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Popular politics, heritage and memories of Chartism in England and Wales, 1918–2020*

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ABSTRACT

Chartism has enjoyed a remarkably enduring posthumous life. This article focuses on the politics of remembering the movement via three case studies: the interwar political left, the attempts by the political and cultural establishment to co-opt Chartism since the 1980s, and the role of Chartism in the contemporary and ongoing campaigns for democratic renewal promoted by a range of heritage organizations and groups. By drawing on critical heritage studies, as well as a range of material – from press reports to ephemera and the built environment – this article shows how forms of remembrance and the practices of commemoration surrounding Chartism were (and are) far from static and repetitive but evolving, dynamic and contested.

Chartism has enjoyed a remarkably enduring posthumous life. But in what ways has this movement for democratic rights lived on, who has kept the memories of it alive, and to what end? In the 175 years since Chartism ceased to be a mass movement of the working classes in the late 1840s, essentially three competing memories have been invoked. The first – and the most familiar to historians of the movement – is the Fabian view. The early twentieth-century Fabians – the intellectual wing of the new Labour party – saw in the Chartism of William Lovett's London Working Men's Association an early anticipation of their own gradualist politics. The Fabian view has tended to play down the image of Chartism as an expression of working-class consciousness, in which workers and gentlemen radicals had co-operated, while simultaneously distancing the movement from socialism. The second memory is that of a militant, class-conscious, internationalist and occasionally violent movement. According to this view, Chartism was a confrontational, anti-capitalist expression of an incipient socialist proletariat. A range of groups to the left of mainstream Labour have invoked this memory of Chartism as part of their campaigns to sketch out an independent left-wing politics. The third way in which memories of Chartism have been invoked is less explicitly party political, though it has been central to attempts by the establishment to co-opt the movement in the late twentieth century: Chartists were premature, far-sighted liberal democrats. Divested of its radical and especially socialist edge, the Chartists have been appropriated for a Whig (and more recently Tory) interpretation of history.[1] In this reading, Chartists were worthy but dull reformers who form part of a longer, gradual and peaceful narrative about the unfolding of liberal democracy.

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[1] To some extent, this tripartite schema maps on to the professional historiography of the movement, at least the first and second memories, though the third – as premature liberal democrats – is much less evident and more likely to be found in educational textbooks and mainstream party political rhetoric. For the Fabian view, see J. West, *A History of the Chartist Movement* (London, 1920). And for the socialist view, see M. O'Brien, *'Perish the Privileged Orders': a Socialist History of the Chartist Movement* (London, 1995).

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While the boundaries between these three memories were not always clear-cut, as this article will show, the many contests over the memory of Chartism have pivoted around conflict between these three competing narratives. The purpose of the present article is neither to provide a chronological account of the fluctuating fortunes of posthumous Chartism nor to track shifting perceptions of the Chartist movement in the historiography (though these aspects will be touched on).[2] Rather, this article focuses on several areas that illuminate issues central to the politics of heritage, the invention of tradition and commemoration in popular movements, from political organizations to community-based heritage groups.[3] The historiography of commemoration and heritage is still weighted towards 'official' and elite attempts to invent traditions, such as that undertaken by states and colonial authorities, and is focused on the themes of nation-building, war and genocide.[4] Much less attention has been paid to dissident forms of commemoration in English political culture – largely because commemoration has often been dismissed by those on the left as a technique of rule used by elites. While the Chartists themselves may have lacked the capital, both cultural and often monetary, to raise monuments and inscribe their memory into the landscape, those who came afterwards were more fortunate. Chartists now have commemorative plaques, mainly of individual leaders but occasionally of the Chartist body – such as the Chartists who were shot dead during the 1842 strikes in the Potteries in Staffordshire, or the Newport mural of marching Chartists, which fell victim to municipal iconoclasm in 2013; spaces and places have also been memorialized, such as pubs where Chartists held meetings, or where conflict took place between Chartists and the authorities, with Newport in South Wales being the outstanding example, following the rising of November 1839.[5]

While memories of Chartism were and are by no means the exclusive property of left-wing political movements and activists (witness the role played by local, family and community history societies, museums and other voluntary bodies in securing plaques and exhibitions), they are not the main focus of the present article, which is mainly concerned with more explicit political invocations of Chartism.[6] As the Chartists themselves bare eloquent testimony, remembrance has been no less central to left-wing political movements, even if much of that has taken the form of intangible heritage.[7] With the rise of critical heritage studies, historians are now better placed to interrogate the form and content of dissident commemoration.[8] Critical heritage studies reject the conventional view that heritage is constituted by the inherent values of objects and practices; rather, it views heritage as the product of judgements made not by elites but the public (heritage from below) about what is valuable from the past. The heterogeneous ways in which knowledge of Chartism is produced and consumed – not just

[2] Several excellent critical overviews of the historiography already exist, notably: D. Thompson, 'Chartism and the historians', in *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London, 1993), pp. 19–44; M. Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists: searching for synthesis in the historiography of Chartism', *Historical Journal*, xxxix (1996), 479–95; and M. Chase, *The Chartists: Perspectives & Legacies* (London, 2015), ch. 2.

[3] I am following Laurajane Smith, Paul Shackel and Gary Campbell's definition of heritage: 'By "heritage" we mean not only tangible artefacts, buildings, places, sites and monuments, but also intangible traditions, commemorations, festivals, artwork, song and literature' (L. Smith, P. A. Shackel and G. Campbell, 'Introduction', in *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes*, ed. L. Smith, P. A. Shackel and G. Campbell (London, 2011), pp. 1–16, at p. 1).

[4] *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge, 1983); *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*, ed. J. R. Gillis (Princeton, 1994); J. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Conn., 1993); A. Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789–1996* (Oxford, 2000); and *Memory and Memorials: the Commemorative Century*, ed. W. Kidd and B. Murdoch (Aldershot, 2004).

[5] The online database *Open Plaques* returns twenty-two hits for 'Chartist', most of them plaques to leaders and places with Chartist connections ('Places, subjects, or plaques matching "chartist"', *Open Plaques* < https://openplaques.org/search?phrase=chartist&gosearch=Go> [accessed 27 March 2023]).

[6] E.g., the recent events commemorating the 1842 strike for the Charter in Halifax. While much of the impetus for securing a plaque came from the Halifax Trades Council and local left-wing campaigners, the Friends of Lister Lane Cemetery – a non-politically aligned group of volunteers – have worked with the Trades Council to erect an information board in the cemetery showing the location of the graves of several Halifax Chartists. The Calderdale Industrial Museum, which agreed to house the plaque on one of its exterior walls, is also a non-political trust. For the events in Halifax, see D. Whittall, 'The Great Strike of 1842: Halifax's Peterloo?', *Morning Star*, n.d. [July 2022] <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/the-great-strike-of-1842-halifaxs-peterloo> [accessed 27 March 2023].

[7] M. Roberts, *Chartism, Commemoration and the Cult of the Radical Hero* (Abingdon, 2020). For definitions of in/tangible heritage, see n. 2 above.

[8] Unsurprisingly, there is a more substantial literature on dissident commemoration in Irish, Scottish and, to a lesser extent, Welsh historiography: G. Pentland, '"Betrayed by infamous spies": the commemoration of Scotland's "Radical War" of 1820', *Past & Present*, cci (2008), 141–73; G. Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford, 2018); *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. I. McBride (Cambridge, 2001); C. Kennedy, 'Gender, memory and mourning in Irish Nationalist culture, ca.1798–1848', *Journal of British Studies*, lix (2020), 608–37; G. A. Williams, *The Welsh in Their History* (London, 1982), ch. 5; and C. Williams, 'History, heritage and commemoration: Newport, 1839–1989', *Llafur*, vi (1992), 5–16.

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through text-based histories but also oral tradition, pageants, public lectures, radio and television, ephemera and most recently graphic novels (each drawn on in the present article) – belies the existence of an equivalent 'authorized heritage discourse'.[9] Yet issues of ownership and power hierarchies cannot be ignored due to the roles played by those who have variously appointed themselves curators and custodians. As Guy Beiner has argued, even 'democratic history', such as attempts by the political left to construct a people's history, 'is by no means egalitarian – it has its own hierarchies and multi-layered power structures'.[10]

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that Chartism has always been 'ever present to the progressive mind', as claimed in 1910 by the Durham miners' leader and Lib-Lab M.P. John Wilson.[11] Like most things, the memory of Chartism has ebbed and flowed – even for the political left, for whom commemoration and heritage has, according to Patrick Wright, often collapsed into a disabling conservative nostalgia.[12] Recent work has begun to highlight the crucial role played by the invention of tradition and memory in modern British politics, but the persistence of a radical tradition beyond 1918 has attracted little attention, and what little exists has largely been episodic, focused on memories of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in the interwar Labour party or the role of heritage in contemporary British politics, to cite two examples.[13] As Antony Taylor has recently argued, 'While considerable attention has been devoted to the origins of the radical tradition, far less has been written about its later incarnations'.[14] Little has been written on posthumous Chartism after 1918, when the movement ceased to be in living memory, and at the precise moment when the British working classes finally achieved the cardinal demand of the People's Charter: universal manhood suffrage.

For purposes of focus, three key episodes in the memory of Chartism have been selected. The first is the battle within the interwar political left for control of the movement's memory. Second, the attempts by the political and cultural establishment to co-opt Chartism since the 1980s, with a particular emphasis on memorialization in England and Wales. Third, the role of Chartism in the contemporary and ongoing campaigns for democratic renewal and a people's history promoted by a range of heritage organizations and groups. Taken together, these three case studies of posthumous Chartism suggest that the broader English radical tradition, of which memory of the movement was a part, was anything but the consensual, enveloping and immutable entity that it has been presented as in some revisionist accounts. Similarly, the forms of remembrance and the practices of commemoration surrounding Chartism were (and are) far from static and repetitive – often identified as a key characteristic of 'how societies remember' – but evolving, dynamic and contested.[15] This article thus develops the argument of Laurajane Smith, Paul Shackel and Gary Campbell that heritage

[9] For the concept of authorized heritage discourse, see L. Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London, 2006), pp. 29–42. An authorized heritage discourse is defined as a top-down view of heritage that promotes the values and beliefs of an elite, which is contrasted with a subaltern heritage discourse from below.

[10] Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance*, p. 9; and F. Gleeson, 'Memory, community and the end of empire on the Isle of Dogs, 1980–2004', *Historical Research*, xcv (2022), 538–55, at p. 539.

[11] M. Chase, *Chartism: a New History* (Manchester, 2007), p. 359.

[12] P. Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: the National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1985), p. 157. See also R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987), pp. 47, 144. For a powerful critique of this 'heritage-baiting', see R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, i: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), pp. 259–71.

[13] C. V. J. Griffiths, 'Remembering Tolpuddle: rural history and the interwar labour movement', *History Workshop Journal*, xliv (1997), 144–69; C. V. J. Griffiths, 'History and the Labour Party', in *Class, Culture and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin*, ed. C. V. J. Griffiths, J. Nott and W. Whyte (Oxford, 2011), pp. 282–301; E. Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition in Contemporary British Politics: Past Politics and Present Histories* (Manchester, 2012); and R. Jobson, *Nostalgia and the Post-war Labour Party: Prisoners of the Past* (Manchester, 2018).

[14] A. Taylor and J. Enderby, 'From "flame" to "embers"? Whatever happened to the English Radical Tradition, c.1880–2020?', *Cultural and Social History*, xviii (2021), 243–64. There are two exceptions to this. First, Taylor's work on the ways in which ex-Chartists in their own lifetimes repackaged their earlier Chartism to facilitate their transition into the Gladstonian Liberal party, or to reassert their radical independence. In more recent work Taylor and Matthew Kidd have explored the role of radical memory, including Chartism, in the formation of early Labour activists, chiefly before 1918. Second, an edited volume by Alex Tyrrell and Paul Pickering that explored how nineteenth-century radicals and reformers created a culture of remembrance and memorialization, which included some discussion of the Chartists. See A. Taylor, 'Commemoration, memorialisation and political memory in post-Chartist radicalism: the 1885 Halifax Chartist reunion in context', in *The Chartist Legacy*, ed. O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (Rendlesham, 1999), pp. 255–85; A. Taylor, '"The pioneers of the great army of democrats": the mythology and popular history of the British Labour Party, 1890–1931', *Historical Research*, xci (2018), 723–43; M. Kidd, *The Renewal of Radicalism: Politics, Identity and Ideology in England, 1867–1924* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 8–9, 65, 141; and P. A. Pickering, 'Chartist rites of passage: commemorating Feargus O'Connor', in *Contested Sites: Commemoration, Memorial and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. P. A. Pickering and A. Tyrrell (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 101–26.

[15] P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 57–65.

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from below and those involved in it 'are able to eloquently present their own histories and heritage, often in uncompromising and challenging ways, that question dominant ways of conceptualizing the history and heritage of the working class'.[16]

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Ever since Chartism declined in the 1850s there has been a battle for the control of the memory of the movement. Although that memory was never the exclusive property of any one single inheritor of the radical tradition, by 1918 there is no doubt that the political left saw itself as the rightful heir of Chartism. But this presented two linked problems in the interwar years. First, there was a perception that popular knowledge about Chartism was deficient: 'From the people of England this treasure has been hidden', remarked the communist Salme Dutt in her 1938 study of the Chartists.[17] Second, the political left itself was internally divided. The Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) leader J. Bruce Glasier complained in 1919 that Chartism 'seems strangely far back from us in time' with the result that 'many of our younger speakers appear either to have little knowledge of it, or disdain to refer to it'. 'What a mistake that is', he concluded.[18] Unsurprisingly, those like Glasier read into Chartism a validation of independent working-class politics: 'William Lovett was the first ILP'er', declared the Glasgow *Forward* in 1920.[19] As these comments imply, this was at least in part the result of a generational shift: the absence at meetings of the 'whitehaired', those who remembered the movement, Glasier opined, had severed the transgenerational links between the present-day labour movement and the radical past.[20] Glasier was perhaps too harsh on the younger generation. When the communist leader Harry Pollitt contested Rhondda East in 1935, he recalled that he had often been asked during the campaign by younger activists about the history of the labour movement, including the Chartists. While Pollitt appreciated the thirst for historical knowledge, he, too, was forced to concede the general historical ignorance of the masses.[21]

Like the more militant Welsh labour leader Nes Edwards, Pollitt took the view that this lack of knowledge about Chartism was more insidious than generational shift and could be traced back to a wing of the Chartists themselves. The attempt to present Labour as a constitutional movement from 'the Lib-Labs down to the "Rightists" of the modern movement', as he put it, had its origins in moral force Chartism – the Fabian view associated with Mark Hovell, Julius West and G. D. H. Cole.[22] This Fabian vision furthered the Labour party's mission to broaden its appeal beyond manual workers, by developing a more inclusive politics that transcended class and countered the challenge that Labour was a socialist party.[23] As far as Labour was concerned, the other advantage of the Fabian view was that, in rejecting the rhetoric and practice of physical force Chartism, it also lent itself to the broader, mainstream political culture of the interwar years. In reaction to fears of brutalization and the rise of political extremism at home and abroad, this mainstream rejected the traditions of protest, demonstrations and rallies, which were identified with the communists.[24]

This Fabian view was contested by the more extreme political left, who clung to the rival, second memory of Chartism as a militant, class-conscious movement. 'So many of those in the labour movement who are familiar with [its] historical development', Pollitt complained, 'so often distort this

[16] Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 'Introduction', p. 7.
[17] S. A. Dutt, *When England Arose* (London, 1939), p. 5.
[18] *Labour Leader*, 23 Jan. 1919.
[19] *Forward*, 27 March 1920 (review of Lovett's autobiography). For similar examples, see *Clarion*, 12 March 1892, 5 Sept. 1892 (Arthur Henderson at Manchester unveiling of restored monument to Ernest Jones). On the role of the radical tradition more broadly in this period, see J. Enderby, 'The English radical tradition and the British left, 1885–1945' (unpublished Sheffield Hallam University Ph.D. thesis, 2019), ch. 1.
[20] On transgenerational belonging, see G. Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, 2007), p. 151.
[21] *Daily Worker*, 27 Nov. 1935.
[22] Thompson, 'Chartism and the historians', pp. 27–30; Chase, *The Chartists*, ch. 2; and M. Chase, '"Packed tightly with the strong meat of history and political economy": Mark Hovell and histories of Chartism', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xciv (2018), 43–57.
[23] J. Lawrence, 'Labour and the politics of class', in *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, ed. D. Feldman and J. Lawrence (Cambridge, 2011), at p. 239.
[24] J. Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, lxxv (2003), 557–89; L. Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Modern Labour Party* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 50–67; and Kidd, *Renewal of Radicalism*, pp. 192–3.

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into a picture not of a fighting British working class movement but one that has developed in a very modest peaceful sort of way'.[25] The result was that the physical force element had been spurned, which, in the view of Nes Edwards, paralleled the contemporary attack on Bolsheviks. There could, however, be subtle differences within the far left. While the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.) read into Chartism the importance of courting the trade unions, for H.M. Hyndman the main lesson of Chartism was the dangers of relying on trade unionism. Hyndman, concerned about the rising power of trade unions in the developing labour movement, quoted Bronterre O'Brien (the favourite Chartist leader for this brand of socialism), who had cautioned that unions were sectional and militated against the development of a working-class consciousness.[26] In a further contrast, *Lansbury's Labour Leader* published an article by Raymond Postgate on the Ashton working-class Chartist Richard Pilling as a 'rebel pioneer', just three days before the outbreak of the General Strike of 1926. Commemorating an individual working-class Chartist was unusual, and the article made the point that rescuing the lives of workers like Pilling was difficult as they were so often lost to history. This article also contained a less than subtle attack on Feargus O'Connor for failing to support the strike for the Charter in summer 1842.[27] Thus, although they interpreted the legacy of the movement differently, for Edwards, Hyndman and Postgate the wrong kind of Chartism was being remembered, if at all, while 'the heroic doings of our Chartist forebears have been hidden away in the family cupboard'.[28] Keeping proper knowledge about the movement before the people was part of the ongoing battle for the direction of the contemporary labour movement, and signalled a different diagnosis of working-class apathy than the more familiar charges of lack of aspiration and education of desire.[29] While ever inspiring stories of the people's own history was kept from them, little could be expected of their politicization.

A decade later the C.P.G.B. were laying claim to the mantle of Chartism, singling out, unsurprisingly, Bronterre O'Brien, George Julian Harney and, above all, Ernest Jones as the real heroes of the movement on account of their internationalism, their association with Marx and Engels, and their anti-capitalist stance, ground that had been laid by the British Socialist Party.[30] By contrast, Feargus O'Connor, the great Irish Chartist leader, was condemned because of his opposition to socialism, a view put forward very strongly by Reg Groves.[31] It was not until the 'new left' turned to the politics of direct action in the late 1960s and early 1970s that O'Connor's posthumous career was rehabilitated – as an advocate of all-out demonstrations on the street, though Jones was still popular with Marxists into the 1990s.[32] The many articles on Chartism in the C.P.G.B.'s *Daily Worker* were invariably accompanied by the same pen-and-ink portrait of Jones.[33]

One could be forgiven for assuming that Jones was one of the most reviled leaders of the movement judging by recent historiography, which has painted him as a charlatan, a swindler and a man of few principles on the make.[34] Focusing on the memory rather than the historiography of Jones gets us much closer to understanding the man's popularity, which clearly endured well into the twentieth

[25] *Daily Worker*, 27 Nov. 1935.

[26] *Justice*, 24 Nov. 1921. This association of the National Socialist Party with O'Brien is hardly surprising as the group traced its origin to the Social Democratic Federation, one of the constituents of which had been the O'Brienites, latter-day followers of the Chartist leader in London (*Justice*, 8 Feb. 1923).

[27] *Lansbury's Labour Leader*, 1 May 1926.

[28] N. Edwards, *John Frost and the Chartist Movement in Wales* (Abertillery, 1924), pp. 1–2.

[29] L. Black, '"What kind of people are you?" Labour, the people and the "new political history"', in *Interpreting the Labour Party*, ed. J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam (Manchester, 2003), pp. 26–30.

[30] E.g., *The People's Calendar*, compiled by Dora Montefoire – in the tradition of popular almanacs – reproduced a quotation for every day of the year by luminaries from the radical tradition. The only Chartists to appear were Ernest Jones (four dates) and Bronterre O'Brien (one date). See D. B. Montefoire, *The People's Calendar* (London, n.d. [1918]), copy in W.C.M.L.

[31] *Daily Worker*, 27 Jan. 1930.

[32] E.g., R. Groves, *But We Shall Rise Again: a Narrative History of Chartism* (London, 1938), p. 27; and *Marxism Today*, June 1991, p. 11. Unsurprisingly, Jones features heavily in the papers of post-war communists Eddie and Ruth Frow, some with the endorsement of 'Communist Party, Lancs & Cheshire District, History Group' (*Ernest Jones (Chartist): a Fighter for Manchester's Working Class* (Manchester, 1953), copy in W.C.M.L., Ruth and Eddie Frow Papers).

[33] *Daily Worker*, 27 Jan. 1930, 1 Nov. 1930.

[34] M. Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics, 1819–1869* (Oxford, 2003); Chase, *Chartism*, p. 338; cf. J. Saville, *Ernest Jones: Chartist* (London, 1952). For a more generous appraisal of Jones's enduring popularity in the labour movement, mainly before 1918, see A. Taylor, 'Radical funerals, burial customs and political commemoration: the death and posthumous life of Ernest Jones', *Humanities Research*, x (2002), at p. 37; and Taylor, 'Commemoration', pp. 267–71.

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century and not just with Hyndman and the Social Democratic Federation.[35] Tellingly, Jones was 'the best-remembered Chartist',[36] and the C.P.G.B. had no monopoly over Jones as he was also invoked by the I.L.P. The latter's memory of Jones in the immediate post-war years was different from that of the C.P.G.B. in the 1930s. The I.L.P.'s *Labour Leader* interpreted Jones's career as a rebuke to those on the far left who believed that it was only through the proletariat itself that its salvation would come: from the Leveller John Lilburne to Jones, the 'apostles of democracy [have] been men of the non-proletarian class'. The *Labour Leader* encouraged local I.L.P. branches to hold 'Ernest Jones centenary gatherings' in January 1919. Also unlike the C.P.G.B., the I.L.P. was less comfortable with Jones's rhetoric of physical force.[37] The veneration of this tradition of gentleman reformers and their aversion to the rhetoric of physical force placed the I.L.P. closer to the Labour party than it did the emerging C.P.G.B. Mainstream Labour also appealed to memories of Jones. The *Daily Herald*, while judging Jones 'too impetuous, perhaps, for the business of leadership', appreciated his fearlessness and honesty.[38] Further evidence of the contested nature of the memory of Jones was that he was also still being claimed by the Liberal party as part of their own tradition of gentleman reformers who appealed to working-class radicals. This was no specious claim as the tradition lived on in the Liberal party in the person of Jones's son, Llewellyn Atherley Jones, who died in 1929.[39]

The directive from the Comintern in 1935 that national communist parties reclaim their respective national pasts for propaganda purposes in the fight against the falsification of history by fascists led to a stronger emphasis on the English radical tradition. In truth this ground had been well prepared.[40] The C.P.G.B.'s rediscovery of Chartism really commenced in the Great Depression when it launched a new 'Worker's Charter' (of nine points rather than the original Chartist six) for increased protection for workers and support for the unemployed.[41] At times the communists preached their own condescending Fabian teleology by contrasting themselves favourably with their Chartist forebears by claiming to complete the work that the Chartists had begun but were deemed incapable of completing because of their ideological immaturity. But this did not stop the communists from portraying themselves as the rightful descendants of the Chartists, a lineal descent that was visualized in the mural produced for the Marx Memorial Library, painted by Viscount Hastings in 1935. The Chartists symbolized people power (they are depicted as a crowd of workers), though revealingly the figure of Robert Owen towers above them (who, for all his paternalistic faults, was at least a socialist), flanked by Marx and Engels.[42]

The communists saw in Chartism the efficacy of people power – and the need for strength, resolve and resilience, even in the face of defeat. Workers should therefore take pride in the memory of Chartism.[43] The legitimacy and efficacy of protest, processions and the laying claim to public space was part of the Chartist bequest. When unemployed workers associated with the C.P.G.B. staged a protest demonstration at Blaina in April 1935, one of the leaders reminded the crowd that the Chartist movement in South Wales had started in that very place.[44] In 1938 there was a running battle between the communists and the British Union of Fascists over holding meetings on Clerkenwell Green, with the former staking a more legitimate claim on the grounds that this was hallowed radical terrain on which Chartists had met.[45] It was incumbent on those in the present to continue the Chartist struggle. In a gushing review of Geoffrey Trease's children's novel *Comrades for the Charter*, based on the Newport Chartist Rising of 1839, Harry Pollitt highly recommended that activists read it. As Steven Fielding

[35] Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, p. 15. On the distinction between history and memory, see Cubitt, *History and Memory*, pp. 43–4. J. F. C. Harrison recalled of his time as an extramural lecturer at Leeds in the 1950s that one of his students, a woolpacker, 'talked of Ernest Jones, the Halifax Chartist leader, as if he had died yesterday, instead of 1869'. Quoted in M. Chase, 'Twentieth-century labour histories', in *New Directions in Local History Since Hoskins*, ed. C. Dyer and others (Hatfield, 2011), pp. 54–65, at p. 55.

[36] D. Thompson, *The Dignity of Chartism*, ed. S. Roberts (London, 2015), p. 139.

[37] *Labour Leader*, 9 and 23 Jan. 1919.

[38] *Daily Herald*, 11 July 1928.

[39] *Nottingham Journal*, 17 June 1929. For similar Liberal invoking of Jones's memory, see *Halifax Evening Courier*, 17 Sept. 1932.

[40] A. Howe, 'Red history wars? Communist propaganda and the manipulation of Celtic history in the thirties', *Journal of the Sydney Society of Scottish History*, xiii (2010), 68–93, at pp. 69–70.

[41] *Daily Worker*, 24 Sept. and 25 Oct. 1930, 14 Apr. 1931. On the Workers' Charter, see M. Worley, *Class Against Class: the Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2003).

[42] *Daily Mirror*, 10 Oct. 1935.

[43] *Daily Worker*, 27 Jan. 1930.

[44] *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Apr. 1935.

[45] *Daily Worker*, 19 July 1938.

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has observed of the interwar years, 'Wherever one stood on the left, this was, to varying degrees, a disappointing time'.[46] While fiction of the broad left was itself diverse and served several different purposes, one of these was clearly uplift and mobilization. Pollitt emphasized the affective dimension of reading this novel: 'to read and study, and with every page feel a surging anger against capitalism and of admiration for the struggle conducted by the Chartists' was for him extremely rewarding, not least because it encouraged agency in the present. The novel produced in him 'a desire to do more in the immediate fight of the working-class'.[47] Trease was no communist, though he certainly had left-wing sympathies, which stemmed from his time as a social worker in the East End of London. Yet this did not stop *Comrades* from being appropriated by the communists. The *Daily Worker* adapted part of the novel into a 'playlet' for its young readers to perform.[48]

As we enter the era of the popular front in the later 1930s and early 1940s, Chartism was increasingly invoked as a way of uniting the political left (though less so the extreme political left), which led to a blurring of the boundaries between the Fabian and militant class-conscious memories of Chartism. This culminated in the celebrations of the centenary of Chartism in 1939 as part of the May Day holiday. Why the year 1939 rather than 1938 was selected is unclear, as the People's Charter had been published in 1838, though it is true that the year 1839 represented the first of three peaks in terms of the movement's traction. The centenary was widely celebrated throughout Britain, with the greatest festivities tending towards places where Chartism had been a significant force, notably South Wales, London and the Potteries. In the Potteries, the North Staffordshire May Day Committee organized a demonstration that featured tableaux on the Chartist movement. The Potteries demonstration brought together representatives from trade unions, the co-operative movement and 'the Labour movement', including the local communists.[49] The souvenir guide of the Potteries demonstration began by presenting fascism as a challenge to the Chartist bequest of free speech and free association. At the same time, the guide noted that the fight against fascism should not be allowed to eclipse the evils of capitalism and the 'reactionary financial interests standing behind Chamberlain and the National Government'. Chartism might have failed, but 'to-day we have confidence in ourselves and our movement because Chartism gave us an example of an independent working-class political party'. Here, once again, was an empowering radical tradition that needed to be defended and extended by building the trade union and co-operative movements, and by 'strengthen[ing] our Labour Party into a united instrument for defence of democracy and the advance of socialism'.[50] The pageant in South Wales was also a product of collaboration – between the South Wales Miners' Federation and the Labour Research Department.[51] These centenary celebrations culminated in the calling of a new Chartist Convention (after the body that had co-ordinated the three petitions that the Chartists sent to parliament) in late 1940 to demand a government representative of the whole people.[52]

But even in this era of the popular front, there were still discordant voices from the militant left that claimed that Chartism was being used to cement the Fabian view of gradual, parliamentary, cross-class socialism espoused by mainstream Labour. The pageant organized by the London communists began with the burning down of a workhouse. In addition to registering the power of physical force, the pageant also made reference to Chartist internationalism, in particular the Polish uprising of 1846, and featured Karl Marx in one of the scenes addressing the Chartists, which is evidence that the radical tradition was not always as English and insular as often argued.[53] What is particularly

[46] S. Fielding, 'Novels for "thinking people": fiction and the inter-war broad left', in *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885–1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner*, ed. C. Williams and A. Edwards (Manchester, 2015), pp. 98–120, at p. 99.

[47] *Daily Worker*, 14 Nov. 1934.

[48] *Daily Worker*, 13 July 1935. For Trease, see J. R. Townsend, 'Trease (Robert) Geoffrey (1909–1998)', *O.D.N.B.* <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-69281> [accessed 27 March 2023].

[49] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 10 Feb. and 1 May 1939.

[50] North Staffs. May Day Committee, *1839–1939: the Potteries and the People's Charter* (Newcastle-under-Lyne, 1939), copy in author's possession. This largely echoed the conclusions reached by Neil Stewart in his book-length study *The Fight for the Charter* (London, 1937), pp. xiii, 254.

[51] *Daily Worker*, 6 March 1839.

[52] *Daily Worker*, 25 Nov. 1940. For similar calls that invoked the Chartist Convention, see *All Power*, June 1923.

[53] M. Wallis, 'The popular front pageant: its emergence and decline', *New Theatre Quarterly*, xi (1995), 17–32; cf. Enderby, 'English radical tradition', pp. 22, 164.

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noteworthy about the internationalism present in the London communist pageant is that members of the Marxist Historians Group had acted as historical advisors, including Christopher Hill, A. L. Morton and above all, Dona Torr – three figures invariably cited as high priests of a native and insular English radical tradition. In a predictable, though highly inaccurate, rewriting of history, one scene has a group of Chartists who convert to communism, before jumping forwards seventy years and subsequently bringing the pageant up to the present day to underscore the title: '1839 – Chartism. 1939 – Communism'.[54] While some communists, such as J. P. Lilburne and Morton, did situate Chartism in an essentially English radical tradition, others such as Pollitt were more internationalist. Indicative of the persistence and deep-rootedness of the 'class against class' emphasis from the late 1920s, the communists continued to view Chartism as an early expression of militant proletarianism and working-class internationalism.[55]

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This battle within the left for the memory of Chartism continued into the post-war years. The communists and their successors were still contesting the Fabian view of Chartism, which sterilized the movement. In addition, the second memory of Chartism as a militant expression of working-class consciousness gained support from a new generation of academic historians committed to 'history from below' and who often identified themselves with left-wing movements and causes. But these historians proved to be just as divided politically and methodologically as the broader political left with which most, though by no means all, identified. As a result, the Fabian view was never fully supplanted within the historical profession in the 1960s and 1970s.[56] Until the 1980s, it was the dissident political left who did most to keep alive the memory of armed Chartism. As was the case in the interwar years, disaffected groups on the political left invoked Chartism either to push the Labour party in a more socialist direction or as a vehicle for attacking the moderation of mainstream Labour.[57] As late as the 1980s, there were still those on the left who challenged the Labour party's appropriation of Chartism. In an article to the *Guardian* in January 1986 the London socialist – and historian of Chartism himself – Keith Flett complained that 'once again the Labour leadership is trying to claim Chartism as its own'. The occasion for this protest was the attendance of Neil Kinnock at a memorial service for the Newport Chartist John Frost, leader of the 1839 uprising, during which Kinnock continued a tradition begun by the Chartists of laying flowers on the graves of those who had lost their lives in the rising. In a classic instance of invented tradition, Kinnock laid a red rose on Frost's memorial having been informed that this had been the flower and colour of choice of the Chartist themselves, though there is no evidence that red roses were the only flowers laid on the graves by the Chartists in the years after Newport. Flett, attacking the recent drift towards the right in the Labour party, noted sardonically that the Chartists Kinnock identified with were not socialists, and had Kinnock been a Chartist in the 1840s, he would have tried to expel Harney and Jones from the movement. The most authentically Chartist part of the memorial was the accosting of Kinnock by black community leaders from Bristol, who attacked the Labour leader for his record on helping some of the most impoverished

[54] Modern Record Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.334/5/CP/4, Tom Mann Papers, Pageant of Chartism Rally programme booklet 1939, pp. 3, 10. See also A. Bartie and others, 'A pageant of Chartism: heirs to the Charter', *The Redress of the Past* <https://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1149/> [accessed 27 March 2023]. A copy of the full script is held in W.C.M.L., Frow Box 72, *Heirs to the Charter, 1839–1939*.

[55] For the C.P.G.B. and working-class consciousness, see Worley, *Class Against Class*.

[56] Cf., e.g., J. Baxter, *Armed Resistance and Insurrection: the Early Chartist Experience* (Our History, lxxvi, History Group of the Communist Party, 1984) with the view of Chartism as a mainly constitutional movement in *The Chartist Experience: Working-Class Politics and Culture, 1830–1860*, ed. D. Thompson and J. Epstein (London, 1982).

[57] *Guardian*, 6 June and 5 Dec. 1968, 5 Oct. 1972. For similar attempts to invoke the Chartists, see *Kensington Post*, 30 May 1969 ('Chartists aim to prod Socialists'); *Long Eaton Advertiser*, 5 July 1968; and *Middlesex County Times*, 18 Oct. 1968. Much of this developed in response to the Socialist Charter of 1968, which, inter alia, led to the establishment of the *Chartist* magazine, organ of the Labour left, and underpinned the new urban left and local socialisms of the 1970s and early 1980s. As Mike Davies recalled, '"Chartist" sounded more open [than Militant]. Plus, we liked the idea of connecting to the unfinished democratic revolution of our 19th century forebears' (P. d'Ardenne, 'Fifty years of *Chartist*', *Chartist*, 1 May 2020 <https://www.chartist.org.uk/50-years-of-chartist/> [accessed 27 March 2023]).

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and vulnerable groups in the city.[58] The annual graveside orations delivered in memory of Bronterre O'Brien, organized by the Connolly Association, have served a similar purpose: when Arthur Scargill gave the 1996 oration, he attacked not only the Tories but also Labour for not defending the rights of trade unions more aggressively, and for their betrayal of socialism.[59]

The Fabian view was beginning to triumph by the late 1980s thanks, in part, to the rise of New Labour, which had been long in the making. In the post-war years the Fabian view had been given a fillip by Hugh Gaitskell – tutored, not uncoincidentally, by G. D. H. Cole.[60] In a curious way, the Fabian view was also validated by Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956), which some have seen as anticipating New Labour. For Crosland, while the Chartists stood condemned as incipient busybody socialists, at least in their later post-Chartist lives, he contrasted them favourably with the affluent but apathetic working class of his own day.[61] With the triumph of New Labour, the Fabian memory of Chartism reached its apotheosis, though it could still occasion dissent within the Labour party. In 1999 Rhodri Morgan, the Labour M.P. for Cardiff South West, in attacking New Labour for abandoning the working classes commented that 'history is not a Blairite specialism and I'm sure most members of the Downing Street Policy Unit would chirp that the Chartists were a boy band'. Morgan urged the Welsh to 'draw strength from their history of popular rebellion', including the Chartists, who 'knew that without democracy and accountability the needs of ordinary working people will be ignored'.[62]

Unfortunately for Morgan history was proving itself to be something of a Blairite specialism. The New Labour vision of Chartism found validation in the historiography of the movement and nineteenth-century radicalism more generally. Writing in the *Observer* in October 2002 justifying Labour's first term in office, Peter Hain indignantly remarked that because of journalistic spin and scepticism 'you would hardly believe that today's Labour Party has the same values as our socialist pioneers', values that he listed as: democracy, justice, individual freedom, and confronting inequalities of power and wealth.[63] In a classic New Labour move, he went on to point out that none of the party's forebears, including the Chartists – had been socialists. A decade earlier, this argument had been made by the Cambridge 'currents of radicalism' school of academic historians. At the same time, the new 'Manchester school' of postmodernist historians challenged from a different perspective the democratic, confrontational and class character of Chartism.[64] Both the Cambridge and the Manchester school were attempts to reclaim Chartism, radicalism and organized Labour from the Marxist interpretation of history. Although the communists had never had exclusive property of Chartism in the interwar and post-war years, they had probably done more than most to invoke the second memory of Chartism. By the 1960s and 1970s this was beginning to pay historiographical dividends as Marxist and more broadly socialist readings of British popular politics were in the ascendant. This was especially true of a new generation of students who had been the first in their

[58] *Guardian*, 10 and 13 Oct. 1986. Flett has done more than most to keep the memory of Chartism alive and to use it in ways that contest the establishment's attempts to appropriate Chartism, as well as using it as a vehicle for the articulation of a socialist critique of the mainstream political left (*Morning Star*, 12 Apr. 2011, 6 Feb. 2017).

[59] Marx Memorial Library, YD02, *Honouring the Memory of Bronterre O'Brien: the Address by Arthur Scargill at the 1996 Commemoration in Abney Park Cemetery*.

[60] Chase, *The Chartists*, p. 20.

[61] A. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London, 1956). For Crosland, see L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951–64* (Basingstoke, 2003), ch. 6.

[62] *Observer*, 21 Nov. 1999.

[63] *Observer*, 27 Oct. 2002.

[64] G. Stedman Jones, *The Language of Class: Studies in Working-Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983); and *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics, 1850–1914*, ed. E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid (Cambridge, 1991). See also *Labour's First Century*, ed. P. Thane, N. Tiratsoo and D. Tanner (Cambridge, 2000); M. Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2011); P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 2; and J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: a Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993), *passim*. The 'currents of radicalism' provoked a trenchant and long-standing debate in which the character of Chartism became a synecdoche for the place (or absence) of class in modern British history, and, broader still, the question of whether it was in those postmodern times possible to write social history and the history of popular politics as traditionally conceived. For a summary of the debate (and a trenchant reassertion of the class-based, confrontational character of Chartism), see J. Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, 2003), Part 1. See also N. Kirk, 'Setting the standard: Dorothy Thompson, the discipline of history and the study of Chartism', in *The Duty of Discontent: Essays for Dorothy Thompson*, ed. O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (London, 1995), pp. 1–32. The best account of Thompson's life is in Thompson, *Dignity of Chartism*, pp. xiii–xxx, and in the autobiographical reflections in Thompson, *Outsiders*, pp. 1–13.

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families to go to university, and who had reached maturity in the days of student protest, anti-Vietnam demonstrations and other forms of direct action.[65] By the 1980s, with the rise of Conservatism, the collapse of communism and the growth of postmodernism, this Marxists interpretation was under siege, and Chartism, hitherto seen as a class-conscious movement par excellence, was a victim of revisionism.

New Labour politicians and revisionist historians alike were divesting Chartism of its radical as well as its socialist edge to make it fit seamlessly into a narrative of radical liberalism that stretched back to the 1760s and reached forwards to New Labour. Conflict (let alone class conflict and direct action) had little place in this new Whig version of the historical, gradual and largely peaceful unfolding of British liberal democracy. Ironically, this reinterpretation of Chartism paved the way for the apotheosis of the movement's appropriation by the establishment. As the eminent historian of Chartism Dorothy Thompson cautioned in one of her last public lectures in 2011, since the 1980s Chartism had been co-opted by the political and cultural establishment into a right-wing consensus. In this rendering, the Chartists were presented as premature liberal democrats who had been ahead of their times.

Just as New Labour had been long in the making, so, too, had Chartism's path to acceptance by the establishment. As we have already seen, the Fabian view stretched back to the Chartists themselves. The fact that five of the six points of the People's Charter had all been achieved by 1918 made the movement look respectable. As early as the 1920s, Chartism was finding a place on the airwaves of the B.B.C., initially mainly in the form of lectures, notably by the young G. D. H. Cole (more grist to the Fabian view). By the 1930s and post-war years this had broadened out into plays and more imaginative programmes that, for example, featured 'Chartist voices' from the different regions (a move to make the B.B.C. appear less metropolitan, as a discerning article in the *Nottingham Journal* tartly observed), as well as programmes for schoolchildren.[66] The *Daily Worker* could barely contain its disdain: 'Oh no, there's no political bias at the BBC. And that is why the Radio Times announced last week' a programme on the Chartists. The *Radio Times* listing had described the programme as 'The story of the growth and initial failure of the notorious Chartist movement'. 'What this incredible statement means', the *Daily Worker* responded, 'it is hard to say'. The problem with the B.B.C, programme was that it had presented the Chartist demands as 'so moderate that they have almost all been granted since' but still attached the label notorious. The *Daily Worker* counselled that those at the B.B.C. ought to have a better grasp of history.[67] With titles such as 'the Chartist fiasco' for a programme on the centenary of 1848, the B.B.C. did not exactly help itself with a reputation for peddling establishment history.[68] In fairness to the B.B.C., in the absence of the transcripts of what was actually said in these early programmes it would be straining credulity to suggest that an establishment view of Chartism was always being put forward over the airwaves. In more recent times, at least, the B.B.C. has included voices from the political and academic left in its radio broadcasts, including both E.P. and Dorothy Thompson and most recently Bill Morris on the black London Chartist leader William Cuffay.[69] The movement has appeared at least twice on the B.B.C.'s prime-time programme *Who Do You Think You Are?*, in an episode in which it was revealed that the actor Jeremy Irons had a Chartist ancestor, and in one in which the comedian Jack Whitehall and his father discovered that one of their ancestors was the Newport solicitor Thomas Phillips, who had played a key part in securing the death sentence on the Newport rebels in 1839.

[65] Chase, *The Chartists*, p. 23.

[66] *Nottingham Journal*, 18 May 1938; and *Radio Times*, 22 March 1936 (entry for 'John Frost, the Newport Chartist' (radio play), B.B.C., U.K., 19:15, 28 March 1936, B.B.C. Regional Programme), 23 Nov. 1934 (entry for 'The Chartist riots', *Children's Hour* (radio programme), B.B.C., U.K., 17:15, 26 Nov. 1934, B.B.C. Regional Programme), 1 Feb. 1973 (entry for 'The Chartist movement', *For Schools* (radio programme), written by Barry Carman, B.B.C., U.K., 10:30, 6 Feb. 1973, B.B.C. Radio 4). All references to B.B.C. broadcasts are from the *B.B.C. Programme Index* <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk> [accessed 29 March 2023].

[67] *Daily Worker*, 6 May 1938.

[68] *Radio Times*, 2 Apr. 1948 (entry for *Chartist Fiasco* (radio programme), talk by W. Baring Pemberton, B.B.C., U.K., 20:15, 10 Apr. 1948, B.B.C. Third Programme).

[69] 'Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Land Plan', *Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen's Escape to the Country* (radio programme), B.B.C., 02:15, 10 March 2017, B.B.C. Radio 4 Extra <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0152F858?bcast=123691598> [accessed 6 Nov 2020]; and *Britain's Black Revolutionary* (radio programme), prod. P. Sellars, B.B.C., U.K., 01:30, 3 July 2019, B.B.C. Radio 4 Extra <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/01626DE0?bcast=129627489> [accessed 6 Nov. 2020].

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Again, in fairness to the B.B.C., expert historians were interviewed and consulted in the filming of these programmes, and the nature of the movement was accurately portrayed.[70]

By the late twentieth century Chartism had become part of mainstream history. Chartism was also now part of the history National Curriculum – thanks largely to Conservatives rather than Labour – as it still is, though it has never been compulsory.[71] In schools the history of the movement is told largely as part of a longer (gradual and peaceful) narrative about the extension of the franchise and liberal democracy.[72] As premature liberal democrats, Chartists no longer appeared as politically controversial. On 29 October 2013 a house of commons early day motion (E.D.M.) moved that the house celebrate the 175th anniversary of the publication of the People's Charter. Although the E.D.M. was proposed by Labour M.P. Hywel Francis, it was signed by seventy-seven M.P.s. Most were Labour, but also included were senior Tories, Liberal Democrats, Scottish Nationalists, Plaid Cymru and a small number of Northern Irish parties, including the D.U.P. and the S.D.L.P.[73] Never before had Chartism visibly commanded such cross-party endorsement.[74] At the same time, this was also evidence that Labour no longer had a monopoly over the radical tradition, an uncomfortable reality that it continues to be reminded of down to the present day. Plaid Cymru, for example, have laid claim to groups such as the Chartists as part of a narrative that views these episodes as forerunners of the independence movement, while the Green party has similarly tried to position itself as a more authentic inheritor of the radical tradition.[75] Thanks to the involvement of Malcolm Chase as historical consultant, the E.D.M. and the resulting memorialization did not amount to a celebration of Chartism as dull, but worthy, white men: the two Chartists selected to appear in a temporary exhibition in the 'No Lobby' of the Commons were the physical force Chartists John Frost and William Cuffay. At Chase's urging, the exhibition also emphasized that Chartism had begun a discussion about whether women, too, should be enfranchised. Although the demand for women's suffrage was omitted from the final draft of the People's Charter, the unprecedented involvement of women in the movement paved the way for later groups such as the Suffragettes.[76]

Perhaps the most telling piece of evidence of Chartism's appropriation by the establishment is that even Conservatives were laying claim to the movement by the 2010s. At the 2010 general election and the subsequent debates in parliament on reforming the electoral system, the Tories called for genuinely equal-sized constituencies to be introduced claiming to make good on the promise held out by the Chartists, a demand reiterated by Michael Gove in October 2016. Labour was quick to assert that it, too, supported this venerable Chartist demand. Interestingly, others – including some Labour

[70] 'Jeremy Irons', *Who Do You Think You Are?* (television programme), prod. L. Carter, B.B.C., U.K., 11:05, 31 Dec. 2010, B.B.C.2 <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/005CBB68?bcast=58380903> [accessed 7 Nov. 2020]; and 'Jack and Michael Whitehall', *Who Do You Think You Are?* (television programme), dir. E. Scoones, B.B.C., U.K., 19:00, 21 June 2020, B.B.C.4 <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/142B6F15?bcast=132193241> [accessed 7 Nov. 2020].

[71] In the early years of the National Curriculum, Chartism was listed explicitly as a possible topic at Key Stage 3, just as it is today as part of a broader topic on the extension of the franchise, but the latter is a non-statutory topic. See H.M.I., *History From 5 to 16* (London, 1988), p. 13; 'Statutory guidance: national curriculum in England: history programmes of study', *Department for Education*, 11 Sept. 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study> [accessed 30 March 2023]. Chartism is also listed as a topic in several G.C.S.E. and A Level syllabuses that feature nineteenth-century papers: e.g., *AQA GCSE History (8145) Britain: Power and the People* (Manchester, 2019), p. 25; and *AQA A/AS Level History (7041–2)* (Manchester, 2019), study unit 1F, p. 25.

[72] Though not all school history textbooks serve up a desiccated version of Chartism: the Schools History Project's *Dying for the Vote* – a Key Stage 3 text – begins with the Newport rising and pays some attention to the violence between Chartists and the state (J. Richardson and I. Dawson, *Dying for the Vote: How Ordinary People Won the Right to Vote* (London, 2002), pp. 6, 25).

[73] *Chartism and Parliament* (E.D.M. 644, 29 Oct. 2013) <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/46131/chartism-and-parliament> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[74] This cross-party support had been long in the making, and the ground had been prepared especially at a local level in relation to commemorative plaques and designating Chartist land settlements conservation areas, for example. Conservatives have on occasion objected to forms of Chartist commemoration, but this has tended to be on the grounds of cost and benefit to local ratepayers, or the inconvenience of living in conversation areas, rather than opposition to the radical tradition per se. E.g., *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4 Sept. 1990; Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., Commons, cmxxxi (10 May 1977), cols. 1293–7; and *Hereford Times*, 24 Oct. 2003.

[75] E.g., Plaid Cymru, 'Wales has a proud history of protesting from non-conformism to Chartism', *Twitter*, 16 March 2021 <https://twitter.com/Plaid_Cymru/status/1371792822106488834> [accessed 30 March 2023]; '"Second Chartist movement" urged by Peter Tatchell in speech to Green conference', *Green Party*, 21 Oct. 2004 <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/archive/news-archive/1632.html> [accessed 30 March 2023]; and C. Lucas, 'Political change must come: but how?', *Green Party*, 20 Apr. 2014, https://www.greenparty.org.uk/natalies-blog/2014/04/20/political-change-must-come-but-how/ [accessed 30 March 2023].

[76] M. Chase, 'Shifting perceptions of the Chartist movement' (R.E.F. 2014 impact case study), Oct. 2013 <https://results.ref.ac.uk/(S(rpug3lctbcjysmhwap1wmvr4))/Submissions/Impact/2417> [accessed 30 March 2023]. See also M. Chase, 'Chartism's black activist', *History Today*, lvii (2010), 20–22.

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M.P.s who contributed to this debate – thought that there had been too much mention of Chartism in the discussion on electoral reform, with Phil Wilson, Labour M.P. for Sedgefield, wryly concluding that 'we have come a long way since those days, so drawing comparisons between the Chartists and what we are doing today is spurious'. In Wilson's view the Chartists had not got everything right, notably their demand for annual parliaments: 'I do not think we are going to go along with that'.[77] Such was the damning judgement of New Labour on the Chartists. Here, too, is an example of what Emily Robinson has interpreted in contemporary British politics as the decline of ideologically distinct approaches to history and the pressure to appear progressive and not beholden to the dead weight of history.[78]

In a move that signalled Chartism's 'symbolic assimilation to the national heritage', in 2001 the National Trust bought a former Chartist cottage in Bromsgrove that had been built as part of the Land Plan estate at Great Dodford. There are some parallels here with Hilda Kean's argument that working-class heritage and commemoration – notably the annual festival at Tolpuddle (in memory of the Dorchester labourers) – flourish in rural contexts, which are anachronistic and out of place and sanctify moments of defeat in the labour movement.[79] There is certainly an element of anachronism. At Great Dodford, there is no mention on the National Trust website of pikes and armed uprisings, only that Chartists who lived on the estates were in retreat from the towns to a life of 'self-sufficiency in the countryside'.[80] These Chartists were incipient organic, sustainable and self-sufficient allotmenteers, not militant workers. The original plan of making the cottage a 'Chartist Study Centre' came to nothing.[81] In fairness to the National Trust, it has done a much better job with the 'kitchen garden' initiative at Rosedene, which was conceived as a way of showing how the Chartists actually tried to live on the estates, in terms of what they grew, how and why.[82] On the other hand, Chartist heritage in the English countryside is hardly out of place: the brainchild of Feargus O'Connor, the Land Plan was designed to relocate urban workers back on the land by purchasing estates, dividing them into smallholdings, complete with cottages, and renting them to subscribers, who were chosen by lot in periodic ballots.[83] And nor, ultimately, is the visitor being confronted with a moment of failure in the labour movement. True, the Land Plan 'failed', as history invariably records, because O'Connor was unable to secure legality for the scheme and to adequately finance it, but when the visitor is confronted with the elegant cottages built for workers in the English countryside, this hardly looks like failure: some 250 houses were built, and many remain. Cottages on other estates, which are still lived in, have been designated conservation areas on account of their historical and architectural significance, testament to several generations of planning and development committees, parish councils, and heritage-minded residents, and bodies such as the Victorian Society, which have collectively ensured that one of Chartism's widely assumed 'failures' has been preserved for posterity.[84] But what makes much of the heritage surrounding

[77] Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 6th ser., Commons, dxv (6 Sept. 2010), cols. 54, 107; *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill: Third Report of Session 2010–11* (*Parl. Papers* 2010 (437)), p. 108; and House of Commons (television coverage), B.B.C., U.K., 12:40, 19 Oct. 2016 B.B.C. Parliament <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0DA7889C?bcast=122730895> [accessed 6 Nov. 2020].

[78] Robinson, *History*, pp. 1–15.

[79] H. Kean, 'Tolpuddle, Burston and Levellers: the making of radical and national heritages at English labour movement festivals', in Smith, Shackel and Campbell, *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes*, pp. 266–82, at pp. 269–71.

[80] 'The history of Rosedene', *National Trust*, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/worcestershire-herefordshire/rosedene/the-history-of-rosedene> [accessed 31 March 2023]. It should, however, be noted this sanitized view is not necessarily endorsed by the residents and the volunteers who were, and are, involved in conducting tours, and it certainly was not the vision promoted by the Dodford Society, which campaigned for the National Trust to purchase the cottage. For example, at Great Dodford, open days have been run by local activist volunteers, who are very clear about the political significance of Chartism. Acknowledgements to Andrew Bibby for this information. See also S. Roberts, 'How the Chartist cottage was saved …', *Chartism & the Chartists*, 1 Apr. 2016 <https://www.thepeoplescharter.co.uk/blog/?p=198> [accessed 30 March 2023]; and D. Poole, *The Last Chartist Land Settlement: Great Dodford* (Dodford, 1999).

[81] *Guardian*, 9 June 2001.

[82] 'The kitchen garden at Rosedene', *National Trust* <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/worcestershire-herefordshire/rosedene/the-kitchen-garden-at-rosedene> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[83] M. Chase, 'Wholesome object lessons: the Chartist Land Plan in retrospect', *English Historical Review*, cxviii (2003), 59–85, at p. 61. For the physical landscape of the Chartist estates, see N. Mansfield, *Buildings of the Labour Movement* (Swindon, 2013), ch. 6.

[84] Gloucestershire Archives, P309a PC 15/15, Forest of Dean County Council, proposed conservation area, Chartist Land Company estates, 22 Nov. 1976, policies adopted 24 June 1982; D14850, Chartist cottages, Lowbands, report of survey and recommendations, July 1976.

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the Land Plan appear less out of place and more in conformity with the Conservative politics of some of these localities is the divesting of the Land Plan of its radical edge. As Elli Lester Roushanzamir and Peggy Kreshel warn, 'Heritage can be too easily converted from contested engagements with history to a commodity intentionally fabricated for a consumer audience'.[85] The fate of some of the other Chartist colonies signalled even more clearly Chartism's appropriation by the establishment. Ironically, few, if any, are now working-class homes. As the conservation area appraisal of Heronsgate (the site of the first estate, renamed O'Connorville) remarked in 2011, 'Most of the houses have large gardens within which there may be garages, gazebos, summerhouses, garden sheds and occasionally an outdoor swimming pool or tennis court'.[86] Unsurprisingly, although the idea for a commemorative plaque at Heronsgate came from the Chorleywood and Rickmansworth Labour party, the suggestion that the plaque include a reference to these authors was vetoed by local residents, who decided to erect their own 'non-political' plaque.[87]

The Welsh historian Gwyn Williams was acutely aware of the way in which episodes from the history of the working classes were being sanitized as they were appropriated by the establishment: 'Some forms of a tradition do not merely encapsulate a past, they sterilize it; they remove it from the historical equation of the present. This is not to cultivate a historical consciousness, it is to get rid of it'.[88] The occasion for Williams's discomfort was the unveiling at Merthyr Tydfil in 1977 of a memorial plaque to the martyr of the 1831 Merthyr rising, Dic Penderyn. Williams was concerned that 'in our ceremony we were sanctifying an historical untruth' because of the way in which over the years Penderyn had been detached from the rising itself. As Williams astutely observed, it was Penderyn 'the Martyr' who was commemorated, not the actual leader of the rising, Lewis Lewis. The latter, as an advocate of physical force and someone who escaped the hangman's noose, was not an appropriate figure for commemoration, whereas the 'wronged' Penderyn, who was found guilty of stabbing a soldier during the rising on the flimsiest of evidence, was more suitable.

A similar process of sanitizing took place when a statue of the Welsh physical force Chartist Dr. William Price was erected in his adopted town of Llantrisant in 1982. Price was one of the most colourful figures who participated in Chartism – he was also a druid, nudist and pioneering cremator. And it was this rather than his participation in the Newport rising that was accented in the accompanying encomiums; and when his involvement in the rising was mentioned at all, it tended to be reduced to farce by the fact that Price, to evade capture, disguised himself in women's clothes and escaped to France. Price's physical force Chartism was smothered by a combination of civic worthiness, laughter at an eccentric and some muted opposition from the local Anglicans, who objected to the erection of a statue to a known blasphemer. The image of Price the eccentric has also been reinforced by plays and the January 2020 revelation that the Hollywood actor Robert Downey, Jr., based his character Dr. Dolittle on Price – the closest that any Chartist is ever likely to get to Hollywood.[89] When the statue was subsequently listed as Grade II, Price's Chartism was largely passed over; it was his pioneering of cremation, along with the architectural value of the monument, that was cited as the reason for the listing. It had been left to local heritage groups to restore Price's radicalism and other achievements such as providing cheap health care to impoverished workers.[90] A play about Price's life – 'Strike a Light', staged in Cardiff in 1985, did little to dispel the image of the eccentric: 'Price the showman all but obscures Price the Chartist', ran one review.[91] Perhaps the most authentic memorial to Price came in 1995, when a pharmacist from Newbridge in South Wales faced disciplinary proceedings on account of his dispensing medicines free of charge to the needy. It was

[85] E. L. Roushanzamir and P. J. Kreshel, 'Gloria and Anthony visit a plantation: history into heritage at Laura, Creole Plantation', in *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanotourism*, ed. G. Dann and A. Seaton (London, 2001), pp. 177–200, at p. 183.

[86] Three Rivers District Council, *Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal* (Rickmansworth, 2011), p. 3.

[87] I. Foster, *Heronsgate: Freedom, Happiness and Contentment* (Rickmansworth, 1999), pp. 171–2.

[88] Williams, *The Welsh in Their History*, p. 137.

[89] *Guardian*, 11 Feb. 1985; and N. Bevan, 'Who was Dr William Price? He's the inspiration for Robert Downey Jr's Welsh accent in Dolittle', *Wales Online*, 24 Jan. 2020 <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/tv/downey-jr-dolittle-welsh-price-17624349> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[90] *Daily Mirror*, 24 Sept. 1981; 'Statue of Dr William Price, a Grade II listed building in Llantrisant, Rhondda Cynon Taff', *British Listed Buildings* <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/300087767-statue-of-dr-william-price-llantrisant#.X6Ve32j7SF4> [accessed 30 March 2023]; and 'Dr William Price', *Llantrisant Town Trust* <https://www.llantrisant.net/index.php/history/dr-william-price> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[91] *Guardian*, 11 Feb. 1985.

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claimed that the pharmacist was drawing on a local Chartist tradition, no doubt with Price in mind, who had similarly ministered freely to the health needs of the working classes during his own day.[92]

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Despite (possibly because of) the appropriation of Chartism by the establishment and the wresting of the memory of the movement from the political left, the last two decades have seen the growth of a vibrant 'heritage from below' that has renewed the memory of Chartism, taking it in new directions and to new audiences. This heritage from below has deep roots. One wellspring has been drama, theatre and literature. Community theatre has been particularly influential, an instance of how radical playwrights and other cultural producers have 'tried to reach working class audiences by infusing traditional and popular forms with radical content'.[93] Since the interwar years a series of plays have been staged often in former Chartist strongholds such as Bradford, South Wales and Manchester. These plays have tried to tell the story of how their communities participated in Chartism, often centring around local leaders, such as Peter Bussey in Bradford or Dr. Scholefield in Manchester, or a key episode such as a rising. Scornful reviews by theatre critics have sometimes missed this key objective.[94] As the social reformer Mary Stocks said of her play about Scholefield, 'It may not be good "theatre", but it is certainly accurate history'.[95] Indeed, beyond party political invoking, one of the key ways in which memory of Chartism was kept alive for much of the twentieth century was through stage and page and more recently song and poetry.[96] The series of novels by Alexander Cordell, in particular *Rape of the Fair Country* (1959), which focused on the Newport rising, and also *Hosts of Rebecca* (1960), which took as its theme the Rebecca Riots and, inter alia, the involvement of the Carmarthen Chartist Hugh Williams, rekindled the memory of Chartism for a new post-war generation. The value, as well as the attendant human interest, of Cordell's novels was that it told the history of Chartism through the lives of individuals, which brought an immediacy and empathy often lacking in academic and party political commemoration of Chartism: 'bursting with vitality, zest and gusto' was J. B. Priestley's judgement on *Rape of the Fair Country*.[97] In South Wales especially, the popularity of Cordell's novels led to discussions in the press about the historical veracity of his depiction of Chartism. Cordell even published a review of Briggs's *Chartist Studies*, while historians such as Gwyn Williams reflected on the value of historical fiction.[98]

Some of this heritage from below also traces its origins to the political left's invoking of Chartism, and this political tradition lives on, though overall it is far less party political than was the case in the interwar and early post-war eras. As early as the 1970s and early 1980s this trend was discernible in some of the moves by the new left and local socialisms to weld together class and identity politics to engage new community groups.[99] Once again, heritage and history had a part to play in furthering these goals. When a group of Sheffield trade unionists and political activists established the Holberry Society for the Study of Sheffield Labour History – named after the Chartist leader Samuel Holberry, who had led an uprising in the town in January 1840 – it unequivocally declared that it was 'a socialist

[92] *Guardian*, 21 June 1995.

[93] C. Steedman, 'Waiting: Arnold Wesker and *The Nottingham Captain*', *Social History*, xlv (2020), 81–114.

[94] *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Dec. 1934, 9 Oct. 1936 (for performances of Stocks's play); *Guardian*, 4 Nov. 1970 (play at Bradford about Peter Bussey), 28 Apr. 1989 (play in Llanidloes about the Chartist riots of 1839); *Stage*, 23 July 1964, 12 Nov. 1970, 14 Dec. 1985 (community plays about the Newport rising); and *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 17 Sept. 1992 (play on the Chartist rising by Tyneside Youth Theatre). On the nature and problems of political theatre, see M. Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-war British Playwrights* (Cambridge, 2003).

[95] M. Stocks, *Doctor Scholefield: an Incident of the Hungry Forties: a Play in Three Acts* (Manchester, 1936), p. 7 (copy in John Rylands Library, University of Manchester). A play with a similar purpose and message was written by Charles Smith (*We Are All Reformers: a Chronicle Play of the Chartist Movement in Stockport* (Stockport, 1938); copy in W.C.M.L., SLING/CHARTISM). Smith dedicated the play to the local history class of the Stockport branch of the W.E.A.

[96] M. Sanders, 'Impact on the public's understanding of nineteenth-century poetry and politics' (R.E.F. 2014 impact case study) <https://results.ref.ac.uk/(S(wm1zkkewl3xfmwm3wq1dqliw))/Submissions/Impact/854> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[97] A. Cordell, *Rape of the Fair Country* (London, 1961), back-cover endorsement.

[98] *Western Mail*, 5 Feb. and 14 Nov. 1959; Williams, *The Welsh in Their History*, pp. 135, 144; and G. A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising* (Cardiff, 1988), p. 16.

[99] D. Payling, '"Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire": grassroots activism and left-wing solidarity in 1980s Sheffield', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxv (2014), 602–27.

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but politically non-sectarian organisation'. The Holberry Society brought together members of the C.P.G.B., the International Socialist Organisation, Big Flame, the local Trades Council and the Labour party, among others. While recovering and celebrating the vibrant tradition of working-class protest in the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire', the Holberry Society mirrored the wider new left's attempt to graft on identity politics to its more traditional and enduring emphasis on working-class protest – at a time when municipal Labour leaders were more grounded in the traditions of working-class protest and supportive of efforts to further memory and history.[100] The society worked with both the women's and the peace movement and co-operated with an independent Women's Local History Group, as well as working with Sheffield Council and other groups to promote public understanding of Sheffield's working-class history through exhibitions, fairs, a radical walk and educational material; by advising libraries and archives; and by securing a plaque in memory of Holberry.[101]

Yet by the 1990s and early 2000s the days of identifying Chartism as the exclusive preserve of an avowedly socialist left were fading. The theme of democratic renewal and citizenship is now more prominent. For example, the organization *Our Chartist Heritage* has taken the lead on the commemoration of the Newport rising of 1839. Its primary objective is to 'inspire … today's citizens with a passion for justice and truth which roused yesterday's Chartist and Suffragette reformers'. Through a rich programme of talks, exhibitions and educational materials, *Our Chartist Heritage* is avowedly an example of heritage from below:

> We recognise that heritage is about people not just about places or things. A better understanding of local Chartist heritage will benefit the community living in the Newport region by enhancing the positive perception of the authentic Chartist heritage of the area, encouraging a sense of civic pride and shared ownership.[102]

Democratic renewal, civic pride and reaching out to the marginalized is central to the goals of *Our Chartist Heritage*. This organization has certainly included academic and specialists in its programme of events – mainly through talks at the annual Chartist Convention held in Newport in early November. Yet the organizers caution that 'there is always a danger that the Chartist heritage of Newport and South East Wales may become the preserve of relatively small groups of experts and enthusiasts'. This democratization of heritage practice, as it has been termed,[103] also underpins other forms of posthumous Chartism such as the website *Chartist Ancestors*, run by Mark Crail. Crail's website contains a wealth of material on Chartism and has a similar objective and relationship with academics, as did the community celebrations of the Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common in 1848.[104] The latter was initiated by groups of residents local to Kennington, which led to a series of events from walks, talks and workshops to a rally recreating the 1848 demonstration, which featured banners with Chartist slogans and 'declarations of solidarity with campaigns for under-represented people today'.[105] These groups are extremely mindful of the dangers of heritage distorting the past (in the way outlined by Gwyn Williams discussed in the previous section) and historians were consulted in the research for the project, gave talks and participated in several workshops.[106]

In all these heritage from below initiatives the emphasis is on Chartism as 'our story' – to cite the subtitle of the Kennington project – which reinforces the view not just of heritage belonging to the people, but people

[100] Acknowledgements to Drs. John Baxter and Nick Mansfield for this information.

[101] Sheffield Archives, X274/1/8/1, Bill Moore Papers, *Bulletin of the Holberry Society*, autumn 1981, p. 1; and Sheffield Local Studies Library, Holberry Society Records, Newsletter, discussion document and appeal for support, 1981. The Holberry Society was responsible for the erection of a commemorative plaque and dedication of a fountain in honour of Samuel Holberry, unveiled in 1979 in the Peace Gardens, and some of those who had been prominent in it ensured that, twenty years later, Holberry remained central to the redeveloped Peace Gardens. See Sheffield Archives, X274/1/8/1, B. Moore, 'Samuel Holberry and Sir Stuart Goodwin' (typescript), 16 Feb. 1998; X274/1/8/2, Correspondence relating to Holberry Plaque, B. Moore to P. Foot, 23 Apr. 1998.

[102] 'About', *Our Chartist Heritage* <http://www.our-chartist-heritage.co.uk/about/> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[103] Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 'Introduction', p. 4.

[104] For Crail's website, see *Chartist Ancestors* <https://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[105] *Kennington 1848: Our Story* (London, 2019), p. 33.

[106] The present author participated in a banner-making workshop, which began with a short talk on Chartist banners – how they were made, what inscriptions and iconography featured on them – before participants embarked on making their own banners.

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as active producers and consumers of heritage. The interactive nature of these examples of commemoration also turned participants from being passive to active producers of heritage. A favourite device has been to ask contemporary audiences to come up with a new People's Charter, while another has been Chartist walks in which present urban geography is inscribed with new historical meaning by telling the story of Chartism through familiar places.[107] The importance of place and a sense of community is essential for meaningful heritage. As the co-founder of the Kennington Common project Richard Galpin commented, 'We found that Kennington 1848 is a story that people really connect with. A lot of people were amazed to hear that this happened in their local park.'[108] Several participants responded that they were proud that Kennington had played a part in the birth of democracy in Britain. The emphasis on place also spoke to contemporary concerns in London about the increasing pressure on public space and cuts to funding of local parks. It is not just the connection between people and places, past and present, that reinforces the sense of ownership of the memory of Chartism but also the open-ended nature of the radical tradition itself. This was something that the Chartists themselves were acutely aware of – of standing on the shoulders of earlier radical reformers, of continuing their work and acting as custodians of the radical tradition, but also taking it in new directions.[109]

Each of these facets is weaved together into what is, perhaps, one of the most contemporary forms of commemorating the Chartists – a graphic novel on the Newport rising by Josh Cranton, Rhys D. W. and David Daniel. Appropriately styled as 'a re-telling of our history and their story', the graphic novel unashamedly begins with the confession that 'this is not a historical account', but a gothic reimagining of the rising that is set in 'an alternate, modern day universe in which the original rising did not take place, leaving modern day characters to fight for their freedom'.[110] The graphic novel arose from a perception that the way in which Chartism had been commemorated in South Wales had, in the view of the authors, been done in ways that made it hard for the younger generation to connect with. This theme of disconnect had been highlighted a few years earlier in the poignant B.B.C. documentary on political disengagement in South Wales by the Welsh actor Michael Sheen, which began with the Newport rising of 1839. Sheen explored why, with this rich democratic heritage and Chartist bequest, ordinary people in the valleys were turning away from politics. Sheen called for a new-style Chartist movement to make politics more representative and accountable, citing organizations such as the United Valleys Action Group, which, in bringing disparate groups together to campaign for change, Sheen argued, was in the tradition of Chartists trying to force change.[111] Like Sheen, the authors of the graphic novel were also conscious of the rising apathy among young people in South Wales, and their hope was that a retelling of Chartism – as 'leather clad punks' (Figure 1) – would make the Chartists more relatable. Once again, this was Chartism as memory rather than as history: while the latter posits a fundamental separation between past and present, privileges objectivity and factual accuracy, memory is based on continuity between past and present, is more dynamic, inclusive and serves the needs of the present far more so than history.[112]

What each of these recent examples of Chartist commemoration suggest is that heritage is most effective and meaningful when people take matters into their own hands. In 2020 this reached new heights and has begun to assume the form of iconoclasm with the toppling of the statue of the Bristol enslaver Edward Colston. At first glance this appears to have no relationship with the memory of Chartism, until that is, we recall the long-running campaign to erect a memorial to William Cuffay. Despite the promptings of a range of individuals and groups, from Keith Flett through to Black Lives Matter campaigners, the campaign appears to be no closer to realizing this objective.[113] But

[107] 'What would be on your Charter?', *Newport Rising Chartist Walk* (leaflet from the 2018 festival). The Chartist historian Bob Fyson used to lead regular Chartist walking tours in the Potteries (*Staffordshire Sentinel*, 8 Aug. 1992), as did the Frows in Manchester under the auspices of the Manchester Industrial Branch of the W.E.A.

[108] *Kennington 1848*, p. 38.

[109] Roberts, *Chartism*.

[110] J. Cranton, R. D. W. and D. Daniel, *Newport Rising: Chartism Redrawn* (Newport, 2019); see also an interview with the authors/artists: *Chartism Redrawn 2019* (user-generated content, online), creat. Newport Rising, 11 Oct. 2020, 4 mins. 45 secs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHZ6aMjyzxk&app=desktop> [accessed 30 March 2023].

[111] *Michael Sheen's Valleys Rebellion* (television programme), dir. S. Roderick, B.B.C., U.K., 21:00, 24 Feb. 2015, B.B.C.2 Wales <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/08CF2C36?bcast=115173800> [accessed 5 Nov. 2020].

[112] Cubitt, *History and Memory*, pp. 43–4.

[113] *Morning Star*, 25 Oct. 2011, Oct. 2020; T. Scriven, 'William Cuffay: the Chartists' black leader', *Tribune*, 4 July 2020; and S. Sutton, 'William Cuffay and the story of the black Chartists', *Wales Arts Review*, 5 June 2020 <https://www.walesartsreview.org/william-cuffay-and-the-story-of-the-black-chartists/> [accessed 30 March 2023].

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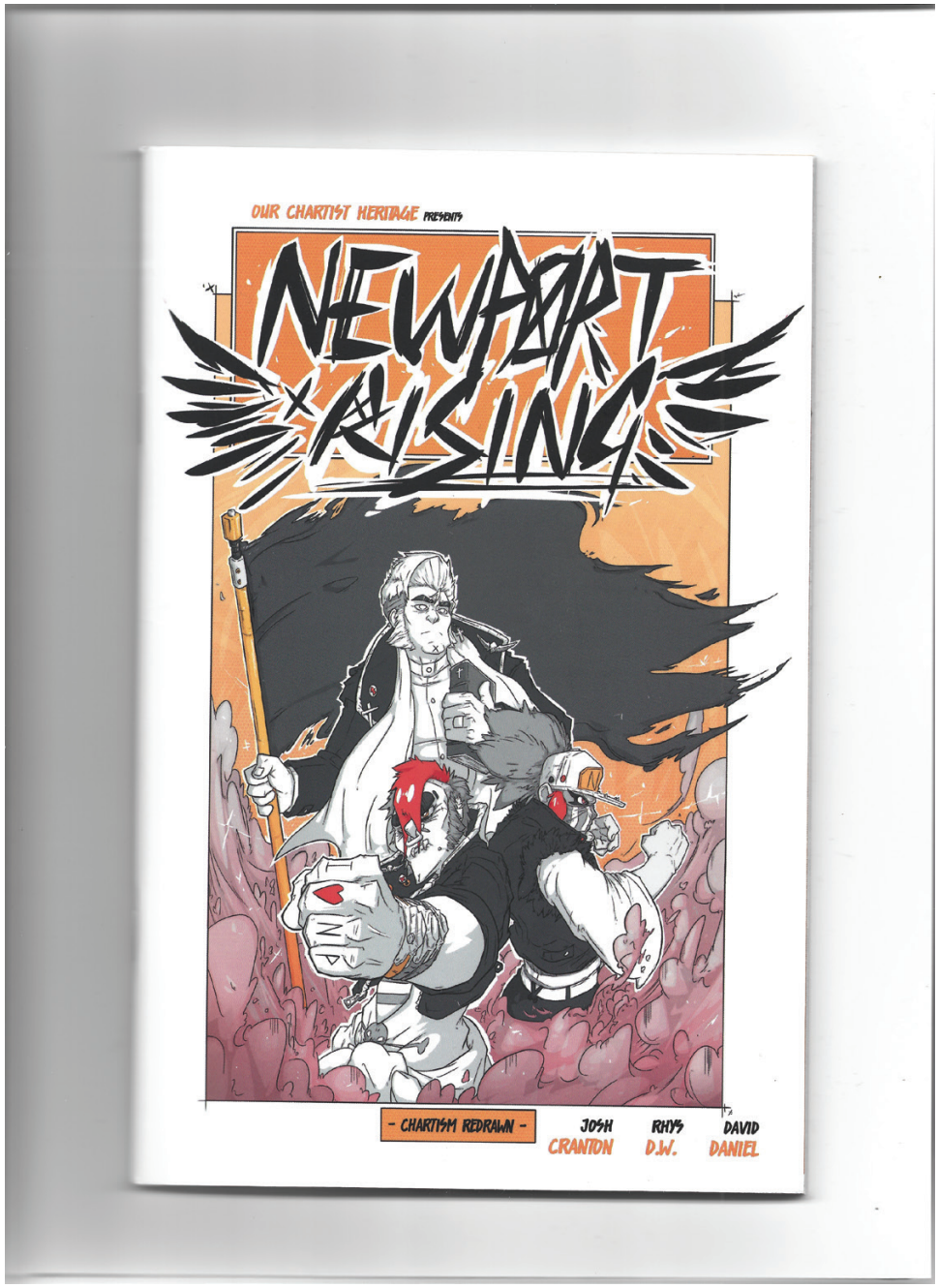


Figure 1. J. Cranton, R. D. W. and D. Daniel, *Newport Rising: Chartism Redrawn* (Newport, 2019). By permission of the authors and Our Chartist Heritage.

the continued absence of memorials to outstanding Black Britons such as Cuffay and many others, means that instances of what the historian Alan Rice has termed 'guerrilla memorialisation' are likely to proliferate while ever the civic landscape excludes those like Cuffay. Rice defines this as instances when people take direct action themselves, as they did with the Colston statue.[114] As we have seen,

[114] A. Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: the Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool, 2010), pp. 11, 13–16.

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Cuffay has even entered the hallowed ground of Westminster, but, alas, that exhibition was only temporary. If white working-class London Chartists had no problem – so far as we know – with a mixed-race man as their leader, surely it is time that present-day Londoners erect a lasting memorial to this remarkable Chartist.[115] The fact that Cuffay was also disabled – he had deformities in his spine and shins – as well as working-class is suggestive of the way that historic black Britons can also be polysemic and used in ways to give voice to different constituencies and concerns in the present in ways that celebrate a shared multiracial British history. Reinserting figures like Cuffay into British history will help to correct the perfectly understandable perception that the history of radical movements like Chartism were the exclusive preserve of a white working class. While ever the perception remains that groups like the Chartists were dull but worthy white working-class reformers, then historians cannot complain that schoolchildren and university students are increasingly taught the history of liberal democracy through the black civil rights movement in the U.S.A., which is understandably seen as more relevant and relatable to a multicultural Britain.[116]

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The ownership and composition of the memory of Chartism has changed significantly since the movement declined in the 1840s and 1850s. To view these shifts in linear terms is not helpful: for example, there has been no clear-cut shift from invoking the memory of Chartism as a form of dissident commemoration to the appropriation of the movement by political and cultural elites. Rather, memories of Chartism have been cyclical. In the two decades following the movement's decline, it was largely appropriated by the Liberal party (even though some former Chartists made the transition into Disraelian Conservatism),[117] which, in the mid-Victorian years, was the hegemonic political ideology and movement. Subsequent instances of appropriation by hegemonic political formations include the Labour establishment in the twentieth century, and more recently that carried out by the political right, who have co-opted Chartism into its Whig/Tory version of history. Posthumous Chartism has enjoyed long periods of association with the establishment, of one kind or another. Each of those associations have remembered Chartism in ways that validate their own ideologies, practices, values and assumptions. Only the communists and the I.L.P. emphasized the proletarian, socialist and confrontational character of Chartism, whereas mainstream Labour have subscribed to the Fabian view of a cross-class, peaceful, gradualist group of reformers ahead of their time. More significantly, even during these various periods of co-option, Chartism has never been the exclusive preserve of these establishments. From the time when radicals invoked the memory of the movement to reassert their independence from the Liberal mainstream, through to the I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. in the interwar years and on to the contemporary campaigns for democratic renewal, posthumous Chartism has always possessed a radical, subversive edge. This has meant that establishments have never entirely succeeded in erasing this, though it came close in the 1990s due to the combination of academic and New Labour revisionism. Yet as the continued growth of heritage from below in the early twenty-first century attests, there is still vitality and radicalism in popular memories of the movement that resist the authority of expert opinion – which is a key characteristic of heritage from below.[118]

Above all, this case study of posthumous Chartism questions the view of heritage as necessarily conservative and myth-perpetuating. As Raphael Samuel famously argued, heritage can be a theatre of memory in which active, complex and nuanced interpretations of working-class history can have contemporary resonance.[119] Even so, it is important to recognize that heritage is still structured by

[115] Since the writing of this article, a plaque in memory of Cuffay, and his father, has been unveiled in his birthplace of Medway, Kent. The plaque was sponsored by the Medway African and Caribbean Association, the Nubian Jak Memorial Trust and others, including the council and trade union movement ('Celebrating Medway's black heroes', *Historic Dockyard Chatham*, 15 July 2021 <https://thedockyard.co.uk/news/celebrating-medways-black-heroes/> [accessed 30 March 2023]).

[116] N. Sheldon, 'Politicians and history: the National Curriculum, national identity and the revival of the national narrative', *History*, xcvii (2012), 256–71, at p. 270.

[117] N. Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society, 1850–1920* (Manchester, 1998), p. 96; and P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: the Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (London, 1980), p. 326.

[118] Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 'Introduction', p. 7.

[119] Samuel, *Past and Present*.

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power hierarchies that often serve to exclude and delegitimate dissident groups in the present as well as in the past. The failure to secure a memorial to William Cuffay is eloquent testimony to the continuing existence and power of an authorized heritage discourse that seeks to exclude subaltern individuals and groups. Finally, this case study of posthumous Chartism serves as a reminder that the broader radical tradition, of which it formed a part, was anything but the consensual, enveloping and immutable entity that it has been presented as in some revisionist accounts.[120] To Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid's formulation that 'those who were originally called Chartists, were afterwards called Liberal and Labour activists',[121] we can plausibly retort that those who were originally called Chartists were afterwards called, on occasion, Liberal and Labour activists, but sometimes communists, Greens, Plaid and even Tories. Further, this invoking was just as likely to be used to emphasize change, difference and conflict as it was continuity and harmony in the radical tradition. On other occasions, they were none of these party political labels and were called democrats, champions of human rights, or, in the words of *Our Chartist Heritage*, the voice of the 'marginalised, disenfranchised and silenced', just as the Chartists were in their own time.[122] Like much else in contemporary Britain, our vision of Chartism is now a fractured, fluid and contingent one – from the establishment's view of Chartists as premature liberal democrats to those on the militant left who see in the movement a validation of direct action.[123] While ever these debates show few signs of abating, the memory of Chartism will continue to be invoked for many years to come.

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[120] Enderby, 'English radical tradition', pp. 15, 22.
[121] E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, 'Introduction', in Biagini and Reid, *Currents of Radicalism*, pp. 1–19, at p. 1.
[122] 'About', *Our Chartist Heritage*.
[123] For a similar argument in relation to imperial memory, see Gleeson, 'Memory'.