrate every time he sees sedition attempted to be circulated, just with as much alacrity and as much of course as he would if he saw a private murder or robbery planned or committed.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, instead of in Grenville's letter of the 16th, the real explanation of the reference to the project of an association in Buckingham's 18 November letter in HMC *Dropmore*, II, lies in the actual manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue recently bought for the nation and deposited in the British Library. What these show is a major transcription error either by the editor or the printer of the published papers. The paragraph relating to the association is in fact *not* at the end of the 18 November letter but instead is part of the final paragraph of a letter from Buckingham to Grenville on 27 November which has been omitted from the published version.<sup>18</sup> As the points raised in the misplaced paragraph of the 27th indeed show, it is in fact a natural reply to Grenville's important letter of the 25th (of which more below).<sup>19</sup> In other words Buckingham and Grenville did not project their Buckinghamshire association until Grenville raised the matter on the 25th, and, in the absence of this apparently damning statement on the 18th, the case for prior knowledge by the ministry of the intended formation of Reeves's association falls down through lack of hard evidence.

It really does look as if the announcement of the Reeves association was not preconcerted with ministers. At this point they were floundering for a way forward against the rising pretensions of the radical societies. This is shown by Grenville's letter of 16 November quoted above, as also by a remark made by Pitt on the evening of the 13th when Burke and Windham called on the premier and Grenville to assure them of the support of part of the opposition for vigorous action at home and abroad. Pitt reportedly declared that '... government was always taxed with doing nothing, though what they could

<sup>17</sup> Grenville to Buckingham, 'Dropmore, Friday night', Huntington Library, Stowe MSS, STG Box 39/6. A home office investigation by Nepean in October/November produced a list of fourteen towns and cities where there were now 'Associations for relief of pretended Grievances' (H.O. 42/22 fos. 216-18).

<sup>18</sup> B.L., Add MSS 58, 876, fos. 160v, 165-168 (cf. HMC *Dropmore*, II, 344-6). The extract quoted earlier and cited in n. 13 above is part of a paragraph which begins 'As to the declaration of association I have no doubt that it has been better considered and with more time than I can give it, but I have added words with a pencil which I wish you to consider as they would meet a very material and growing part of the mischief it not only bids *discedere a contacté* but it adds *dividite turbidos*. [The extract already quoted then follows and continues]... and a notice that counterparts of it are lodged with Messrs A B C etc at Aylesbury, Buckingham, Amersham, Wycombe, Chesham, Marlow, Colebrook, Beaconsfield, Newport and Olney. The money to be collected for and lodged with the County Treasurer. This will avoid county meetings which we do not wish to multiply' (fos. 167v-168). The letter concludes with a discussion of Buckingham's ability to call out the militia in an emergency.

<sup>19</sup> This letter is printed in *Memoirs of the courts and cabinets of George the Third*, ed. duke of Buckingham and Chandos (London, 1853), II, 228-30, and contains references to announcing the association about the time of the quarter sessions and to securing signatures of farmers and yeomen.

do must sometimes be slow in its effects'.<sup>20</sup> However, ever since the Royal Proclamation of 21 May calling on the public 'to avoid and discourage all proceedings tending to riots and tumults' and enjoining magistrates to take action against seditious libels, ministers had been declaring that there were limits to what they could do by themselves and urging the need for positive action by the public at large. When in September an Oxfordshire J.P., the Rev. William Mavor, offered to publish an exhortation to loyalism, he was told by Henry Dundas that 'It becomes the duty of every one capable of judging the advantages to be derived from our excellent Constitution to exert his endeavours for its support, especially when evil people of different descriptions are employed in every part of the country to overthrow it.'<sup>21</sup> Grenville was equally explicit to his brother on 14 November that 'The hands of Government must be strengthened if the country is to be saved; but above all, the work must not be left to the hands of Government, but every man must put his shoulder to it, according to his rank and situation in life, or it will not be done.'<sup>22</sup> With such loudly broadcast invocations emanating from ministers it is perhaps not surprising that a positive response was evoked.

In these circumstances more notice should perhaps be taken of the author and journalist John Gifford's account of the origins of the Reeves association published in 1809. Gifford produced writings for the association (his 'Short Address to the Members of the Loyal Associations' is said to have sold 100,000 copies) and when editor of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* from 1798 he used Reeves as a contributor. One of the latter's guests in 1798 later recalled that 'Reeves' house was frequented by many of his old associates of the Crown and Anchor – Mr John Bowles and Mr John Gifford, both bitter party men...'. From both direct and indirect acquaintance Gifford was in a good position to have picked up Reeves's own version of what happened:

On the 17th of November, Mr Reeves, a barrister, who had gone out to Newfoundland, some months before, in the capacity of chief justice to that settlement, returned to London. ... The very day after his arrival, Mr Reeves had a consultation with a small party of his legal friends, one of them a respectable judge, now no more; another who actually enjoys a seat on the bench; – and a third at present in high official situation. At this meeting it was determined that the most proper antidote to be opposed to the prevailing poison of the day, was that which counter-associations, composed of well-affected men, would supply; and Mr Reeves undertook to create them in a short time.<sup>23</sup>

The timing is credible. Having organized the finances of the new Westminster

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum of Thomas Grenville (quoting Burke) 15 Nov. 1792. B.L., Add MSS 60, 487(B). <sup>21</sup> Quoted by David Eastwood in 'Patriotism and the English state', pp. 151–2.

<sup>22</sup> *Court and cabinets*, II, 228. See also Dundas's 22 November letter to Pitt quoted at the start of this article.

<sup>23</sup> John Gifford, *A history of the political life of the Right Honourable William Pitt* (London, 1809), III, 282–3. Gifford changed his name from John Richards Green after his bankruptcy in the 1780s. For his connections with Reeves see E. L. de Montluzin, *The anti-Jacobins 1798–1800. The early contributors to the Anti-Jacobin Review* (London, 1988), pp. 93–5 (he was also a friend of the journalist John Taylor who dined from time to time with Reeves pp. 32, 67); J. L. Mallet (Reeves's house-guest in 1798), *John Lewis Mallet: an autobiographical retrospect of the first twenty nine years of his life* (Privately printed, Windsor, 1890), p. 199 (I am grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Sparrow for bringing this reference to my attention).

magistrates, Reeves told Nepean in August that he would be away from London for the next two months, and he was in fact in Newfoundland again from 3 September to 30 October.<sup>24</sup> The names of two of his three co-founders as indicated by Gifford can be identified with some degree of probability. John Bowles, like Reeves a barrister and commissioner of bankruptcy, enjoyed a seat on the Surrey bench in the 1800s. He was one of Reeves's known dining companions, one of the original committee members of Reeves's association, one of its pamphleteers, and was described by the *Gazetteer* newspaper on 16 August 1793 as said to be 'the original projector' of the association.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Plumer was in a high official situation in 1809 as solicitor general. In 1792 he was another barrister and commissioner of bankrupts and also an original committee member of the association. In 1796 he acted as Reeves's defending counsel when he was charged with seditious libel.<sup>26</sup> The other alleged co-founder, the 'respectable judge', retains his anonymity.<sup>27</sup> One of these may have gone on to play the part of the pseudonymous John Moore, announced as secretary of the society to whom all communications were directed to be addressed at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, but who disappeared without trace once a committee was formed on 29 November.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Reeves to Nepean, 2 Aug. 1792, H.O. 42/21, fo. 277v; *Dictionary of Canadian biography*, vi, 1821-1835 (Toronto, 1987), 636.

<sup>25</sup> Montluzin, *The anti-Jacobins*, pp. 67-8; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXIX (1819), pt. 2, 565-6; *Morning Chronicle*, 30 Nov. 1792, p. 1 (for the list of committee members of the Crown and Anchor Association appointed at a meeting on the 29th). L. Werkmeister, *A newspaper history of England 1792-1793* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1967), pp. 137, 403. For Bowles's subsequent pamphleteering activities see Emma Vincent, "The real grounds of the present war": John Bowles and the French revolutionary wars, 1792-1802', *History*, LXXVIII (1993), 393-420.

<sup>26</sup> *The history of parliament. The commons 1790-1820*, ed. R. G. Thorne (London, 1986), iv, 832-4; *D.N.B.*, xv, 1318-20; *Morning Chronicle*, 30 Nov. 1792, p. 1. Was the position of king's counsel granted to Plumer on 7 Feb. 1793 a reward for his services on this occasion? Plumer had defended Sir Thomas Rumbold before the house of commons in 1786, and was one of Warren Hastings's three counsels during his impeachment 1787-94. For his defence of Reeves in 1796 see A. V. Beedell, 'John Reeves's prosecution for a seditious libel, 1795-6: a study in political cynicism', *Historical Journal*, xxxvi (1993), 799-824.

<sup>27</sup> Connections could be made with Sir James Eyre, chief baron of the court of exchequer and at that time chief commissioner of the great seal, in that Reeves dedicated one of his earliest legal works to him, Plumer in his early career attended Eyre on circuit, frequently assisting him by taking down evidence at trials, and that Eyre died in 1799 (Beedell, 'John Reeves's prosecution', p. 801; *D.N.B.*, vi, 963-4, xv, 1318-20). Eyre was promoted to chief justice of the common pleas in February 1793. Equally, however, there was Sir William Ashurst, judge of the King's Bench and also a commissioner of the great seal, who died in 1807, whose famous charge to the Middlesex grand jury on 19 November 1792 expressed sentiments similar to those supported by the association and was the first work it published (see *The World*, 3 Dec. 1792, p. 1). Perhaps the description 'respectable' rather than 'distinguished' judge denotes lesser fry at the same level as Reeves himself rather than these: all is speculation. Mary Thale in editing *Selections from the papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1795* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 30, names Charles Yorke, without supporting evidence, as the single co-founder of the movement along with Reeves. Yorke, M.P. for Cambridgeshire, was another barrister and original member of the committee of the association, and he also appointed Reeves superintendent of aliens while he was home secretary in 1803, but he does not match so closely any of the three descriptions given by Gifford.

<sup>28</sup> The existence of John Moore has been much debated. His total disappearance lends credence to the assertions of Thomas Wright, printer of *The Association papers* in 1793 and of Reeves's controversial *Thoughts on the English government* in 1795, who told the commons committee investigating the authorship of the latter '... that J. Moore was a man *in nubibus*. He explained by

Reeves's advertisement for his new association, declared to be the result of 'a meeting of Gentlemen at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand' on 20 November, was printed first in the opposition newspapers, on the second pages of the *Morning Chronicle* on the morning of 23 November and of the *Star* on the same evening.<sup>29</sup> It took the form of a substantial address in explanation of the proposal, followed by a six-point declaration which needs to be set out here in order to explain why the government's interest was immediately aroused:

We do, as private men, unconnected with any Party or description of persons at home, taking no concern in the struggles at this moment making abroad, but most seriously anxious to preserve the true Liberty, and unexampled prosperity we happily enjoy in this kingdom, think it expedient and necessary to form ourselves into an Association for the purpose of discouraging, in every way that lies in our power, the progress of such

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stating that he, J. Moore, was merely a fictitious name; that no such person existed as secretary to the society; and that he knew it at the time he printed their proceedings, but that the name had not been continued after a few meetings.... That it was at his suggestion originally that the fictitious name of J. Moore was adopted by Mr Reeves *pro tempore*, as it might be afterwards dropped; and at the meeting of the 30th November, he mentioned the circumstance to the committee who resolved that the name should be dropt' (*The parliamentary history of England from the earliest period to the year 1803*, xxxii [London, 1818], cols 661–2). However, as E. C. Black and Mark Philp have pointed out, the endorsements on the association papers presented by Reeves to the British Museum (B.L. Add MSS 16, 919) are in two hands – Reeves and another using the initials J.M. (Black, *The Association*, p. 237 n. 8; M. Philp, 'Vulgar conservatism 1792–3', *English Historical Review*, cx (1995), 42–69, see p. 47 n. 4). Could this have been John Bowles?

<sup>29</sup> For the affiliations of these two newspapers, which had combined their newsgathering facilities, see Werkmeister, *Newspaper history*, pp. 31, 34–5, 37, 120 (the *Star* moved towards neutrality by the start of 1793). Dozier, *King, constitution and country*, p. 56, followed by Dickinson, 'Popular loyalism in Britain in the 1790s', in E. Hellmuth (ed.), *The transformation of political culture* (Oxford, 1990), p. 517, mistakenly credits the *Star* with the first advertisement, whereas it fills the first one and a half columns of the second page of the *Morning Chronicle* of 23 November. The advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle* on the 24th, referred to by Dozier (p. 57), is in fact a further unique report of another meeting held on the 22nd. This undertook to reprint a sermon preached by the Rev. Dr Vincent on 13 May 1792 on the text 'Ye have the Poor always with You' and added 'Many Gentlemen having honoured the Society with signifying a wish to assist in promoting the design of it, the Society are anxious to express their sense how happy they feel, that the good cause they have engaged in, has so many respectable persons to aid and assist in its support. The Society will be happy to see the number of these persons increase, and in the meantime will take into their consideration in what manner they shall act, so as to deserve and make use of the support offered to them'. Was it this article that finally stirred Pitt into action? Why these advertisements appeared first in the opposition press is the major remaining mystery of the story. It may be, as Reeves wrote to Pitt in 1795, that he did not wish the government to appear too identified with it from the outset and hence avoided the government press (n. 6 above), but why use the opposition papers rather than any more impartial? Could it be that he had contact with someone with influence over them (and able to defray the costs of very large advertisements of one and a half columns in length)? Might this explain the otherwise obscure and unsubstantiated claim in *The Times* on 30 November that William Windham wrote the first 'elegant address' from the association and also Reeves's mysterious thanks in 1794 for Windham's 'generosity on a former occasion when those thankless men [ministers] were silent...' (B.L. Add MSS 37,874, fo. 36v)? Windham, however, is silent on the matter and the evidence points to his energies being directed elsewhere (see n. 57 below) while associators who included Bowles were not short of pamphleteering talent.



nefarious designs as are meditated by the wicked and senseless Reformers of the present time; and we do hereby resolve, and declare as follows:

FIRST – That the persons present at this Meeting do become a Society for the discouraging and suppressing Seditious Publications, tending to disturb the Peace of this Kingdom, and for supporting a due execution of the Laws made for the protection of persons and property.

SECONDLY – That this Society do use its best endeavours occasionally to explain those topics of public discussion which have been so perverted by evil designing men, and to shew, by irrefragible proof, that they are not applicable to the State of this Country, that they can produce no good, and certainly must produce great evil.

THIRDLY – That this Society will receive with great thanks all communications that shall be made to it for the above purposes.

FOURTHLY – That it be recommended to all those, who are friends to the Established Law, and to peaceable Society, to form themselves, in their different neighbourhoods, into similar Societies for promoting the same laudable purposes.

FIFTHLY – That this Society do meet at this place or elsewhere, every Tuesday and Saturday.<sup>30</sup>

SIXTHLY – That these considerations and resolutions be printed in all the public papers, and otherwise circulated into all parts of the Kingdom.<sup>31</sup>

This advertisement was printed in the pro-ministerial newspapers on the following day, Saturday the 24th.<sup>32</sup> John Heriot, the proprietor and conductor of the government-subsidized afternoon daily the *Sun*, told Reeves five days later that he inserted the first two advertisements of his Crown and Anchor Association at the desire of Nepean of the home office.<sup>33</sup> Reeves himself was summoned to call on Pitt on that same Saturday.<sup>34</sup> Reeves made two subsequent near-identical statements of Pitt's involvement. One of these has already been quoted near the start of this article, the other was that '... when I first set out in Nov. 92 Mr Pitt had the curiosity to send to me to know what we were about...'.<sup>35</sup> These are both decidedly economical with the truth and

<sup>30</sup> In the copy subsequently reprinted in the *Association papers, the Annual register...for the year 1792* (London, 1810, pt. 2, p. 159) and by Laprade, *England and the French revolution* (pp. 76–7), Thursday is also added to these days. It was not in any of the original advertisements and may reflect a later desire for consistency by making the original conform with the days fixed subsequently for committee meetings. <sup>31</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 23 Nov. 1792, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> See *The Times, The World, Sun*, 24 Nov. 1792.

<sup>33</sup> Heriot to Reeves, 29 Nov. 1792, B.L. Add MSS 16, 919, fo. 111v. Cf. Dozier, *King, constitution and country*, pp. 56–7, and M. Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism 1792–3', p. 47, the short paragraph in the *Sun* on the 23rd that 'The better order of Britons are at length roused by the boldness of domestic enemies, and are forming themselves into Associations, for the purpose of repressing and defeating pernicious doctrines afloat in this country. The plan does infinite honour to the projectors, and we doubt not will be followed up with spirit and effect.' is almost certainly the afternoon paper's response to the *Morning Chronicle* advertisement earlier in the day. I am grateful to Mr Christopher Harrison for locating copies of the *Sun* for me in Birmingham Central Library (copies of all other newspapers referred to are in the British Library).

<sup>34</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 28 Nov. 1792, p. 2. This crucial interview was first noticed by John Caulfield ('Reeves association', pp. 21–2) but not knowing of Pitt's letter to Dundas next day he could only guess at its implications. Heriot's letter to Reeves on 29 November (n. 32 above) would seem to indicate that the interview was in the morning, giving Nepean time to authorize free advertisement of the initial declaration for that afternoon's edition of the *Sun*.

<sup>35</sup> Reeves to Windham, 1 Aug. 1794, B.L., Add MSS 37, 874, fo. 36v.

in no way indicate the speed and vigour with which Pitt reacted a day after its publication to turn the Reeves initiative to his own advantage. As the pro-government *Public Advertiser* reported on the following Wednesday (the 28th) 'Government are determined to give every encouragement to institutions formed on the principle of that held at the Crown and Anchor, the Chairman of which (Mr Reeves) was admitted to an interview with the Minister on Saturday.' What happened at that interview on 24 November can be deduced from a letter which Pitt wrote to Dundas on the following day which has lain long neglected in the archives of the William L. Clements Library at Ann Arbor, Michigan and which is of sufficient importance to be reproduced in its entirety as an appendix to this article; from Grenville's letter to Buckingham also of the 25th;<sup>36</sup> and from the new declaration of the Reeves association which was published in the London daily press on Monday 26th.

To appreciate why the government was so particularly interested in the declaration of the Reeves association it has to be realized that it was far from being the only proposal for an association mooted at this time of near panic at the growing popular and radical agitation. Dundas in Edinburgh was 'pressed almost from every quarter to give Countenance and encouragement to such a Species of Association...', and Grenville in London told his brother that 'We are called upon on all sides for counter associations'.<sup>37</sup> Pitt and Grenville do in fact seem to have considered the idea themselves before the Reeves advertisement appeared. Pitt started a series of notebook jottings on 9 November amongst which are two lines:

Subscriptions to a fund for prosecuting libellers  
Associations of Persons to be called out in case of Necessity and annexed to Corps of Militia<sup>38</sup>

From the similarity of notes immediately before and after these jottings to points made in Grenville's letters to Buckingham of 14 and 16 November, they are likely to have been made between those dates.<sup>39</sup> Yet the two cousins had taken no action because they were perplexed as to the policy to adopt towards associations. With memories perhaps of Lord George Gordon's Protestant Association which had precipitated the Gordon Riots in the 1780s, with the

<sup>36</sup> *Court and cabinets*, II, 228–30, Grenville to Buckingham 25 Nov. 1792. In the absence of Pitt's letter and of knowledge of the interview with Reeves, Grenville's letter has long been thought to refer to the meeting of London merchants, bankers and traders at the Merchant Taylors' Hall, announced on 28 Nov. and held on 5 Dec. (Laprade, *England and the French revolution*, pp. 74–75; Mitchell, 'Association movement', p. 60 [locating it at the Grocers' Hall], Goodwin, *Friends of liberty*, p. 264 n. 257), though this view has been challenged by Ginter, 'Loyalist Association movement', pp. 179–90, and by Caulfield, 'The Reeves Association', p. 19, on the grounds that the declaration of that meeting was nothing like that intended by Grenville in his letter. The events of the 24th–26th, about which Grenville was writing, and Pitt's concurrent letter to Dundas, confirm their doubts and show that Grenville was referring to the government's projects for developing the Reeves association.

<sup>37</sup> Dundas to Pitt, 22 Nov. 1792, P.R.O., PRO 30/8/157(1) fo. 143; Grenville to Buckingham, 25 Nov., *Courts and cabinets*, II, 229.

<sup>38</sup> P.R.O., PRO 30/8/198, Notebook 4, fo. 109.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. PRO 30/8/198, Notebook 4, fo. 108v, with *Court and cabinets*, II, 226–8, and fo. 110 with Huntington Library, Stowe MSS, STG Box 39/6 'Dropmore, Friday night' [16 Nov. 1792].

unwelcome example before them of Association of the Friends of the People, recently formed by pro-radical members of the opposition, and with the new radical societies deemed as associations, Pitt told Dundas on the 25th that 'indeed the Term Association is One which I rather wish to avoid with any View' and Grenville pointedly talked of 'counter associations' to his brother on the same day. Dundas in Edinburgh also faced this quandary and avoided commitment because '...it is a very delicate Point for Government in the present moment to invite Associations of one kind, when they will be called upon soon to condemn so many others...'.<sup>40</sup> It is not unlikely that Pitt raised this problem with Reeves at their interview on the 24th and it may account for Gifford's later story, which has puzzled historians, that 'Mr Pitt, far from giving his countenance or concurrence to it, in the first instance had great doubts of its policy and expediency. He, indeed, in a very early stage of the business, expressed his wish that a total stop should be put to all further proceedings, as he had it in contemplation to frame a bill for the prevention of all political meetings whatever, except such as were necessary for the exercise of the constitutional right of petition' – but that Reeves was able to show its legality and that on reflection Pitt changed his mind and gave his approval.<sup>41</sup> In fact the conjunction of the growing feeling of panic among the propertied classes in England, Dundas's two alarmist letters of the 14th and 22nd from Edinburgh, and the publication of Reeves's advertisement on the 23rd, may have forced the prime minister's hand. As he admitted to Dundas on the 25th '...there are certainly some Objects on which the declarations of Public Meetings and the Exertions of Individuals acting in Concert, may be highly useful, and that in a Mode strictly conformable to the Laws...'. Reeves's advertisement had '...produced a great Impression which shews that there is a Spirit and Disposition to Activity which if We give it at the outset a right Direction may be improved to very important purposes'.<sup>42</sup>

The wording of the start of the fourth paragraph of Pitt's letter to Dundas on the 25th shows, if any more proof is needed, that ministers were not involved in the first advertisement of Reeves's association,<sup>43</sup> but the remainder

<sup>40</sup> See appendix para 3; *Court and cabinets*, II, 229; Dundas to Pitt, 22 Nov., P.R.O., PRO 30/8/157(1), fo. 143.

<sup>41</sup> Gifford, *Political life of Pitt*, III, 288–9; Ehrman, *Pitt*, II, 231 n. 4. Reeves concluded his second declaration, published on the 26th following his interview with Pitt, with a statement deprecating private political meetings, condemning the terms on which the radical clubs had associated as seditious and often treasonable, but justifying meetings of his own association 'for suppressing sedition, for propagating peaceable opinions, and for aiding the magistracy in subordination to the direction of the magistrates' as allowed by the law and required by the times (*The Times*, 26 Nov., p. 1).

<sup>42</sup> See appendix, paras 3 and 4.

<sup>43</sup> See appendix. There have been attempts to see Grenville as implicated while Pitt was not (Ehrman, *Pitt*, II, 230–1), but as shown above they rested on the mistaken transference of part of Buckingham's letter of the 27th to the 18th, and they totally disregard the intimate relationship between the two cousins: '...so inseparably connected that there is but one sentiment between them...' (*Selections from the letters and correspondence of Sir James Bland Burges*, ed. R. Hutton [London, 1884], p. 174), '...whatever is written to one may be considered as written to the other...' (*Journal and correspondence of William Lord Auckland* [London, 1861–2], II, 414). Throughout this period the two worked in close cooperation (see M. Duffy, 'Pitt, Grenville and the control of

of the paragraph goes on to show how they then seized upon it to give the nascent loyalist association movement the 'right Direction' which they wanted.

Amidst the many demands for associations and some actual proposals sent to the home office<sup>44</sup> Pitt and Grenville focused on the Reeves proposal for a number of reasons. It was the only one published in the press. Among all the proposals it was the one that came closest to the type of association they were prepared to countenance. Reeves was an official and placeholder sufficiently close to government to be potentially malleable to pressure to mould his initiative to their purposes as the example for others to follow – which was the purpose of the interview on the 24th. Yet, lastly, he was also sufficiently distant for further declarations of his association not to appear too obviously the product of ministerial direction – as Pitt told Dundas, 'We mean not to let it be known that it comes from us...'<sup>45</sup>

Accordingly the two cousins '...privately formed a Form of a Declaration... [which Pitt forwarded to Dundas and Grenville to Buckingham on the 25th]...founded on the same principles as those stated in the printed Paper, but more carefully and precisely defining the Objects to which we think every Measure of the sort ought to be confined.'<sup>46</sup> There seems little reason to doubt that this was the paper published by Reeves in the London press on the 26th, stated to be the result of a further meeting of gentlemen at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the 24th, which redefined their method of operating and their objects as follows:

It should seem that the business of such Societies should be conducted by a Committee, and that the Committee should be small, as better adapted for dispatch of business; for it should be remembered that these are not open Societies for talk and debate, but for private consultation and real business. The Society at large need not meet more than once a month, or once in two or three months, to audit the accounts, and see to the application of the money.

The object of such Societies should be to check the circulation of seditious publications of all kinds, whether newspapers or pamphlets, or the invitations to Club meetings, by discovering and bringing to justice not only the authors and printers of them, but those who keep them in their shops or hawk them in the streets for sale; or, what is much worse, are employed in circulating them from house to house in any manner whatever. Secondly, They should by reasoning, and by circulating cheap books and papers,

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British foreign policy in the 1790s', in *Knights errant and true Englishmen. British foreign policy 1600-1800*, ed. J. Black [Edinburgh, 1989], pp. 151-77).

<sup>44</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 42/22 contains two proposals (both for armed associations), one dated to 17 November for an 'Ante[sic]-Levelling Society instituted for supporting the Civil Power in suppressing tumults and for maintaining the Constitutional Government of this country in KING, LORDS and COMMONS for the General Welfare' (fos. 401-8), and the other (fos. 490-491v) in a package received on the 26th from Lt. Col. Robertson of The Grainge, Alresford, Hants., dated 23 Nov.

<sup>45</sup> See appendix, start of para 5.

<sup>46</sup> See appendix, para 4, and *Court and cabinets*, II, 229. Pitt and Grenville worked together closely on the 24th. A board of trade official trying to deliver a letter to the foreign secretary found Grenville 'so busily employed with Mr Pitt' that he could not see him and had to leave it with an under-secretary (Fawkener to Hawkesbury, 24 Nov. 1792, B.L., Add MSS 38, 192, fo. 135).

endeavour to undeceive those poor people who have been misled by the infusion of opinions dangerous to their own welfare, and that of the State.

Thirdly, They should hold themselves in readiness to prevent or suppress tumults or riots, if necessary.

Lastly. It should be a part of the original compact of every such Society, that in what they mean to do, they should always act in subordination to the Magistrate and the Executive Government, and in their aid and support, and not otherwise.<sup>47</sup>

The gloss on the ministerial intent behind the wording of this declaration is provided by the letters of Pitt and Grenville on the 25th. The type of association they were being mostly pressed to sanction was armed associations such as were formed against the Gordon rioters in 1780, in one of which, the Lincoln's Inn volunteers, Pitt himself had shouldered a musket along with his fellow lawyers. Pitt now had doubts about the expediency of letting armed vigilantes loose on the streets where they might be out of government control.<sup>48</sup> He and Grenville had been developing from about 14th–16th an idea to authorize lord lieutenants to commission volunteer companies to the militia in case of riot which, as the latter explained, '... seems to add the advantage of subordination to regular power to that of association', but they were not yet ready for that, and Pitt instructed Dundas, who was in favour of the measure, to '... discourage for the present any Voluntary Associations with a view to Armed Force; and hold out in general this Idea as likely to be proposed immediately on the Meeting of Parliament'. Their object for the moment was to divert the pressure for associations in other directions, hence a muted sop to this demand was included as the third of the new objects of Reeves's association (which had the attraction to them of not having proposed itself as an armed association) while directing the main emphasis to more desired objects.

While Dundas in Scotland was preoccupied with the problem of maintaining order in a country without a militia, Pitt and Grenville in London were more concerned with the effect of the seditious propaganda being spread by the growing number of radical societies.<sup>49</sup> They looked to another model: the many local associations that had sprung up in the 1770s and 1780s to bring prosecutions against criminals.<sup>50</sup> Pitt's notes about 14–16

<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, 26 Nov., p. 1. See also *The World*, the *Sun*, the *Morning Chronicle*, and the *Star* (where the Crown and Anchor meeting is dated the 22nd). Papers such as the *Public Advertiser* which had not published the first advertisement on the 24th, published it on the 27th, followed by this second declaration on the 28th. The correlation between the new declaration and the contents described in Pitt's and Grenville's letters leaves no doubt that it was to this that Grenville was referring when he wrote on the 25th that '... we are preparing an association in London which is to be declared in the course of next week' (*Court and cabinets*, II, 229).

<sup>48</sup> J. P. de Castro, *The Gordon riots* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 144–7, 162–3, 168–70; Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, I, 41–2. Pitt's attitude on this occasion seems similar to that of the military officer in 1780 who locked the gates on the Temple volunteers to save his soldiers from being shot by 'friendly fire'! (de Castro, p. 168).

<sup>49</sup> See Grenville's letter to Buckingham on the 16th quoted above pp. 946–7.

<sup>50</sup> For which see D. Philips, 'Good men to associate and bad men to conspire: associations for the prosecution of felons in England 1750–1860' and P. J. R. King, 'Prosecution associations and their impact in eighteenth-century Essex', in *Police and prosecution in Britain 1750–1850*, ed. D. Hay and F. Snyder (Oxford, 1989), pp. 113–207.

November contemplated the idea of subscriptions to prosecuting funds, and on the 24th Buckingham urged Grenville that ‘... some mode might be devised, by associations or otherwise, to assist Government by information of seditious libellers and disturbers of the public peace...’.<sup>51</sup> The problem of combatting seditious libel was uppermost in ministers’ minds on 24 November when Grenville, acting in the absence of Dundas, sent out a circular letter to the Custos Rotulorum of each county, ‘prepared’, as he told the Crown Law Officers in asking their opinion on the previous day, ‘on the idea of having the minds of the magistrates a little prepared for the indictment of libels and seditious discourses’. In it he reminded the Custos of the Royal Proclamation against seditious libels of 21 May and directed that a charge be given to the Grand Jury at the next General Quarter Sessions ‘... diligently to enquire, and True Presentment to be made, of all such wicked and seditious Writings so published and industriously spread... within the said county... in order that the Author, Printer, Publisher, and Distributors of all such wicked and seditious Writings... may be severally dealt with, for their said offences, according to law’.<sup>52</sup> The main advantage of loyalist associations was seen by the cousins as to back up this campaign and hence the particular importance given to this subject in the new declaration of the Reeves association. The campaign had been begun with Justice Ashhurst’s charge to the Middlesex grand jury in the court of King’s Bench on the 19th, and it is also significant that the new declaration of the 26th began with a statement that at the Crown and Anchor meeting on the 24th it was decided immediately to print and distribute this charge.<sup>53</sup>

Lastly, if ministers were to sanction the mobilization of a popular loyalist movement, they had no desire to see it get out of control of government or even to start dictating policy to government. They were looking, as Pitt told Dundas, for ways ‘tending to uphold instead of weaken the Authority of regular Government’. To this end they particularly wished to avoid the regular general meetings of societies several times a week proposed in the first Reeves advertisement, since this threatened too much to take control of the

<sup>51</sup> See n. 38 above and HMC *Dropmore*, II, 339.

<sup>52</sup> Grenville to the Attorney and Solicitor Generals, 23 Nov. 1792, B.L., Add MSS 59, 364; the circular letter was printed in the newspapers in the following week (see the *Sun*, 26 Nov., p. 2; *Public Advertiser*, 28 Nov., p. 2) and can be read in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1792), pt. 2, p. 1146. The government newspaper, the *Sun*, alerted its readers on 23 Nov. (p. 2) that ‘GOVERNMENT, we are assured, is taking every necessary and effectual measure for the conviction and punishment of those, in every quarter of the Kingdom, who are accessory in disseminating those principles of Sedition and Treason which have been of late so industriously propagated.’ On the same day as the circular to the Custos Rotulorum, the treasury solicitor also circulated all regional government solicitors with instructions to prosecute all libellers, publishers and distributors of seditious libels (Black, *The Association*, p. 239).

<sup>53</sup> *The Times* 26 Nov., p. 1; Justice Ashhurst’s Charge can be read in *Charges to the grand jury 1689–1803*, ed. G. Lamoine (Camden Fourth Series, Vol. XLIV, London, 1922), 447–50. It was followed by a similar charge from the chairman of the Middlesex bench, William Mainwaring, on 10 December (ibid. 451–5). The government-subsidized *Sun* printed Ashhurst’s charge on 26 Nov. (p. 4, cols 2–3).

localities out of the hands of government.<sup>54</sup> Instead, as Pitt explained to Dundas, they looked to keeping general meetings as few as possible and to confine superintendence of the associations to small (and hence more manageable) committees – ‘In this Way We hope to avoid the Inconvenience of much public Discussion at Numerous Meetings, and yet have the Impression and Effect of Numbers on our Side.’ Above all, as the final stated object of the new declaration further indicated and as Grenville stressed to Buckingham, ‘the great object’ of the new plan of association was ‘to confine it within the limits of regular Government, and not to go beyond that point’.<sup>55</sup>

If associations could be established on these terms then Pitt was ready to give them his backing and to promote their extension throughout the country so as to have ‘the Impression and Effect of Numbers on our Side’. The new declaration of the Reeves association published on the 26th thus became the genesis of the association *movement*. Ministers looked to the Reeves association to provide the example and inspiration for far wider developments. The 26 November advertisement announced resolutions to open a book at the Crown and Anchor in which supporters could enrol their names, and it declared one of the duties of the society as ‘to encourage persons to form similar Societies in different parts of the Town’. It was ‘much to be wished that a society were formed in the City of London, another in Westminster, and another in the Borough [of Southwark]’ and that ‘When these great societies were formed it might be considered, and would be seen by the effect of them, whether it would be necessary to make smaller Societies around them, to assist and cooperate’. All this was as outlined by Pitt to Dundas in his letter of the 25th where he went on to state the idea then ‘to procure Declarations in the same Words, in the Counties and great Towns in England’, and Grenville outlined who they wished to attract: ‘A few persons of rank cannot be kept out of it, but we mean it chiefly to consist of merchants and lawyers, as a London society should, and that their example should then be followed by each county or district – including there as many farmers and yeomen as possible.’ Pitt had been confident on the 15th that ‘the bulk of the people here, and certainly the higher and middling classes are still sensible of their Happiness and eager to preserve it’. He now looked to provide the latter in particular with a way to back up the government’s efforts to do so.<sup>56</sup>

To this end, as the letter from the editor of the *Sun* on the 29th indicates, Reeves was provided with free advertisement in government-subsidized newspapers, and he later admitted to being given free use of the Post Office for

<sup>54</sup> Perhaps Pitt was watching how Paris had become ungovernable once the Sections had been granted on 25 July 1792 the right of *permanence* – to convene frequent meetings by their own authority – and on 13 August were allowed to set up their own volunteer military companies. See M. Slavin, *The French revolution in miniature* (Princeton, 1984), *The making of an insurrection. Parisian Sections and the Gironde* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), and his article on the Sections in *Historical dictionary of the French revolution 1789–1799*, ed. S. F. Scott and B. Rothaus (London, 1985), II, 885–9.

<sup>55</sup> Appendix, paras 3–4; *Court and cabinets*, II, 229.

<sup>56</sup> Appendix, para 5; *Court and cabinets*, II, 229; Pitt to Dundas, 15 Nov. 1792, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Pitt papers.

the distribution of 'packets' from his association.<sup>57</sup> However, ministers did not intend him to co-ordinate and control the movement. They were looking to publicize the Reeves association as an example of the movement they wanted, but one which would encourage the spread of independent local associations rather than establish a single national body with a central organization, and they expected to use their own wider contacts to stimulate and deal directly with other associations wherever possible. In their letters on 25 November, Pitt urged Dundas to set the same plan on foot in Scotland, and Grenville alerted Buckingham to prepare the formation of an association in Buckinghamshire. Over that same weekend Pitt saw two of the opposition leaders, Windham (who had offered him support for vigorous measures) and Lord Loughborough (whom he was trying to persuade to become lord chancellor). He would seem to have discussed his association projects with the former, on the evening of the 24th, since next morning Windham made an otherwise inexplicable call on a government supporter Lord Mulgrave, 'who imparted to me the measure, in which I have since concurred, and which I hope now to extend with effect to this country'. Mulgrave, who had particular reasons to seek Pitt's favour, had taken on the task of creating an association in Middlesex.<sup>58</sup> Pitt certainly discussed associations with Loughborough on the 25th and gained his approval of the project.<sup>59</sup> On the 26th, he saw the lord mayor of London twice, and while he was mainly concerned with a possible radical riot that evening it was also an opportunity to discuss his desire for the formation of an association in the City.<sup>60</sup> By the 28th newspapers were reporting the government's determination 'to give every encouragement to institutions

<sup>57</sup> See above n. 5 and n. 33. Reeves later asserted to Dundas that having begun the association without any communication from government, 'when it was on foot I then had some communication with persons at Whitehall. I have never had any money from Gov' to carry it on' (Scottish Record Office, GD 51/1, f. 264, 14 Dec. 1795, cited in Philp, 'Vulgar Conservatism', pp. 46-7, n. 5). While strictly true this rather overlooks the free services provided for him.

<sup>58</sup> Pitt to Windham, 24 Nov., B.L., Add MSS 37, 846; entry for 25 Nov., *The diary of the Rt Hon William Windham 1784 to 1810*, ed. Mrs H. Baring (London, 1866), p. 267; Anstruther to Windham, 30 Nov., Mulgrave to Windham, 1 Dec. 1792, B.L., Add MSS 37, 873, fos. 181, 183. Mulgrave had just succeeded to his brother's Irish peerage and sought the reversion to the British peerage which had lapsed with his brother's death. After some difficulty in obtaining signatures, he and Windham launched an association 'of noblemen and gentlemen' at the St Alban's Tavern - John Anstruther (another opposition M.P.) complained that 'the middling rank of people in this country are so accustomed to see great names at the head of public meetings that they wait to take their tone from them'. Mulgrave peddled to Windham the Pitt line that the association should conduct its business through small standing committees in different parts of the county without calling together all who signed their resolutions except in extraordinary circumstances. Their association finally announced itself in the press on 7 Dec. (the *Sun*, p. 2) with the aims of discovering authors, publishers and distributors of seditious writing in the city and liberty of Westminster and its environs, binding associators to use their utmost endeavours to enforce the law against them, and pledging to help maintain the public peace and support the civil authority against riots.

<sup>59</sup> See appendix, postscript.

<sup>60</sup> *Public Advertiser* 28 Nov., p. 2. How far did these interviews lead to the meeting of merchants, bankers and traders at the London Tavern on the 28th, which in turn called for a general meeting at the Merchant Taylors' Hall on 5 Dec. where resolutions supportive of the constitution were agreed to and left for others to sign, or to the resolutions of the City common council on the 29th



formed on the principle of that held at the Crown and Anchor' and over the following two days the pro-government press made a big effort to puff the association.<sup>61</sup> However, it was the opinion of at least one contemporary observer, and also of the historian of the loyalist movement, that it was the government's decision to call out the militia on 1 December, which automatically triggered the recall of parliament to meet on the 13th – and which at last showed that the government was in earnest – that provided the final stimulus to loyalists to stand forward and declare themselves.<sup>62</sup> *Contra* J. H. Rose and John Ehrman, Pitt continued to play a full part in this. On Wednesday 12 December the *Public Advertiser* reported that

The Lord Mayor, accompanied by Mr Brook Watson, had an audience with the minister on Sunday evening, at his house in Downing Street, relative to the state of the metropolis and the Associations daily forming in different parts thereof, for the general protection of the liberty and property of the citizens. Mr Sergeant Watson, Chairman of the Association of St Andrews, Holborn, and other adjoining parishes, had also an interview with the Minister, immediately after the Lord Mayor retired.<sup>63</sup>

By then the project of associations was proving a success probably beyond the ministers' wildest dreams as the mood of the propertied nation swung dramatically behind government. By 18 December Grenville's under-secretary, Burges, could write exultantly that '... the whole country is forming itself into associations'.<sup>64</sup>

Pitt and Grenville looked to the Reeves association to provide the example and inspiration for a far wider association movement encompassing lesser men of property and the middling classes. A number of the early associations did not conform to the Pitt/Grenville concept in every way, either in composition

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to defend the constitution, suppress unlawful and seditious assemblies, and recommending the city wards to consider the best means of preserving tranquility and securing obedience to the laws (*Annual register for 1792*, Pt. 2, pp. 160–3)?

<sup>61</sup> *Public Advertiser* 28, 29 Nov., p. 2; *The Times* 29 Nov., p. 2; *The World* 30 Nov., p. 2, which reported that '... the List, which is already in number near 400, will in a few days, amount to as many thousands...'. The *Sun* carried two supportive paragraphs on the 27th, one on each of the 28th and 29th, and four on the 30th including the announcement that 'Hundreds of the most respectable Citizens of all descriptions daily enroll their names at the *Crown and Anchor* Tavern, for the purpose of assisting the patriotic views of the New Association' (all on p. 2).

<sup>62</sup> Rose to Auckland, 7 Dec. 1792, B.L., Add MSS 34, 446, fos. 65–65v; Dozier, *King, constitution and country*, pp. 59–67.

<sup>63</sup> *Public Advertiser* 12 Dec. 1792, p. 2. In early 1793 the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1793, Pt. 1, p. 48) listed 11 corporate bodies, 21 City wards, and 12 livery companies which had associated in London to support 'the King and Constitution as established at the Revolution of the Year 1688'.

<sup>64</sup> Burges to Auckland, 18 Dec. 1792, B.L., Add MSS 34, 446, fo. 161. Caulfield ('Reeves association', p. 20) has suggested that Grenville himself may indeed have played an even closer role by attending a meeting of Reeves's committee on 12 Dec., but this is a misinterpretation of a letter from Buckingham on the 8th (HMC *Dropmore*, II, 312–13) referring to the normal pre-session meeting of peers supporting the government, over which Grenville presided, and to his anticipation of the response of parliament when it assembled the following day. Buckingham excused himself from the pre-session meeting to be present at the first meeting of the Buckingham association.

or in forming committees to search after sedition, and equally others later did not associate on Crown and Anchor lines. However, many did, and research is increasingly showing the wide range of people even down to the lower orders drawn into these associations.<sup>65</sup> The associations were one of the major expedients that Pitt employed to defuse the domestic crisis of late 1792, though there were also others and perhaps this fact, as well as the personal effort that Pitt himself put into encouraging associations, explains the premier's subsequent neglect of Reeves who was left to complain that '... when the project had once answered – he took it as one of those pieces of good fortune that belonged to him, and thanked heaven for it – at least he thanked nobody below'.<sup>66</sup>

About a year later, according to Reeves, Dundas declared how he was struck that

the very measure taken was the only one that could have answered, that it was a time for the nation to speak and not for the Government; that it being a question, whether the people were satisfied with the government, under which they lived, *they* were to speak and not the government, and that government might have issued proclamations, called out the militia, and brought the parliament together, but all would not have done – If they had piped and had none to dance the matter would have been made worse, nothing but the people declaring themselves could answer in that critical juncture.<sup>67</sup>

There is some truth in this, but Reeves tried to use it to take all the credit to himself. This was to disregard the facts that Pitt had seen the need for the nation to appear to speak without too obvious prompting by government and had picked upon the way 'not to let it be known that it comes from us'. He had acted quickly to seize upon a likely initiative, to give it the 'right Direction' he desired, and to promote the movement to the point where he secured 'the Impression and Effect of Numbers on our Side' without the disadvantages of a popular movement raging out of government control. Whatever the credit to Reeves for taking the initial step without prior consultation with government, it is difficult not to admire the finesse of the prime

<sup>65</sup> Mark Philp's study of the correspondents to the Reeves association points to the number from 'slightly lower in the social structure' uncertain whether they were socially qualified for such activity ('Vulgar conservatism', pp. 51–2). For examples of membership of associations see Dickinson, 'Popular conservatism', pp. 115–16; N. E. J. Strange, 'Manchester loyalism 1792–1798' (unpublished Manchester University M.Phil. thesis, 1990), pp. 96–102. M. C. Pottle, 'Loyalty and patriotism in Nottingham 1792–1816' (unpublished Oxford University D.Phil. thesis, 1988), contrasts the Nottingham Constitutional Association which made no specific reference to the Reeves association with that of Birmingham which adopted the Crown and Anchor resolutions (pp. 21–4). Strange indicates the importance of the second Crown and Anchor declaration to the leading Manchester association, the Bull's Head Association (pp. 79, 131–64). Reeves subsequently claimed that 2,000 associations were formed (*Association papers*, p. v) and Dozier estimates between 1,000 and 1,500, of which nearly 200 corresponded with Reeves's own association (*King, constitution and country*, pp. 61–2).

<sup>66</sup> Reeves to Windham, 1 Aug. 1794, B.L., Add MSS 37, 874, fo. 36v. In 1793 Reeves received the Stewardship of the Manor and Liberty of the Savoy to add to his cache of remunerative posts (Black, *The Association*, p. 236).

<sup>67</sup> Reeves to Windham, 1 Aug. 1794, B.L., Add MSS 37, 874, fos. 38–38v.

minister whose skill at manipulating public opinion was only ever matched in the eighteenth century by that of his father.

## APPENDIX

[William Pitt to Henry Dundas]

Downing Street  
Sunday Nov 25th  
1792

Dear Dundas

The Recognitions have been sent to the Chief Baron and the Atty & Solr Genl, and We will dispatch the messenger the Moment We can collect their Opinions.

Your Statement respecting the Military Force will enable Me to take Steps for preparing the Army Estimate with a View to the necessary Augmentation, which I will do without loss of Time. On the Subject of Associations We have had a great deal of Consideration. I am clear that nothing short of extreme Necessity would justify the Setting on Foot any Thing which might take the Shape of an Armed Force not under the regular Command of the Executive Power, nor Subject to Military Discipline. The full benefit however which would be derived from such a Measure may I think be obtained in another way without this Mischief. My idea is that in England the Lord Lts of Counties should in case of Riot be enabled to add to any Extent Volunteer Companies under Officers properly qualified, to the present Militia, and to grant Commissions for the Purpose. Perhaps the persons willing to accept Commissions in such an Emergency might be allowed to enrol their names beforehand. By this Means the extent of the Force that would be forthcoming would be ascertained beforehand; and when embodied It would be at once under the Crown, and ought to be made by Act of Parliament, subject to all the Provisions of the Mutiny Act. As you have no Militia, nor any Officers exactly corresponding to our Lord Lieutenants, I do not know how to put this Idea into Shape as applicable to Scotland, but you will find no difficulty in doing It, if you think the Idea right. In that Case I think you would discourage for the present any Voluntary Associations with a view to Armed Force; and hold out in general this Idea as likely to be proposed immediately on the Meeting of Parliament.

The Observations I have hitherto made apply to Associations with a View to Armed Force; and indeed the Term Association is One which I rather wish to avoid with any View. But there are certainly some Objects on which the Declarations of Public Meetings and the Exertions of Individuals acting in Concert, may be highly useful, and that in a Mode strictly conformable to the Laws, and tending to uphold instead of to weaken the Authority of regular Government.

A printed Paper appeared a few days ago, which I enclose to you, (N 1) and which I like in everything but its having adopted the objectionable Term of Association. It has produced a great Impression, which shews that there is a Spirit and Disposition to Activity which if We give it in the outset a right Direction may be improved to very important Purposes. With this View We have privately prepared a Form of a Declaration (Which is enclosed N 2) founded on the same principles as those stated in the printed Paper, but more carefully and precisely defining the Objects to which We think every Measure of the Sort ought to be confined.

We mean not to let it be known that it comes from us, but are privately taking Steps which I have no doubt will be effectual to procure public Meetings at which this Paper

may be approved and signed by as many respectable Names as can be collected in London, Westminster and the Borough. Our Idea then is to procure Declarations of the same Words, in the Counties and great Towns in England. We mean to endeavour to confine any General Meetings held for this Purpose solely to signing such a Declaration, raising Subscriptions, and electing a small Committee to superintend the Management of the Fund and the detail of Prosecutions, and of circulating useful Writings. The Meeting might then adjourn from Time to Time at long Intervals, to receive the Report of their Committee, pass the Accounts and renew if necessary their Subscriptions to the Fund. In this Way We hope to avoid the Inconvenience of much Public Discussion at Numerous Meetings, and yet to have the Impression and Effect of Numbers on our Side.

I imagine from what You state, You can easily set the same Plan on Foot in Scotland, and I think it ought to be done without loss of Time.

We have taken another Step here, which ought also to be extended to Scotland, and which you will see from the enclosed Copy of a Circular Letter, (N 3) which was sent Yesterday to the Custos Rotulorum of each County. You will judge to whom similar Directions should be sent in Scotland, and being on the Spot, It will save Time if you send the Letters (in whatever Shape you judge right) signed by Yourself by the King's Command.

I send you (N 4) the Answer which I received this Morning from Ld Loughborough. I have sent to desire to see him, and will keep open this Letter till afterwards. By a Conversation with Windham last Night, I find that the Decision of the Party (at a pretty full Meeting) does not come up to the Expectation which Burke and He gave us of a general Support, but as confined to Support on the same Grounds as that given last Year [*sic - in fact May 1792*] to the Proclamation. This half Support is far short of what the Times call for from Men who look rationally either to their own Interests or the Public; but We must endeavour to turn it to as much Advantage as We can. We have a very material Dispatch from the Lord Lt of Ireland, which shall be sent to you if it returns from the King in Time to be copied. I have not Time to say any Thing now on Foreign Politics but they furnish every Day fresh Reasons for wishing you in Town. I conclude this Letter will reach you on Wednesday, and at your Rate of dispatching Business, I reckon you will have taken your Measures in Consequence, so as to set out by Saturday. If however I calculate wrong send us Word, as otherwise Nepean will be regulated by this Idea in sending any thing to You. I need not say how glad I am that your Constitution has served you so well, especially just now. I shall not move from hence till you come.

Ever Yours  
WP

I have just seen Lord L. whose Language is highly honorable. He explains his Motive to be the preserving Weight enough among his own Friends to be more sure of keeping the Bulk of them right. He seems very confidant that they will give fair & full Support in all necessary Measures, and abstain from Opposition on other Points. He offers himself to give his Opinion as a Privy Counsellor on any Points I want. I have mentioned to Him among others my Ideas about Associations, of which he seemed quite to approve. WP

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