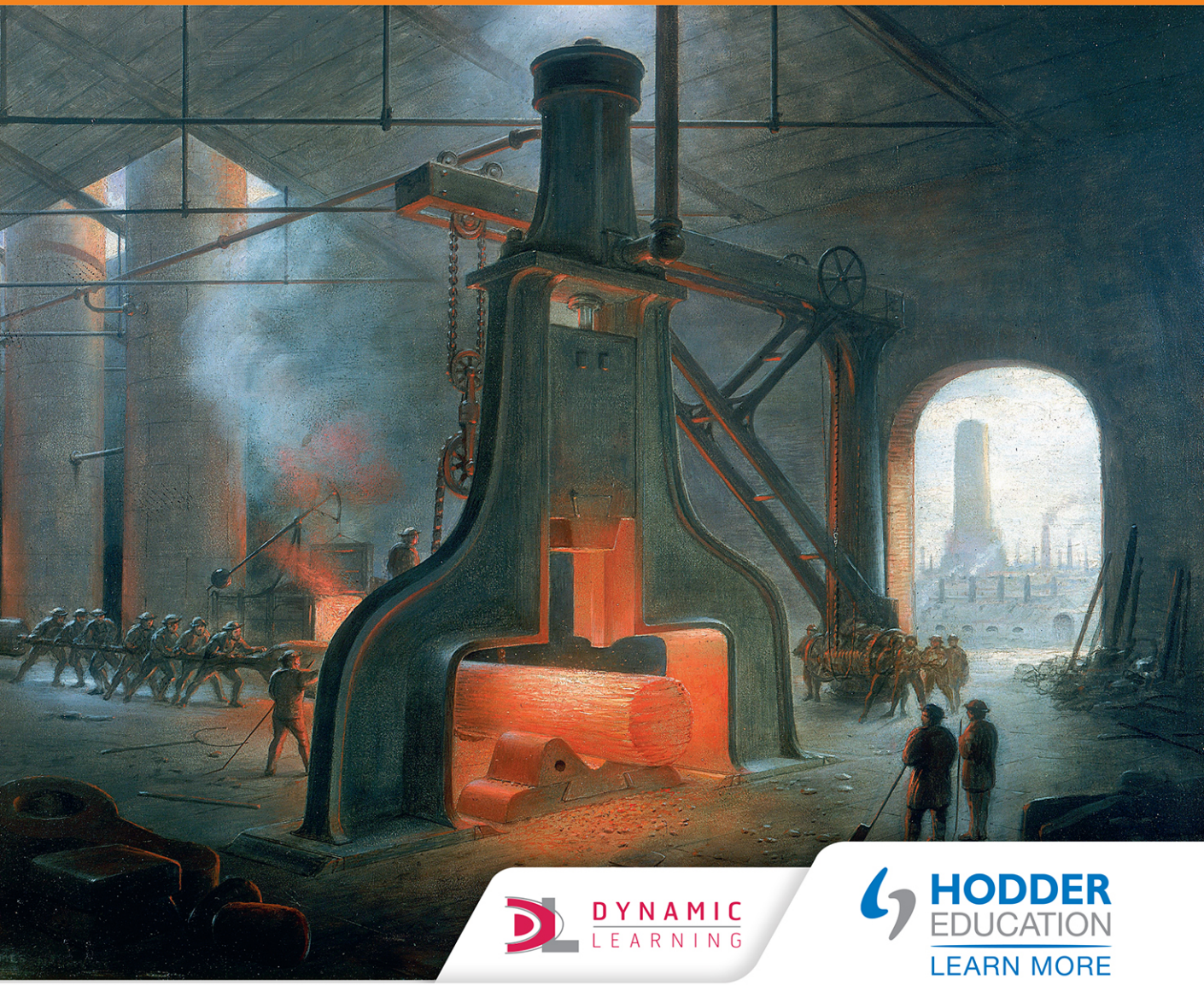
access to history

Britain
1783–1885

BENJAMIN ARMSTRONG



DYNAMIC LEARNING

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Contents

Dedication

Keith Randell (1943–2002)

The *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

CHAPTER 1

Context

Britain in 1783 was a growing country on the verge of great developments. Yet, it had recently lost a challenge to its empire, in the form of the American War of Independence, and was about to face further problems abroad and at home that would lead to significant political, economic and social impacts. By 1885, Britain had vastly changed, as had the lives of most of its population.

Politics

There was no single part of the government which held power. The British constitution was mainly unwritten – not written in laws. Rather, the parts of the constitution acted to provide an executive (the government), legislature (law-making body, or parliament) and judiciary (court system).

The head of state in 1783 was King George III (reigned 1760–1820). He was not an especially inspirational king, largely out of touch with both his population and his government. Unlike many other monarchs of the time, George III was not an absolute monarch (able to rule by decree). While the king could exercise considerable power to influence political decisions, especially through wealth and **patronage**, he needed to cooperate with parliament to rule the country successfully.

KEY TERMS

Patronage Offering positions, salaries, pensions or honours to supporters.

Bills A proposal for a law is a bill. When it is passed, it becomes an Act.

Constituencies Voting areas in Britain. In 1783–1870, each one had one or two MPs.

The executive

The king formed a government by selecting ministers from within parliament who acted as his supporters and advisers. Chief among these was the prime minister. The government took the lead in proposing legislation in parliament. Although the government did not answer to parliament, without parliamentary support it was difficult for them to be effective at governing.

The legislature

Parliament was responsible for passing new legislation. It consisted of two houses, the House of Lords and the House of Commons:

- The House of Lords was the more powerful of the two houses. It was an unelected body consisting of members of the Church of England clergy, such as bishops, and members of the nobility, such as dukes and earls. The number of members of the House of Lords varied over time. In the eighteenth century, there were 220 members. The House of Lords had the power to veto **bills** passed by the House of Commons.
- The House of Commons proposed and debated new laws. A bill passed in the Commons was sent to the House of Lords to vote on. Members of parliament (MPs) were elected in **constituencies**. Each one sent one or two representatives as MPs. However, the rules for who could vote varied

between constituencies, and there was no consistent standard. Southern England was particularly well represented, but the north was not. Since MPs were not paid a salary, it was effectively impossible for anyone without a private income to be involved in politics. Therefore, although the Commons was elected, it was not democratic in the sense that we would understand in modern Britain.

The judiciary

- Senior judges were appointed by the Crown and given a salary. They had a measure of independence, guaranteed since 1701, that they could not be removed without both the House of Lords and Commons requesting the monarch to do so.
- Local law and order was maintained by local landlords and justices of the peace (JPs) who oversaw local court cases. Without a police force, they relied on the local militia or **yeomanry**, volunteer paramilitary forces, on which they could call if necessary.

KEY TERMS

Yeomanry A yeoman was a man owning a small rural area of land, and the yeomanry was a military group made up of these men.

Gentry Wealthy people below the nobility in social class.

Urbanisation The process of towns and cities growing in size and population.

Status quo The existing situation.

Establishment The group of people with power.

Society

Society in Britain was very clearly stratified. Power and wealth were connected to land:

- The wealthiest, the nobility, owned huge areas of land. The landed nobility, about 400 families in the 1780s (who provided most of the 220 peers in the Houses of Lords), earned at least £5000 per year; approximately a dozen of the very wealthiest earned £40,000–50,000.
- The **gentry** had land and money but lacked the titles of the nobility. About 700 families of the gentry earned £3000–4000 annually, while another 4000 earned up to £3000.
- The yeomanry, less wealthy than the gentry, lived on £300–700 annually.
- The average British family of the time had an annual income of £20–30 a year.

There was a clear social distinction between those with money and those without. To stand as a member of parliament (MP) in 1783 required property worth £600 if in the country, or £300 if in a town. One could not be a JP with land worth less than £100, and game animals could not be shot, even on one's own farm, by those with land worth less than £100. This meant that there were legal as well as lifestyle differences for those with wealth.

Economy

By the late eighteenth century, new technologies in textiles production and steam power had led to broad changes, collectively referred to by historians as the Industrial Revolution. In turn, this led to changes in communication, banking and the population. Because of industrialisation and **urbanisation**, the social structures of 1783 were starting to face pressure for change. The numbers of rural yeoman and gentry were in decline while the wealth of industrialists was growing.

As well as challenging social structures, the urbanisation created new centres of industry, especially in the north of England. In the 1780s, Manchester had 40,000 residents but by the 1801 census, this had already grown to over 70,000. These urban areas simultaneously reduced the direct control of landed elites over the working classes who were no longer on their land, and created dangerous, unhygienic areas of growing poverty in which radical ideas against the ***status quo*** could begin to form and spread. It is no coincidence that much of the political and social protest between 1783 and 1885 has strong links to northern urban areas.

Religion

Britain was fundamentally a Christian country in 1783, represented principally by the established Church of England. Crucially, this was the religion of the king and of the government. The existence of God was a widely accepted belief, with only a minority of radical thinkers open to the possibility of atheism.

Alongside the Anglican Church, there were several other Christian denominations. One was Catholicism, a religion that was viewed with suspicion by the **establishment**. A Catholic, for example, could not stand for election as a MP or hold a position in local government. Until 1778, Catholics had paid an extra tax and been banned from joining the army or purchasing land.

Other Protestant, Nonconformist sects were growing in 1783. They were accepted by Anglicans but seen as overzealous and a potential social threat. Examples include the Christian denominations of **Methodism** and **Quakerism**. These groups encouraged more **evangelical** ideas and sparked a renewed interest in religion and spirituality.

Britain in the wider world

Britain in 1783 was a powerful country, with a growing empire and commercial interests worldwide. However, in 1783, Britain had just lost the American War of Independence, surrendering control of its American colonies to the newly formed United States of America. Also, in 1789, the **French Revolution** challenged the international *status quo* and threatened traditional institutions in Europe. This dragged Britain into the **Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars**. These conflicts not only stretched Britain's labour and financial reserves, but also opened Britain up to radical protests and demand for domestic reform.

In the eighteenth century, Britain was heavily involved in the trans-Atlantic or '**triangle trade**'. This was a significant economic interest; British merchants controlled a large proportion of the shipping which transported enslaved Africans to the Americas for sale. Although this trade was fundamental to the industrialisation of Britain, especially in the cotton mills of northern England which relied on the cotton brought by merchants on the return leg of the slave journeys, the late eighteenth century also saw a growth in opposition which would result in the abolition of the slave trade by 1807.

KEY TERMS

Methodists A group of Protestant Churches, separate from the Church of England, with fundamentalist beliefs based on a strict reading of the Bible.

Quakers Also known as the Religious Society of Friends. A Christian denomination which emphasises personal spiritual experience over ritual and tradition.

Evangelical A term used collectively to describe fundamentalist Christians who adhere to the Gospels in the Bible and have an enthusiasm to spread their beliefs.

French Revolution Event in 1789 when French radicals overthrew the monarchy and formed a new government. The revolutionary government was based on the radical idea of equal rights for all citizens.

Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars Conflict broke out between France and other European nations in 1792, called the Revolutionary War. Britain became involved in 1793. After a brief peace in 1802–3, the war resumed until 1815. This second phase is known as the Napoleonic Wars.

Triangle trade Refers to the British slave trade, a reference to the three stages of the journey (Britain to Africa, to the Americas, to Britain).

SOURCE QUESTION

How useful is the picture in Source A for learning about the lives of black people in Britain?

SOURCE A

An engraving of Ignatius Sancho (1729–80), a black writer, composer and shopkeeper in eighteenth-century Britain. He was known for supporting campaigns to abolish slavery. This engraving was made in 1802 as a copy of a painting made in 1768. The very fact that we have two surviving images of him when we have so little evidence of the lives of the majority of the population of Britain at this time is evidence of the prestige that he gained.

Were there black people in Britain?

As well as the wider African cultural history, which is not reflected in the story of the slave trade, there was a small but significant population of black people in England in the eighteenth century, most of whom were not slaves:

- In 1764, the journal *Gentleman's Magazine* estimated that there were 20,000 black servants in London.
- During the American Revolutionary War, thousands of black families had fled to British territories to escape slavery, and over 1000 had ended up in London, Dublin and Liverpool.
- Many black people living in Britain were servants; there were also small communities of black sailors in port towns such as Southampton.
- Some individuals, often ex-soldiers, faced poverty, and it was not uncommon in cities to see black ex-servicemen begging.
- There were a small number of wealthy, successful black individuals who rose from being servants. When John Rippon, a black servant to the Earl of Powis, died in 1800 he left over £130 in his will. Ignatius Sancho was born on a slave ship but died a noted composer and writer (see Source A, above).

This book will address the themes of continuity and change in Britain over these turbulent and changing years from 1783 to 1885. Some of the changes happened because of social pressure; others were due to the leadership and decisions of key individuals, while still others were driven by economic need and changing technology. Remember that in dividing this book into sections, such as political change or international policy, we are using artificial divisions imposed with hindsight. In reality, events rarely divide so cleanly, and you should cross-reference and consider the implications of one area of change on others.

CHAPTER 2

Pitt's Britain and the abolition of the slave trade 1783–1807

When William Pitt the Younger was appointed prime minister in 1783 at 24 years of age, he became the youngest man ever to hold that office. Between 1783 and 1801, he spent seventeen years as prime minister, with a further twenty months between 1804 and 1806. He oversaw reforms to finance, trade and administration, as well as much of Britain's conflict with Revolutionary France. During the same period, Pitt faced challenges from Nationalist groups in Ireland, as well as a growing radical demand for reform to the political system. Additionally, Britain was a leading nation in the trade of slaves. This trade had played a key role in the development of the British economy and empire. Yet in 1807, an Act was passed which abolished the trading of slaves between British colonies.

This chapter examines Pitt's time in office, and the abolition of the slave trade, through the following themes:

- William Pitt the Younger as prime minister
- Pitt's reforms
- Pressures faced by Pitt's government
- Opposition to reform
- The abolition of the slave trade

The key debate on page 35 asks the question: Which factors were most important in the abolition of slavery? The key debate on page 37 asks the question: How effective were Pitt's domestic policies 1783–1806? (Note: if you are studying the Pearson Edexcel course, the interpretations at the end of the chapter will help you to answer the following question: Which factors were most important in the abolition of slavery?)

KEY DATES

1783	Pitt appointed prime minister
1784	General election called by Pitt
1786	Sinking fund introduced Sierra Leone established as a colony for freed black slaves
1787	Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with its London-based Abolition Committee, formed
1788–9	Regency Crisis
1789	French Revolution began
1791	Wilberforce presented first annual anti-slavery bill to the Commons
1793	France declared war on Britain
1797	Fox ended parliamentary opposition to Pitt
1799	Slave Trade Act passed, limiting numbers of slaves on British ships
1799–1800	Combination Acts passed, preventing workers forming trade unions
1800	Pitt's government passed the Act of Union, joining Ireland and Britain, effective from 1801
1801	Pitt resigned as prime minister
1804	Pitt appointed as prime minister for second time
1805	Abolition bill passed in the Commons, although rejected in the Lords
1806	Parliament passed an intercolonial trade ban on slaves outside the British Empire Pitt's death
1807	Abolition of the Slave Trade Act passed

1 William Pitt the Younger as prime minister

■ *How did William Pitt the Younger become prime minister?*

KEY TERMS

American War of Independence Conflict between American colonists and the British army 1775–83, which resulted in the American colonies forming an independent nation.

Coalition An alliance of politicians with differing viewpoints.

Whig Politicians who opposed royal power and sought reform.

East India Company A private business which controlled trade in Asia, particularly India. It had become almost a government in its own right as it made political decisions, controlled private troops and carried out diplomatic negotiations with other countries.

KEY FIGURE

Charles James Fox (1749–1806)

Fox was a radical Whig politician and very critical of the establishment, especially the patronage system. His views were very divisive, and many conservative politicians disapproved of his drinking, gambling and womanising. King George III considered him 'as contemptible as he is odious'.

William Pitt the Younger became prime minister after a political crisis. Lord North, King George III's friend, had been a popular prime minister since 1770. However, in 1776, the **American War of Independence** had broken out. North and George III were blamed for the defeat, losing popularity and support. The king eventually accepted the Marquess of Rockingham as prime minister, only for Rockingham to die unexpectedly only fourteen weeks later, in July 1782. He was then replaced by Lord Shelburne as prime minister.

In March 1783, North formed a **coalition** with **Charles James Fox**, an outspoken **Whig** and reformist. Together, they supported the Duke of Portland to replace Shelburne as prime minister. This was surprising, since not only were the three from different parts of the political spectrum, but also Fox and North had been political opponents for years. But North needed Fox's popular support in the Commons and Fox needed to work with a politician who was acceptable to the king. Reluctantly, George III appointed Portland as prime minister, with Fox as foreign secretary and North as home secretary.

Portland's government failed mainly because North had lost credibility through association with Fox, whereas Fox looked hypocritical for working with North. Further, they lacked royal support – the king refused to use his patronage by creating peerages to reward their supporters.

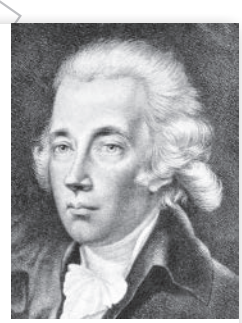
The crucial factor in the coalition's weakness was the attempt to pass the 1783 India bill, a law designed to reorganise the power of the **East India Company**. The bill proposed appointing seven of Fox and North's supporters, including North's son, as commissioners to manage the company for four years. It was passed by the Commons, but defeated by the Lords. The failure gave George III the excuse he needed to replace Portland, Fox and North with Pitt the Younger.

The 1784 election

Pitt was a surprising choice for prime minister:

- He was only 24 years old, with three years' experience in the Commons and nine months as chancellor of the exchequer.
- He did not have strong popular support; he had lost the 1779 election and used a **rotten borough** to become a member of parliament (MP).
- The rest of the cabinet were from the House of Lords, not the Commons.
- Pitt led a **minority government** and could only rely on about 149 votes, while Fox and North controlled about 230 votes.
- Pitt was socially awkward and so lacked easy charm and charisma.

William Pitt (the Younger)



1759	Born in Hayes, Kent, the second son of former prime minister, William Pitt the Elder
1773	Admitted to Cambridge University
1780	Stood for parliamentary election and lost
1781	Became MP with patronage of Sir James Lowther
1782	Became chancellor of the exchequer
1783	Appointed as prime minister
1784	General election strengthened Pitt's position
1801	Resigned as prime minister
1804	Appointed as prime minister
1806	Died of poor health

Background

Pitt was born to William Pitt the Elder, Earl of Chatham from 1866. His mother's family, the Grenvilles, were an influential Whig family (they opposed royal power and sought reform). This made the family nobility, although as a second son he would not inherit the title of earl. His title 'Younger' was to distinguish him from his father, who was prime minister in the 1750s and 1760s.

Election as a member of parliament

Although Pitt believed in limited democratic reform, he owed his start in politics to the old, corrupt system. Sir James Lowther was a wealthy man who owned the voting rights in several 'rotten boroughs' (where there were very few voters, and the landlord could essentially pick the MP he wanted). After Pitt failed to win the election in 1779, Lowther used one such borough, Appleby, to have Pitt elected to the House of Commons.

Political leadership

Pitt built a reputation as a capable, honest and hardworking minister while serving as chancellor of the exchequer. He had a good relationship with George III, who appointed him prime minister in 1783 in the hopes of creating a strong Tory leadership (one that would support the king and oppose reform). Pitt served as prime minister until he resigned in 1801 in protest at the king's refusal to sign a Catholic Emancipation Act. He served again in 1804 until his death in 1806.

In other ways, Pitt was a good choice:

- His family was politically influential.
- He had a good relationship with the king.
- He had given articulate speeches against electoral corruption.
- He had shown that he was intelligent and thoughtful as chancellor of the exchequer.
- He was popular with independent MPs.
- He had a reputation for honesty, which contrasted with the apparent hypocrisy of North and Fox.

The king wrote to Pitt in January 1784, encouraging him to call an election. He was concerned that the prime minister was reliant on royal patronage. Pitt insisted on delaying the vote, since an election would risk losing his support. He was gambling that the Whig opposition would try to obstruct him, but not force a new election. He hoped that a delay would allow the king's agents to build support for him, and that he could demonstrate his potential as a statesman.

King George III agreed to wait, which shows his confidence in Pitt. By March, Pitt's position was more secure. He had spoken well in the Commons, and many independent MPs warmed to him. He had also made wise ministerial

KEY TERMS

Rotten borough
A constituency with very few voters, often fewer than 30, where the landlord could essentially pick the MP they wanted.

Minority government
When the government controls fewer votes in the Commons than their opponents, making it hard to pass laws that they propose.

appointments, avoiding politicians associated with the previous eighteen months, for example, Fox, who refused to support Pitt, or North, whom the king no longer favoured. Consequently, he was not associated with failure.

Many expected Pitt to offer political office to Charles Jenkinson, a politician favoured by the king, to keep royal favour; Pitt refused, showing that while loyal to the king, he was not simply a mouthpiece. He also rejected royal **sinecures**. The fact that he was clearly independent of royal control encouraged support.

Pitt demonstrated his growing support by passing the mutiny bill. While this was only a formality that was regularly passed to maintain the armed forces, it showed that he was overcoming opposition. In March 1784, he asked George III to call a new election. This was only three and a half years since the previous election; generally elections were held at the seven-year limit.

The new election swung control of the Commons to Pitt. Approximately 160 of Fox's supporters became known as 'Fox's Martyrs' since their loyalty to Fox cost them their seats. Of the 558 MPs elected, nine per cent were Pitt's supporters, whereas 25 per cent were Fox's supporters. The majority of MPs were independent gentlemen, who tended to support Pitt, or MPs who relied on royal patronage and would support the king's prime minister.

The main reasons for Pitt's victory in 1784 were:

- Pitt's leadership. He was intelligent, calm and logical.
- The king's support. George III offered pensions and **peerages** to supporters of Pitt. There were four peerages created in the month leading up to the election, and reports of a promise of thirteen or fourteen more. Several peerages were created among London industrialists.

KEY TERMS

Sinecure An honorary position given by the Crown for loyalty. It involved no work but gave an income.

Peerage A title of nobility. From most to least important they are duke, marquess, earl, viscount, baron. Collectively they can be called 'lord'.

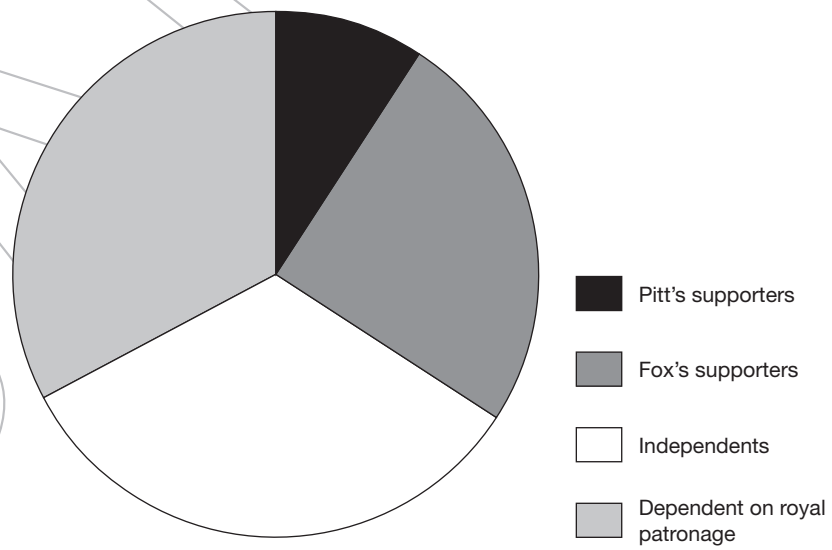


Figure 2.1 The political loyalty of MPs elected in 1784. Data based on L. Namier and J. Brooke, editors, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–1790*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964.

- Popular support. Pitt did particularly well in larger constituencies, where it was harder for opponents to bribe the electorate.
- Pitt's reputation. He had shown himself to be loyal, honest and independent from Crown control.
- The support of notable landowners. Several key landholders supported Pitt. This was important, as many MPs were returned by nomination. Only 75 contested elections occurred in England and Wales, and eight in Scotland.
- A swing against Fox in London. The London metropolitan area returned ten Pitt supporters and only two Fox supporters, including Fox himself – even Fox's victory in Westminster was hard-fought, in contrast to Pitt's formality of an election for Cambridge University. This was probably because of the lack of patrons controlling voters in London, so voters were freer to express their genuine political views.

Yet, since his appointment was based on royal support and the failure of three governments in two years, it was not expected that he would last until Christmas. Consequently, Pitt's government was initially nicknamed 'the mince-pie ministry', and political opponents referred to Pitt as a 'school-boy'.

The significance of the 1784 election

The 1784 election consolidated Pitt's power. It has been said that the election marked the first step in **Tory** politicians beginning to form a party. This is not entirely accurate; the MPs who supported Pitt were not unified, and Pitt did not act as a party leader. There was no expectation of party loyalty, for example. Lowther's nine MPs switched to support Pitt's opposition over the 1789 regency bill.

However, the 1784 election contributed to the idea of the government and opposition as two distinct sides. For example, John Robinson, an election agent, carried out pre-election survey predictions on the basis of whether a pro-Pitt, pro-Fox or neutral MP would return. The concept of belonging to either the government or the opposition would contribute to the solidifying of distinct parties in the first half of the nineteenth century.

KEY TERM

Tories Politicians who supported the king and opposed reform.

ONLINE EXTRAS AQA WWW

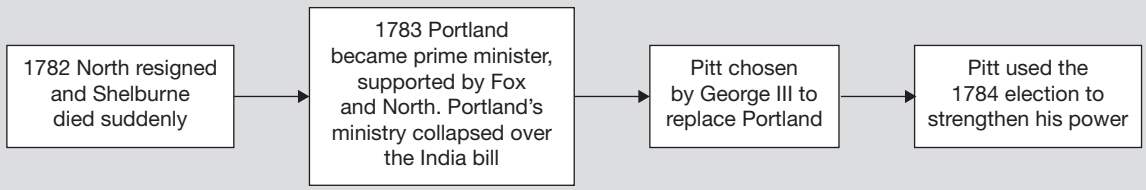
Test your understanding of Pitt's policies by completing Worksheet 1 at **www.hoddereducation.co.uk/accesstohistory/extras**

ONLINE EXTRAS OCR WWW

Develop your analysis of Pitt's government by completing Worksheet 1 at **www.hoddereducation.co.uk/accesstohistory/extras**

SUMMARY DIAGRAM

PITT THE YOUNGER AS PRIME MINISTER



2 Pitt's reforms

■ *How successful were Pitt's reforms?*

While Pitt was in power, he aimed to improve government efficiency, especially in financial matters. From 1783 to 1801, and again from 1804 to 1806, Pitt combined the offices of chancellor of the exchequer and first lord of the treasury with being prime minister. He had significant impact on financial and administrative reform, although he was less successful with political reform and managing the East India Company.

Financial challenges

Pitt faced three financial challenges:

- The loss of thirteen American colonies by 1783 had deprived Britain of one of its largest markets for manufactured goods.
- **National debt** had almost doubled from £127 million (1775) to £243 million (1784). This was almost twenty times the national revenue. It cost over half the annual national income to make the annual interest payments alone.
- There were concerns over corruption. Some investors were making up to six per cent profit on government loans. Much of the rest of government spending was on contracts that were often awarded to the wealthy minority.

Trade

Pitt was a supporter of the contemporary economic thinker Adam Smith, who had published his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Smith argued against the commonly accepted theory that economic strength came through **protectionism**, saying that this held back economic development and reduced the quality of life for all. Instead, he proposed **free trade**, suggesting that trade without control or tariffs was universally beneficial. Countries would offer the best prices to increase trade and would maintain peaceful relationships to protect trade. This would, he insisted, ensure more efficient production, lower prices and an overall improvement in the standard of living.

The radical idea of free trade

Pitt sent representatives to the courts of the principal rulers in Europe to negotiate reduced tariff duties. Very few of the ambassadors achieved their goal. Even the foreign secretary spoke dismissively of the 'present rage for commercial treaties', which he neither liked nor comprehended. When Pitt tried to agree a trade deal with Ireland, it was opposed by the **Dublin Parliament** and industrialists in the north of England who felt threatened by the prospect of competing with cheaper Irish labour. The only notable success was with France, with the Eden trade treaty that lasted from 1786 until the war in 1793.

KEY TERMS

National debt
The amount of money that the government of a country has borrowed from banks and money lenders.

Protectionism
An economic system for safeguarding domestic production by imposing tariffs and levies on imported goods from foreign countries.

Free trade The belief that the economy should be left alone by the government, without tariffs or restrictions.

Dublin Parliament From 1264 until 1800, Ireland had its own parliament. From 1692, it met in Dublin.

Britain accepted the import of French wines at the lower tariff rate granted to the Portuguese. In return, French tariffs on imported British manufactured goods were reduced by ten to fifteen per cent. Northern industrialists took advantage of this, so that by 1792, the value of British trade to the Europe had almost doubled from 1783, and the trade deficit of £2.5 million had become a surplus of almost £2 million. Pitt's government also invested in new ships. In 1760, Britain had 600,000 tonnes of shipping; by 1792, 1.5 million tonnes.

Free trade was not immediately opened to the Americas due to national resentment of the British defeat by American republicans in 1785. Instead, trade in the West Indies was controlled by the Navigation Act (1786), which limited colonial trade to British ships. The aim was to avoid trade with American merchants. A year later, some ports in the British West Indies were opened to small American vessels, which caused British exports to the West Indies to treble. Britain opened more of the West Indian markets to America for free trade by agreeing to the Jay Treaty of 1794. Between 1793 and 1799, British exports to America more than doubled. By 1800, the USA was importing a quarter of British exports, with another quarter of British goods to the rest of the Americas.

However, smuggling was a major problem. It was estimated that twenty per cent of imports overall and 50 per cent of tea leaves were illegally smuggled into Britain. Pitt responded by:

- reducing tariffs and import duties on goods such as wines, spirits and tobacco
- reducing tea duties from 119 per cent to 25 per cent
- introducing a Book of Rates to simplify the tariff system
- passing the 1787 Hovering Act to extend the authority of customs officials to twelve miles off the coast, and allow them to board and seize any ships loitering there.

By 1789, legally imported tea had doubled in quantity. The **Exchequer** reported an extra £200,000 in taxes during 1784–5. By 1793, the British government had increased its revenue by about £3 million.

KEY TERMS

Exchequer The British government's economic department.

Sinking fund A method of government investment to reduce national debt.

The sinking fund 1786

In 1786, the government attempted to reduce national debt with a **sinking fund**. This involved the government putting surplus money into a separate fund. The money was used to buy government shares on the stock market at an improved price. Profits were reinvested into the fund, which could be used to pay off the balance of the national debt and reduce the interest payments. To prevent the money being spent on other projects, Pitt established legislation to prevent the money being redistributed, raised taxes to generate £1 million per year, and appointed commissioners to control the fund.

From 1786 to 1793, the fund raised £10 million to reduce the national debt. A second sinking fund was established in 1793, financed by a levy on all new loans to the State. While the sinking fund had worked pre-war, it was not successful

during the war years (1793–1815). The war increased government spending and borrowing significantly, so that the national debt was rising faster than the sinking fund could cover. The government had to borrow money to fund the sinking fund, which cost more in interest than was gained by using the sinking fund. By 1801, despite the sinking fund, national debt had increased by 87 per cent to £456 million. Historian Eric Evans (2001) argues that the government had been 'disarmed by the seductive logic of compound interest' and ignored the fact that the fund relied on reducing, not increasing, spending.

The sinking fund only became effective again in 1815, with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, until it was ended in 1829.

Taxation

Pitt reformed the tax system to create revenue, deliberately choosing to affect the wealthy:

- 1784: new taxes on bricks, men's hats, horses and carriages.
- 1785: duties on keeping servants were increased, and new duties introduced for keeping female servants. Bachelors had to pay double. The existing window tax was increased, with a tax of up to £20 for houses with over 180 windows. A shop tax was introduced based on premises size. Tax was added on gloves.
- 1786: new taxes on hair powder for wigs, perfume and cosmetics.
- 1789: increased duties on newspapers, advertisements, playing cards and dice.
- 1796: introduction of inheritance tax.
- 1797: tax on owning watches and clocks. Pitt also introduced a so-called triple assessment payment – a tax on luxury goods that would rise by three to five times as an extra tax, or people could choose to pay ten per cent of their wage instead, unless they earned less than £60 per year.
- 1798: income tax introduced at ten per cent for those with an income of between £60 and £200, and twenty per cent for those over £200. The tax was widely evaded at first, but opposition decreased as the war dragged on and the tax was seen as a patriotic duty. This was Pitt's most effective economic policy.

Pitt's economic policies had mixed success:

- By 1792, Pitt's economic policies had increased government income by £6 million annually, and during the Revolutionary War, a further £1 million annually. However, this was not enough to limit spiralling national debt once war had broken out.
- Some policies were abandoned, such as the shop tax, which was repealed in 1789 following protests in London, and the tax on watches, which was replaced by a tax on using coats of arms after the guild of watchmakers protested against the loss of trade.

- Some policies caused financial strain, for example the window tax. In 1792, Pitt had to exempt houses with fewer than seven windows.
- Pitt's triple assessment collected £3 million, but he had expected £7 million. This was because many people declared their income as just below £60 to avoid paying.
- The system was imprecise. Many tax assessors were local tradesmen, who deliberately undervalued their customers' liability.

Governmental and administrative reform

Pitt reformed the government by focusing on creating a small number of trained, professional employees, rather than many ever-changing amateurs:

- He reduced the number of government employees by combining departments, amalgamating similar jobs and transferring staff into the most important departments. For example, the Board of Taxes grew by 35 per cent, mainly through staff transferred from the treasury and the excise board.
- The customs and excise departments grew to have a combined staff of 600 and contributed two-thirds of government revenue.
- A department was even created to purchase stationery in large quantities, preventing officials from privately purchasing luxury stationery from government funds.

While not substantially reducing the overall costs, the changes ensured that the money was used more efficiently.

To ensure greater control of funds, Pitt created a single consolidated fund at the Bank of England, from which all government salaries were paid, and organised audits of public money to minimise corruption. He also reduced government sinecures. He rejected the honorary title of clerkship of the pells (with a salary of £3000), and public accounts commissioners identified 180 other positions to abolish. Pitt removed 28 of these, and as the remaining post-holders died over subsequent years, they were not replaced. By 1806, almost all sinecures had vanished. Pitt had all but destroyed the patronage system.

Pitt also streamlined military spending, which was two and a half times greater than civilian spending. Again, Pitt did not significantly reduce spending, but ensured that money was spent more wisely to strengthen the military, especially the navy. By 1790, the Royal Navy had 33 new ships. It seems likely that Pitt intended to extend his reforms of the navy to include promotion by merit and seniority rather than patronage, salaries instead of fees, and a stronger navy board, but the **Regency Crisis** of 1788–9 (see page 18) distracted him from completing his reforms.

The East India Company

In 1784, Pitt challenged the power of the East India Company, a behemoth of an institution that controlled trade to Britain from Asia. By the early nineteenth century, 11,000 tonnes of tea were being imported annually into Britain from

Development of cabinet government

A key reform under Pitt was the establishment of the importance of the prime minister and his cabinet in running the country. In modern terms, it seems normal to see the prime minister as the key figure, but this had not always been the case. The role of the prime minister had been developing since the early 1700s. By Pitt's careful construction of a cabinet made of political allies to overcome parliamentary opposition, combined with maintaining a measure of independence from royal influence, he cemented the central role of the prime minister in political governance. This model of political leadership was followed by many prime ministers of the 1800s through to the modern day.

KEY TERM

Regency Crisis When George III took ill, Pitt's opponents tried to appoint Prince George as regent to rule in his father's place.

China via the company. It controlled British territories abroad with managers and a military force on the ground, and company directors back in London, even making diplomatic agreements with other states.

Pitt introduced the India Act 1784, which essentially separated political and economic control. The company kept financial control, but military and political leadership passed to government representatives Lord Cornwallis and Henry Dundas. From 1786 to 1793, the governor-general's powers were increased substantially, thus ensuring governmental control. Diplomatic relations between India and nearby states subsequently improved.

The reform was limited. Cornwallis was unable to control company troops, meaning that the company still effectively had a private army in Asia which wore British uniforms, yet was beyond government control. The company also retained control of its revenue in return for an annual payment to the government of £500,000.

Parliamentary reform

Although Britain had an elected parliament, the unreformed system bore little resemblance to a modern democracy. Between 1790 and 1801, there were 558 MPs elected from 314 constituencies (245 English, 24 Welsh, 45 Scottish). With the 1801 Act of Union, 66 Irish constituencies with 100 MPs were added. There were borough and county constituencies. Borough constituencies were urban areas, generally small towns, while county constituencies were rural areas. In addition, Oxford and Cambridge universities had two MPs each. There were fundamental differences between the voting qualifications across counties and boroughs.

Counties had a voting qualification of owning property worth at least 40 shillings (£2) per year, which effectively disqualified the working poor. Historian R. Thorne (1976) estimated that in this period, voter numbers in all 40 English counties were only about 190,000: an average of 4750 per constituency.

There was greater variety among the 203 boroughs in England, which can be seen in Table 2.1 (see page 15).

Across constituencies, there was huge variety:

- All counties had two MPs, yet the largest (Yorkshire) had 20,000 voters for a population of 660,000 while the smallest (Rutland) had 800 for a population of 18,000.
- Northampton had 1000 voters, while St Germans had twenty. Both were potwalloper boroughs with two MPs.
- There were rotten boroughs such as Old Sarum, an extreme example, which was a burgage borough with two MPs. By the late eighteenth century, seven voters owned all the voting properties yet none lived in Old Sarum. By 1800, no one lived there at all. In 1820, two brothers bought Old Sarum and sat as MPs until 1832.

- Forty per cent of MPs were elected from ten counties south of Bristol and London.
- Cornwall (population *c.*300,000) had 42 MPs, while Lancashire (population over 1 million) had fourteen.
- The English cities of Manchester (1830 population *c.*144,000) and Birmingham (1830 population *c.*182,000) had no MPs at all.

Corruption

Corruption was rife. Landowners dominated the voting, and therefore parliament, through corporation voting, where the vote was limited to those with wealth and power on the corporation, or through owning the freehold and burgage property. Consistently, from 1783 until at least 1867, 70 per cent or more of MPs were landowners. In the counties, landowners could pressure their tenants to vote for their chosen candidates. Lord Lowther, for example, spent £100,000 on land, which meant that by 1784 he controlled nine seats in the House of Commons; in 1780, when voters threatened not to support his candidate, he threatened to cut off their coal. Before 1832, landowner dominance meant that few elections were ever actually contested. In some boroughs, nicknamed 'venal boroughs', voters sold their votes to those willing to pay. Although illegal, this was quite normal.

Table 2.1 The different types of constituency boroughs in England

Type of borough	Number in England in 1790	Average number of voters per constituency	Qualification to vote
Potwalloper	13	550	Meeting the qualification of having a hearth large enough to boil a cauldron
Freeman	91	870	Having the legal status of being a freeman of the borough
Scot and lot	37	650	Paying local taxes, called rates
Corporation	25	30	Being a member of the local corporation, a form of council
Burgage	30	30	Owning certain properties in the borough
Freeholder	7	30	Owning freehold of land; if enough was owned by one person it acted like a burgage borough

Data based on L. Namier and J. Brooke, editors, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–1790*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964.

Pitt's proposal

Ironically, having gained political office through a rotten borough, Pitt attempted to achieve limited constitutional reform to the voting system. In 1785, he proposed that:

- Thirty-six small boroughs should be removed, with the 72 seats distributed among county and city constituencies.
- £1 million should be put aside by the government to compensate borough property owners for their loss in influence.
- The 40-shilling franchise qualification should be extended to long-term renters in the counties to increase voter numbers.

This bill was opposed by landowners and King George III, and defeated in the Commons by 248 votes to 174.

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The success of Pitt's reforms

Historians have differing opinions about the success of Pitt's reforms. Table 2.2 (see below) gives a summary of some key points for each side of the argument (also see the key debate on page 37).

Table 2.2 A comparison of the successes and failures of Pitt's policies

Evidence of success	Evidence of limited success
• Government revenue increased by about £4 million per year • Trade with the USA and Europe increased • Britain's international economic dominance was protected • Radical reformers respected the tax system as it targeted the rich • The government became more economically and administratively efficient • Financial corruption was reduced • Britain was strong enough to face France in a long war • Pitt established greater governmental control in India by reducing the East India Company's power	• The sinking fund had a limited impact on national debt • The outbreak of war increased national debt • In 1797, Pitt had to suspend all government payments in an attempt to avoid bankruptcy • Income tax was unpopular • Reforms to the Royal Navy were incomplete • Attempts to reduce tariffs with other European powers were largely unsuccessful • The trade deal with Ireland failed • Pitt's policies were not original. They had been tried or proposed by previous Whig prime ministers • The removal of sinecures was a slow process as he waited for most holders to die • Overall governmental costs did not decrease • The East India Company retained its own troops and control of trade • Reform to the constitution was blocked by opposition, including George III

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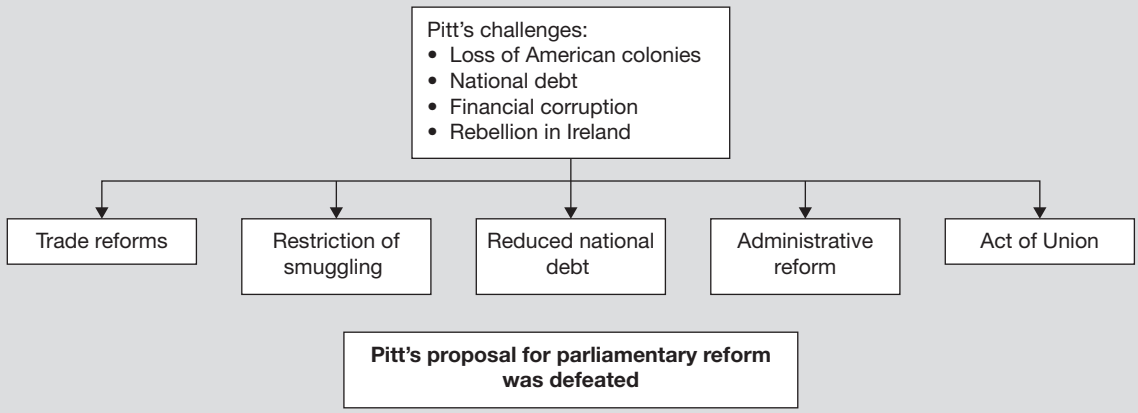
SUMMARY DIAGRAM

PITT'S REFORMS



3 Pressures faced by Pitt's government

■ *What were the pressures faced by Pitt's government in the 1790s?*

Pitt's government faced challenges, both externally from the international impact of the French Revolution, and internally from Whig opposition and tensions in Ireland.

The impact of the French Revolution on Pitt's government

The British government was slow to realise the significance of the French Revolution. In 1792, Pitt announced in the Commons that there would be a reduction in spending on defence because 'there never was a time in the history of this country when … we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace than at the present moment'. France declared war on Britain in 1793.

Tory MPs and members of the nobility were concerned about the violence against the nobility in France, while the Whigs were divided:

- Whig MP **Edmund Burke** was critical of the French Revolution in his work *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). While he accepted some of the liberal goals, he was concerned that the revolution was too poorly planned to lead to stability.
- By contrast, Charles James Fox, the Whig opposition leader, declared the formation of a new constitution based on principles of equality to be 'the greatest event … that ever happened in the world'.

KEY FIGURE

Edmund Burke (1729–97)

Burke was an Anglo-Irish Whig politician and critical of British policy in America as well as of uncontrolled royal patronage. However, he was particularly concerned by the threat of mob rule following the French Revolution, and was an outspoken opponent of what he saw as a threat to British values of tradition, rank and position.

Burke was more influential than Fox, who had destroyed his political reputation during the Fox–North coalition. This contributed to a hardening of opinions against the revolutionary ideals, even among Whigs who favoured reform, and opposition to any bill that sounded vaguely revolutionary.

The challenge of Whig opposition

In the 1780s, the Whigs posed a strong challenge to Pitt. Key examples are the 1784 election and the Regency Crisis.

Regency Crisis 1788–9

In 1788, King George III suffered a mental breakdown. To Pitt and the king's medical attendants, the king had simply gone mad, leading to his nickname in history as 'Mad King George who lost America'.

The heir to the throne, George, Prince of Wales, 'Prinny' to his Whig friends, was a drinking partner of Fox, the opposition leader. He resented his father and formed an 'anti-court' of opposition politicians and courtiers in which drinking and partying were commonplace. This Whig opposition tried to organise the 200 Fox-supporting MPs to unite for 'Prinny' to rule as prince regent in place of George III. This would have ended Pitt's royal support and almost certainly led to a Whig government. The threat failed because:

- The titular leader of the Whigs, the Duke of Portland, considered 'Prinny' irresponsible.
- Instead of working with the Whig leaders, the headstrong Prince of Wales chose to work with the outspoken Whig MP Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a playwright who loved vulgar showmanship and backstage deals and who grossly overestimated his own potential. Working with Sheridan alienated the Prince from many more conservatively minded Whigs like Portland and Burke.
- In January 1789, Pitt's strong arguments in the Commons succeeded in persuading MPs to vote only for limited powers for the prince regent.
- King George III recovered unexpectedly in February 1789, which ended the crisis. Pitt once again had royal support.

The decline of Whig opposition

With their existing divisions and their mixed response to the French Revolution, the Whigs offered little real opposition to Pitt's government in the 1790s. Fox tried to maintain the middle ground to keep the support of the still influential Duke of Portland. But any efforts were soon crushed:

- When the September Massacres (1792) occurred in France, Fox foolishly allowed his own **republican** feelings to overwhelm political judgement and refused to condemn the deaths caused by the revolutionary chaos.
- When war broke out between France and Britain in 1793, Fox's Whigs were tainted by having liberal ideas. In contrast, Pitt was perceived to represent British values of social order, tradition and Christianity.

Was King George III mad?

Revisionist historians McAlpine and Hunter (1969) proposed, based on contemporary descriptions of the king which included that his urine turned blue in colour, that the problem was a hereditary metabolic disorder called porphyria, which damages the nervous system and leads to mental instability. Garrard and Rentoumi (2013) have claimed that the blue-coloured urine was from medicine. They argue that George III's writings suggest a manic state indicating some form of mood disorder.

KEY TERM

Republican A political viewpoint in favour of a government without a monarch.

- In 1793, a failed radical attempt to form a National Convention in Edinburgh, and the government's unsuccessful 'Treason Trial' of the London Corresponding Society leaders (in 1794, see page 22) had convinced many Whigs that a real revolutionary threat existed.

Pitt exploited the Whig weakness and in 1792 approached individual Whigs to create a coalition. For example, he invited Portland to consult on the precise wording of legislation against seditious writings. Baron Loughborough was the first Whig to defect to Pitt in January 1793 in return for the title of lord chancellor. Soon afterwards, other Conservative Whigs, many with impressive aristocratic titles or connections, joined Pitt's government. Other Whigs refused to support Fox.

Pitt showed shrewd leadership by demoting several Tory supporters to allow more prominent Whigs, like Portland, to have key roles if they joined his coalition. Portland joined the coalition in May 1794 in return for the position of home secretary. Six of the thirteen cabinet positions went to Whigs who had opposed Pitt. However, he kept crucial long-time supporters in his cabinet.

In the short term, the significance of the Whig divisions in the 1790s was that the Tory government under Pitt was unchallenged in the early nineteenth century. As a direct result, following Pitt's death in 1806, the Tories remained dominant until 1830. More significantly in the long term, the formalising of the roles of government and opposition became the forebear of the more rigid party system which formed in the nineteenth century.

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Test your understanding of Whig opposition by completing Worksheet 4 at **www.hoddereducation.co.uk/accesstohistory/extras**

Rebellion and Union in Ireland

In 1798, the republican Wolf Tone led the **United Irishmen** in open rebellion. This was prompted by revolutionary ideas from America and France, combined with economic pressure. The rebellion was quickly crushed, due to divisions within it and the overwhelming power of the British army.

In 1801, Pitt's government passed the Act of Union. They overcame opposition from Irish republicans (who feared their loss of independence) and **Ulster Protestants** (who feared that parliament would be lenient on Catholics) by making good use of bribery and promising government offices and peerages.

The impact of the 1801 Act of Union was:

- To absorb Ireland into the British constitution, creating the United Kingdom.
- To abolish the Irish Parliament, and instead give seats to 100 Irish MPs and 28 Irish Peers in the British Parliament.
- To join the Church of Ireland with the Church of England, and guarantee in law the supremacy of the Church of England in Ireland.

Not everything changed. Ireland retained its own legal system, army establishment and system of landholding, and Irish affairs were still directed from Dublin on behalf of the British government.

Following the Act of Union, Pitt attempted to pass a Catholic emancipation bill, which would have given political rights to the 75 per cent of the Irish population

KEY TERMS

United Irishmen An Irish republican association which opposed British control of Ireland.

Ulster Protestants Protestants in the Ulster region of Ireland who supported British, Protestant control of Ireland.

ONLINE EXTRAS Pearson Edexcel **WWW**

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who were Catholic. The king refused, and Pitt resigned on 16 February 1801 (though he continued to act as prime minister when another bout of 'madness' prevented the king appointing a new prime minister). Pitt was replaced by Addington, and Pitt joined the opposition. By 1804, Addington's government was unable to withstand opposition from Pitt and Fox, and Addington resigned. Pitt returned to office, although with a weaker government than before, as many of Addington's supporters chose to join the opposition.

Radical threats in the 1790s

In the 1790s, there was a growing radical demand for political reform. This was a challenge to Pitt's government for two reasons: the demands challenged the traditional power of the political elite, but also the government was very aware that in France, popular protest had led to a revolution which had overthrown the monarchy.

A sense of political dissatisfaction in Britain pre-dated the French Revolution. However, there was nothing resembling a popular protest movement before the 1790s. The closest thing to popular protest was the Society for Constitutional Information. This organisation was formed in 1780 by Major John Cartwright to oppose Lord North and support the American colonists. This middle-class organisation was strongest in Sheffield, although it was represented in many places. The principal idea was that reform would only be possible if information was shared, and so the society gave free leaflets to the public which called for reducing the time between elections and making political representation more equal. Although this shows evidence of some form of popular reformist thought, it was little more than a talking shop which lacked direction or clear goals. It foundered in 1783 due to a lack of purpose.

The French Revolution exposed radical ideas to the world, especially after 1791 when Thomas Paine wrote his influential *Rights of Man*. Paine not only defended the values of the revolution, but proposed the possibility of a society in which the government took responsibility for the welfare of the people. This invigorated an extra-parliamentary reform movement:

- The Society for Constitutional Information re-emerged. However, as a middle-class organisation the society was careful to avoid supporting excessively radical ideas such as changes to land ownership.
- The London Corresponding Society (LCS) was formed in 1792 by Thomas Hardy. It was primarily supported by artisans and small tradesmen and asked only a penny per week, twenty per cent of the cost of joining the Society for Constitutional Information. For most of the 1790s, the LCS probably had no more than 1000 members, but gained political attention through their campaigns of distributing printed handbills to the public.
- Similar organisations sprang up across the UK. Some abolished membership fees entirely. It is likely that by 1797 there were over 80 political societies nationally with about 10,000 members.

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