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The development of political procession routes and policing the right to march in London, 1780–1915

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ABSTRACT

Processions and marches were an integral part of popular politics, protest and urban life. This article maps the routes of 101 civic, political and trades' union processions in London from 1780 to 1915. Mapping routes demonstrates the changing political and social geographies of the capital, its policing and the emergence of symbolic sites, with Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park becoming nationally significant from the 1840s onwards. Political movements engaged in negotiation over public space and the right to march with the home secretary and Metropolitan Police commissioner raised key issues over constitutional liberties in an expanding franchise.

Processions were – and still are – an integral part of popular politics in towns and cities. Processions are a collective body moving through the main streets of an urban area, displaying symbolic representations of their identity and visual emblems of their cause. Protesters walk or ride from one place to another to make a claim on an authority, present an address to a mayor or parliament, or demand redress from their employers. Today, protest marches often follow a regular route in central London, starting at Victoria Embankment by the Thames, heading westwards, around the houses of parliament, up Pall Mall towards the final destination of Hyde Park. This is now the well-established regular route for political processions. It enables protesters to pass through the major politically symbolic buildings and sites of power in the capital, demonstrating their identity and cause to the centre of power, and occupying the public spaces, albeit temporarily. But this route did not become standardized or formalized until the late 1860s. Even after the route in central London was regularized, other routes and sites were used by socialist and unemployed marchers as the capital expanded, especially in the East End.

This article examines the development of political processions in London over the long nineteenth century. It maps the routes of eighty procession events – or 101 individual processions (as some events had converging multiple routes) between the Gordon Riots of 1780 and the start of the First World War (Figure 1).[1] By mapping the routes and analysing the choices made by emergent democratic and trades' movements in contrast with civic and royal authorities, this article shows how the unique and

[1] Maps drawn with open-source G.I.S. software (QGIS <https://qgis.org/> [accessed 22 May 2025]), layered on the open-source Toner basemap. A publicly accessible map is available (Google Maps <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1k6cntO9x5BAp0C0dTeByi13rywcb5R0&usp=sharing> [accessed 22 May 2025]).

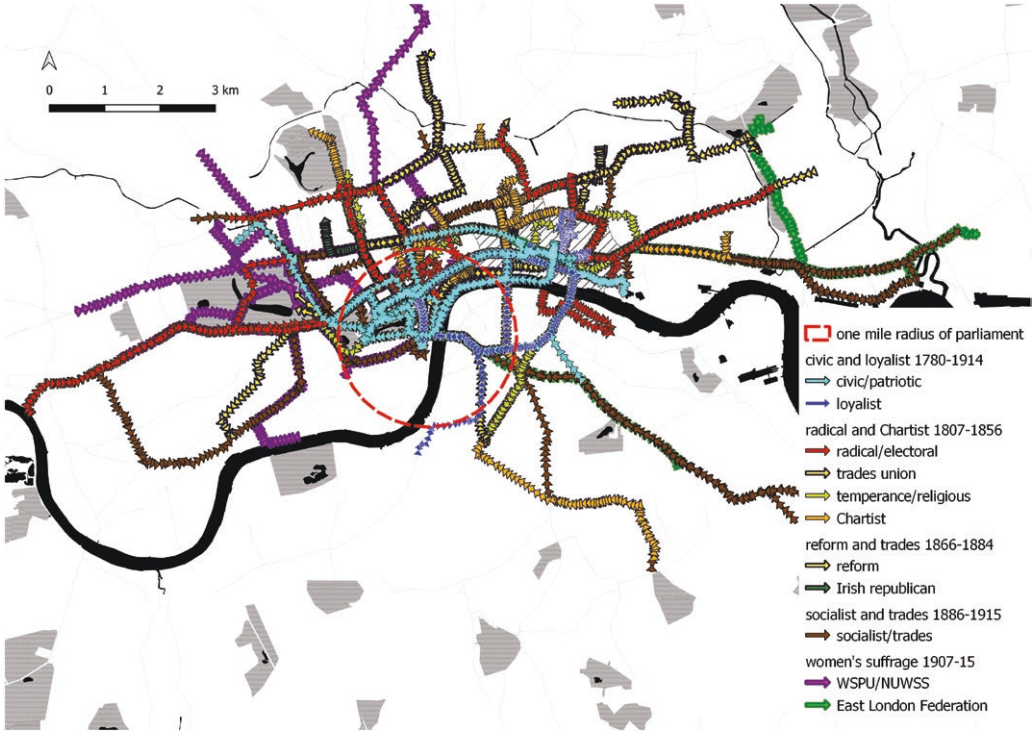

Figure 1. London procession routes, 1780–1915. Sources cited throughout the article. Map drawn with QGIS <https://qgis.org/> [accessed 23 May 2025].

changing political geographies of the capital interacted with an expanding franchise and involvement of unrepresented people in the body politic. It analyses how the built environment, competing layers of local and government authorities, and the evolving socio-economic make-up of the city shaped the routes and form of political processions. All the events mapped in this article were termed processions in the newspaper reports. This article defines political processions as a specific type of protest for the emergent popular democratic movements and trades' unions, while noting that inhabitants took part in other forms of procession too, including at religious and cultural celebrations and pageants. Mapping the routes demonstrates the spatial effects of anti-democratic and public order legislation and the policing of protests throughout this period. London was exceptional because of the direct presence of parliament and the monarchy that political groups addressed in protest as sources of power. The introduction of the Metropolitan Police from 1829 created unique challenges for protest in the capital. While procession routes evolved over the long nineteenth century, key periods of conflict between protesters, police and the government in 1848 and 1887–90 definitively shaped the form of the protest that has its legacies in how marches are planned and policed to the present day.

Urban inhabitants of all political persuasions and social status witnessed or took part in processions at some point in their lives. As Simon Gunn has noted in his study of civic culture during the nineteenth century, 'Marching in rank order through the main city streets with banners and costume dress became an important part of the social experience of a significant section of the urban population'.[2] Studies of urban life in Britain and Europe have highlighted the procession as integral to social and political ritual from the middle ages onwards. An annual calendar of civic events, religious feast days, guild and friendly society parades were marked by elaborate processions around the main streets and squares of towns. Anniversaries of naval and military battles and monarchs' birthdays were celebrated or commemorated by processions headed by local political notables and participated in

[2] S. Gunn, 'Ritual and civic culture in the English industrial city, *c.*1835–1914', in *Urban Governance in Britain and Beyond Since 1750*, ed. R. J. Morris and R. Trainor (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 227–41, at pp. 231, 238.

by the inhabitants as shows of patriotism, rituals that were exported to the colonies and adapted by new nations constructing their own historic narratives.[3] Civic processions were overtly hierarchical; participants were restricted to the political and social elites and military, in strict order, followed by constituted bodies such as guilds and religious congregations. Processions marked out the boundaries of administrative authority and symbolic control of local authorities and social elites.[4]

Among the few historians to map routes, Mark Harrison and Sam Griffiths's examinations of urban ritual in Bristol and Sheffield respectively showed how civic processions tended to circuit the 'central streets' in a show of civic identity in the late eighteenth century, and then moved out to the suburbs as the towns expanded and the middle classes took over local government in the first half of the nineteenth century.[5] Gunn has argued that civic processions in Birmingham manifested the rise of a Liberal elite in Victorian municipal government, displaying their physical as well as symbolic control of the public spaces built from their wealth.[6] Political and trades' societies, and religious and migrant communities used marches to assert their identity and demonstrate control over streets and districts. Religious processions, carnivals and pageants formed and sustained community identities in the new neighbourhoods as towns suburbanized from the later nineteenth century onwards.[7] Irish Protestant loyalist and Catholic republican parades in Ulster and in British cities were the ultimate embodiment of collective occupation of public space, using a ritual to mark out and claim neighbourhoods defined by sectarian identities. Mervyn Busteed, for example, has illustrated how commemorations of the 'Manchester Martyrs', Fenian activists executed in 1867, chose various parade routes through the Irish neighbourhoods of Manchester in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflecting the impact of evolving collective memory, changing factions among the republican leadership, alternating party allegiances in local government, and shifting populations of migrants in the city.[8]

Historians of popular protest have focused on the symbolic, textual and representational elements of processions by the emergent democratic and trades movements in the nineteenth century. As Robert Poole has shown, the working-class democratic societies undertaking the 'march to Peterloo' in Manchester on 16 August 1819, for example, formed processions in their Sunday best clothing and other emblems to display respectability but also to stress their legitimacy when protest was restricted by the authorities.[9] Paul O'Leary's study of Chartist processions in South Wales towns argued that the act of marching 'inscribed Chartism in the texture of the urban settlement'.[10] The performance and theatrical ritual of processions has also been a key theme in the scholarship of nineteenth-century parliamentary reform movements.[11] Lisa Tickner has argued that the female suffrage processions of the 1900s were a key turning point in the politics of visual display in Britain.[12] The expectation of the assembled spectators was as important to the display of collective identity: newspapers often commented on the scale of the crowds watching from the pavements and from the windows of the

[3] T. Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics and the Royal Navy, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 2006); M. Berlin, 'Civic ceremony in early modern London', *Urban History Yearbook*, xiii (1986), 15–27; and S. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997).

[4] N. Rogers, 'Crowds and political festival in Georgian England', in *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850*, ed. T. Harris (London, 2001), pp. 233–64, at p. 245.

[5] M. Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790–1835* (Cambridge, 1988); and S. Griffiths, 'From lines on maps to symbolic order in the city?', in *Spatial Cultures: Towards a New Morphology of Cities Past and Present*, ed. S. Griffiths and A. von Lunen (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 76–94, at p. 78.

[6] Gunn, 'Ritual and civic culture', p. 238.

[7] *Restaging the Past: Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain*, ed. A. Bartie and others (London, 2020); D. Georgiou, '"The drab suburban streets were metamorphosed into a veritable fairyland": spectacle and festivity in the Ilford Carnival, 1905–1914', *London Journal*, xxxiv (2014), 224–48; and C. Wildman, 'Religious selfhoods and the city in inter-war Manchester', *Urban History*, xxxviii (2011), 103–23.

[8] M. Busteed, 'Parading the green – procession as subaltern resistance in Manchester in 1867', *Political Geography*, xxiv (2005), 903–33; D. Bryan, *Orange Parades: the Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control* (London, 2000); and D. Warner, 'When two tribes go to war: Orange parades, religious identity and urban space in Liverpool, 1965–1985', *Oral History*, xlvii (2019), 30–42, at p. 31.

[9] R. Poole, 'The march to Peterloo: politics and festivity in late Georgian England', *Past & Present*, cxcii (2006), 109–53; and M. Nouvian, 'Defiant mourning: public funerals as funeral demonstrations in the Chartist movement', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, xxiv (2019), 208–26.

[10] P. O'Leary, *Claiming the Streets: Processions and Urban Culture in South Wales, c. 1830–1880* (Cardiff, 2012), p. 52.

[11] S. Angus, 'Veneration and mockery: images of gentlemen leaders within the material culture of Scottish radical processions, 1832–1884', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, xliii (2023), 112–35; and M. Chase, 'The popular movement for parliamentary reform in provincial Britain during the 1860s', *Parliamentary History*, xxxvi (2017), 14–30.

[12] L. Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–1914* (London, 1987).

buildings en route. The civic urban environment served as a stage for theatrics, but it was also an embodied space: there was no point in holding a demonstration without townspeople being there to witness it.

The evolving geographies and morphology of political processions in London have received less attention among urban and political historians, and the routes have not been comprehensively mapped. This lack of analysis is somewhat surprising, given that records of the specific routes are easily accessible. Procession routes were often advertised in advance in the local press, especially for civic occasions and for mass political processions, the planning of which became increasingly complex over the course of the century. Reports of events further outlined the route, and any diversions or alternatives taken. Newspapers described the spectacle of the procession or the size of the protest march through charting its length, the time it took to cross a certain landmark, and the extent of support from spectators viewing from along the pavements and from the windows of adjoining buildings.[13] Marches could also be long distance, seeking redress for the provinces from the centre of power, with the most notable examples ranging from the Pilgrimage of Grace in the sixteenth century to the national hunger marches of the 1930s.[14] This article concentrates on political processions and marches that were participated in by resident London trades and political groups rather than coming in from elsewhere, and which generally stayed within the bounds of the capital. It argues that symbolism and representation formed only part of the role and significance of political processions and marches. The physical occupation of public space and the bringing together of large groups of people enabled political and trades movements to increase numbers and organization in practice as well as through ritual. Occupying the streets was an integral element of the development of popular political movements in an expanding franchise over the long nineteenth century.

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Urban customary rituals developed distinctive geographical patterns in London. Unlike in many other towns, there was no obvious regular route for all processional events in the capital until the emergence of the mass platform demonstrations in the later eighteenth century.[15] Studies of early modern London note that, before the expansion of the capital westwards well beyond the City walls, there was 'no equivalent of the Piazza San Marco as a public ritual space' and therefore no grand site for crowds to congregate.[16] Most streets were notoriously narrow and the other open spaces were often encroached on. Cheapside was the widest ceremonial route in the City before the eighteenth century, and remained a popular choice for display. Parades by the ancient guilds and livery companies and by the inns of court were by their nature exclusive to their members. Parishes held their own religious processions around their bounds. The City of London Corporation held oversight of royal and civic processions in the capital. The lord mayor's parade was in effect a perambulation of the bounds of the City around Threadneedle Street and the Bank of England, a circular route of around four miles. The event provided a secular contrast to traditional religious processions, and manifested the power of the mercantile elite.[17] As the residential and commercial districts of the capital expanded west of the City boundaries, though the lord mayor's parade remained an annual feature, the locus of ceremonial and processional activity shifted westwards. This did not mark a breakdown in ritual and opportunities for participation, rather, as Michael Berlin has argued, offered 'an opening up to wider, more pluralistic forms', with a range of routes.[18]

[13] Procession routes are derived from newspaper reports in the British Library Newspaper Archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> [accessed 22 May 2025] and the Metropolitan Police records in The National Archives of the U.K., MEPO.

[14] M. L. Bush, 'The Tudor polity and the Pilgrimage of Grace', *Historical Research*, lxxx (2007), 47–72; *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies Since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. Reiss (Oxford, 2007); and I. Channing, *The Police and Expansion of Public Order Law in Britain, 1829–2014* (London, 2015).

[15] For Manchester processions, see K. Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789–1848* (Manchester, 2015), p. 180; for Sheffield, see Griffiths, 'Lines on maps', p. 78; for Bristol, see Harrison, *Crowds and History,* pp. 190–1.

[16] Berlin, 'Civic ceremony', p. 18.

[17] City of London and Court of Common Council, *Ceremonials to be Observed by the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, Sheriffs and Officers of the City of London, etc.* (London, 1864).

[18] Berlin, 'Civic ceremony', p. 23.

Processions were not always part of royal ceremonial. Whereas the monarch's birthday was an occasion for civic processions in other cities and towns, in London, its celebration was usually confined to a military parade from St. James's Palace to a muster in St. James's Park.[19] For George III's fiftieth jubilee in October 1809, there was no royal procession, and the lord mayor led a small parade of the corporation for only half a mile between the Guild Hall and St. Paul's Cathedral. This low-key ritual contrasted with the elaborate jubilee processions that were being held in most of the other towns and cities across England.[20] Buckingham Palace became a starting point for royal ceremonial only from 1837, when Queen Victoria established her main residence in the capital. For the rest of the century, royal and civic processions travelled eastwards along the Mall, and along the Strand towards the Guild Hall or St. Paul's Cathedral in the City. Royal funerals at Westminster Abbey and the state opening of parliament drew the ceremonial southwards (Figure 2).

During parliamentary elections, parades were used by all parties to gather support, show strength of numbers, protect voters on their way to the poll, and assert political territoriality over the public spaces in the borough during the hustings and in the ritual of 'chairing the member' after their successful election. Westminster and Middlesex elections were conducted in a small area within walking distance of the hustings at Covent Garden, until it was moved to Trafalgar Square in 1868. The chairing of the radical Sir Francis Burdett after his successful contest at the 1807 general election took five hours, drawing huge crowds on the streets to watch the electors set off from Covent Garden to collect Burdett from his house at Piccadilly and ceremonially convey him on a 'triumphal chair' in an elaborately decorated carriage to the Crown and Anchor on the Strand.[21] Election processions were

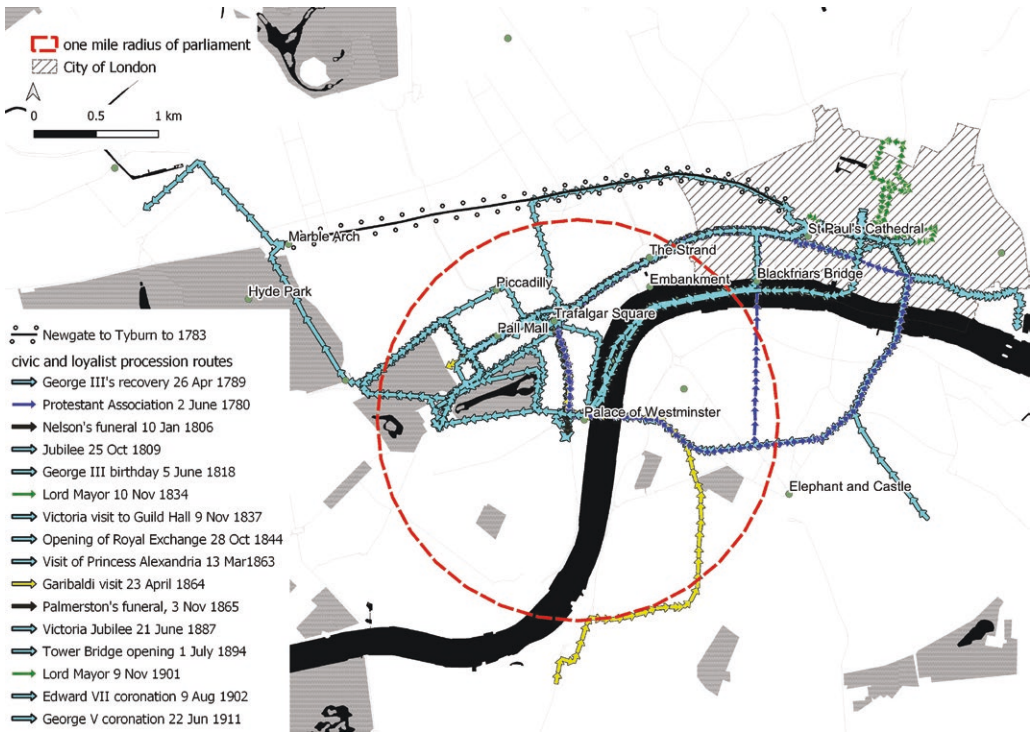

Figure 2. Patriotic and royal processions, 1789–1911. Sources: *Chester Chronicle*, 1 May 1789; *Star*, 10 Jan. 1806, 26 Oct. 1809; *Commercial Chronicle*, 6 June 1818; *Holt's Weekly Chronicle*, 12 Nov. 1837; *Illustrated London News*, 2 Nov. 1844, 13 March 1863, 4 Nov. 1865, 2 July 1887; *Mail*, 27 Oct. 1902; and *Yorkshire Post*, 21 June 1911.

[19] E.g., *Morning Post*, 6 June 1814; and *Baldwin's Weekly Journal*, 30 Apr. 1825.
[20] *Star*, 26 Oct. 1809; and T. Preston, *Jubilee Jottings: the Jubilee of George III* (London, 1887).
[21] *Westminster Journal*, 30 May 1807; *Proceedings of the Late Westminster Election* (London, 1807); and F. O'Gorman, 'Campaign rituals and ceremonies: the social meaning of elections in England 1780–1860', *Past & Present*, cxxxv (1992), 79–115, at p. 91.

popularly mocked as emblematic of corruption. The British Museum's print collection contains dozens of satirical prints caricaturing people parading in election rituals as unthinking followers of corrupt leaders (for example, Figure 3). The cost and time required for organizing the events determined the size and appearance of the practice. Processions were part of the huge expenses incurred in the era prior to the 1832 Reform Act. The expenses of Burdett's chairing in 1807 totalled around five hundred pounds, which was half again of his total costs for the election.[22]

Notably, neither the houses of parliament nor Downing Street were major end destinations for political movements. Rather, political processions generally only stopped briefly by them en route to their final site of demonstration. Even though the palace of Westminster was permeable to the public in this period, most political movements relied on small delegations or the intermediary of an individual M.P. rather than the power of the crowd to present a petition. The 1661 Tumultuous Petitioning Act was still in force, restricting petitioners to a group of ten entering the palace.[23] A notable exception was the presentation of Lord George Gordon's petition to repeal the Catholic Relief Act in June 1780, leading to the riots that engulfed the capital for a week. Gordon's Protestant Association arranged three converging processions on 2 June, whose contingents started out at St. George's Fields in Southwark, then diverged, crossing the Thames at London Bridge, Blackfriars Bridge and Westminster Bridge, before marching down Fleet Street, the Strand and across Charing Cross, converging again to present their petition to parliament.[24] Following the Gordon Riots, political and trades' movements avoided directing mass processions to parliament until the mid 1830s. The general avoidance of parliament and other sites of government by radical processions was further enforced by legislation passed by the

Figure 3. James Gillray, *Middlesex Election, 1804*, showing Sir Francis Burdett's entry to Covent Garden. Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

[22] M. Baer, *The Rise and Fall of Radical Westminster, 1780–1980* (London, 2012), p. 175.
[23] R. Eagles, '"Got together in a riotous and tumultuous manner": crowds and the Palace of Westminster, *c.*1700–1800', *Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, xliii (2020), 349–66.
[24] *The Trial of Lord George Gordon for High Treason* (London, 1781), p. 8.

Tory governments against the democratic societies. In 1817 the Seditious Meetings Act was passed in reaction to an isolated attack on the Prince Regent's coach on its way to the opening of parliament. One clause of the legislation prohibited all political meetings to be held within a mile radius of the palace of Westminster when parliament was in session.[25] Westminster Square therefore did not establish a reputation for political gatherings. Processions went past parliament only periodically and did not stop outside it for demonstrations, which were held rather on Kennington Common, south of the river and just over the prohibited boundary, or, later in the century, in Hyde Park.

The most popular and indeed common procession in London before the 1780s was not royal, civic or electoral, but penal: the execution procession from Newgate prison to Tyburn gallows. The route went straight westwards along Holborn, St. Giles and Oxford Street, to the gallows situated at the north-east corner of Hyde Park, roughly where Marble Arch now stands. The Tyburn ritual ended in 1783 when the execution site was moved to just outside Newgate, after much contemporary debate over the levels of disorder among the crowds attending the procession. Some localized execution processions continued until the early nineteenth century, especially around the docks at Wapping, where the high court of the admiralty condemned naval transgressors.[26] The abolition of the Tyburn processions nevertheless left a large hole in the ritualistic life of the capital, which was to be filled by new social and political movements.

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The rise of the democratic radical and parliamentary reform movements from the 1780s onwards reoriented both the purpose and the routes of the political procession. Reform processions were a show of representing the 'people' to the public, and they led to the 'mass platform' demonstration or public meeting. There were precedents in processions to the large meetings in support of the renegade politician John Wilkes at St. George's Fields, Southwark, during his imprisonment in the Tower of London in 1768, and the electoral parades accompanying Sir Francis Burdett and other radical candidates.[27] From the 1790s, the more regular route that went westwards across what became Trafalgar Square and along Pall Mall towards Hyde Park began to crystallize, though it would take many decades to become established (Figure 4).

The first wave of working-class democratic agitation inspired by the French Revolution sought to demonstrate the power of the people on the streets. The largest democratic association in the capital, the London Corresponding Society (L.C.S.), held a procession and rally to celebrate the acquittal of its leaders after their trials for treason in December 1794. The radicals followed the ritual of chairing of the members, with members carrying two hundred lit torches headed by a 'beautiful silk flag on which was inscribed in large letters – THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS'. The crowd pulled the carriage of John Thelwall and the other released leaders 'slowly, through the principal streets'. Though there was no detail in the L.C.S. correspondence about which these streets were, it is likely that the starting point was Newgate prison, and probably ended at the executive committee's regular meeting place of the Crown and Anchor on the Strand, a distance of just under a mile.[28]

For the most part, however, the early radical societies still appear to have expected crowds to simply turn up at the meeting site at the advertised start time. There is no record of the L.C.S. organizing a similar procession in October 1795 to the mass meeting on Copenhagen Fields in Islington, on the northern edge of urban expansion. With the revival of democratic agitation in the winter of 1816–17, crowds gathered at Spa Fields, an open area in Clerkenwell, for three mass meetings held

[25] R. Poole, 'Petitioners and rebels: petitioning for parliamentary reform in Regency England', *Social Science History*, xliii (2019), 553–79.

[26] T. Hitchcock, 'The journey from Newgate to Tyburn', *Old Bailey Online* <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/about/journeytyburn#> [accessed 22 May 2025]; and T. Laqueur, 'Crowds, carnival and the state in English executions, 1604–1868', in *The First Modern Society*, ed. A. L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J. Rosenheim (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 305–55.

[27] P. D. G. Thomas, 'The St George's Fields "Massacre" of 10 May 1768: an eye witness report', *London Journal*, iv (1978), 221–6.

[28] British Library, Place Papers, letter from Sheffield, 22 Dec. 1794, cited in A. Krishnamurthy, 'Coffeehouse vs. alehouse: notes on the making of the eighteenth–century working class', in *The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. A. Krishnamurthy (Farnham, 2009), pp. 85–108, at pp. 92–3.

by the supporters of the republican Thomas Spence and addressed by the radical 'gentleman orator', Henry Hunt. The newspapers noted 'one report among the many was that it was intended to make a procession through the City to Westminster', but this did not occur. Similarly, there were no recorded processions to the mass platform meeting addressed by Hunt at Smithfield Market on 21 July 1819. The 'Committee of 200' radical society instead sent fourteen men 'with white wands and two flags' in delegation to wait upon Hunt at his lodgings in a pub near the Old Bailey court and accompany him to the meeting.[29] The London radical societies perhaps sought a more sober and less corrupt form of ritual and display at the mass platform than what they usually witnessed at Westminster electoral processions. By contrast, the radicals of Manchester, Birmingham and other unrepresented towns elsewhere made the procession an integral part of their public meetings for parliamentary reform, as its customary origins locally were associated less with elections and more with respectable religious and trades' parades.[30]

The gentlemen leaders of the radical reform movement were nevertheless prepared to employ the rituals of the election when it boosted their egos. A popular tactic was the 'grand entry' into the city, in the mode not only of successful M.P.s after an election, but also of military leaders returning home after a victory, or with biblical allusions to Jesus Christ entering Jerusalem. 'See the conquering hero comes' was a popular hymn played by the band at both electoral and radical processions. Hunt's carriage was accompanied by a procession into London after his release on bail from Salford in September 1819.

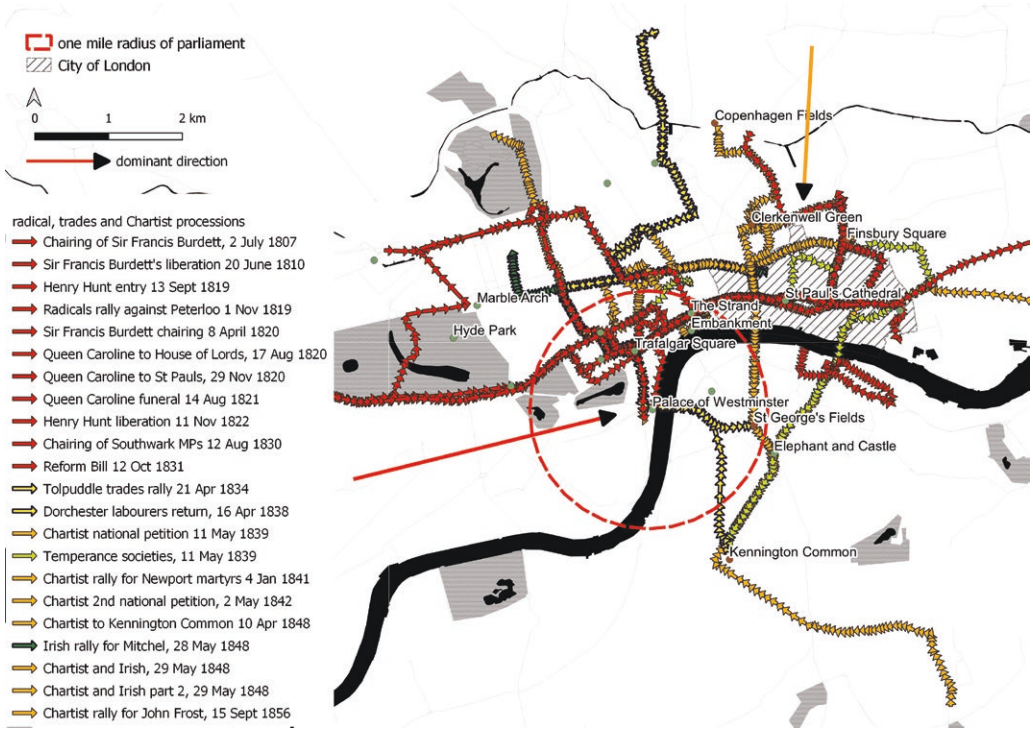

Figure 4. Radical, Chartist and trades processions, 1807–56. Sources: *Hull Packet*, 7 July 1807; *General Evening Post*, 19 June 1810; *Imperial Weekly Gazette*, 18 Sept. 1819; *Morning Post*, 1 Nov. 1819; *London Packet*, 18 Aug. 1820; *Morning Post*, 30 Nov. 1820; *Drakard's Stamford News*, 15 Nov. 1822; *Morning Herald*, 13 Aug. 1830; *Liverpool Standard*, 22 Apr. 1834; *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 19 Apr. 1838; *Essex and Herts Mercury*, 14 May 1839; *English Chronicle*, 5 Jan. 1841; *Northern Star*, 7 May 1842; and *Norfolk Chronicle*, 15 Apr. 1848.

[29] *Morning Post*, 22 July 1819; and V. Gatrell, *Conspiracy on Cato Street: a Tale of Liberty and Revolution in Regency London* (Cambridge, 2022), p. 226.

[30] *Chester Courant*, 19 Nov. 1816; *Champion*, 8 Dec. 1816; and Poole, 'March to Peterloo'.

Large crowds lined the streets southwards through Islington and Angel to the Strand for a dinner at the traditional radical meeting site of the Crown and Anchor Tavern.[31] Hunt's supporters conducted another grand entry upon his release from imprisonment in Ilchester gaol in November 1822. The trades societies met outside Hyde Park to start the welcome procession. Hunt's carriage followed the main parade route of royal and state events: Piccadilly, St. James Street, Pall Mall, along the Strand to Temple Bar and the City, where a celebratory dinner was held at the Eagle Tavern. The newspapers described how 'the fine causeway from Hyde Park Corner to Knightsbridge was one dense mass of people', but the horse barracks and the carriage gates of Hyde Park at the end of Piccadilly were locked shut, to prevent the crowds entering.[32]

Studies of the democratic and trades movements in this period tend to emphasize the representational aspects of protesters 'claiming' public space and their subversion of symbolism of the authorities through ritual and emblems.[33] So radical and trades' procession routes in Manchester, Sheffield and other towns often mirrored the civic and patriotic routes of the local elites as a way of asserting their own representation in the public sphere. Radicals saluted sympathizers, hurled insults at their enemies' houses and honoured the sites of previous battles, for example St. Peter's Field, later Square, in Manchester.[34] By contrast, it is less evident that London radical and trades movements sought to 'claim' the civic spaces and loyalist routes in the same way before Trafalgar Square was finished in the 1840s. Once the weight of the commercial and middle-class residential districts shifted beyond the City towards the West End, reform and Chartist processions generally travelled westwards along the Strand to Pall Mall before heading north through Piccadilly (see Figure 4). The choice of location for large demonstrations influenced the geography of routes. Political groups used marginal sites on the edges of the expanding capital, including commons, building grounds and former gallows sites until these open areas were enclosed and built upon. To the south of the river, access to St. George's Fields was diminished in 1810 when part of the site was sold to the newly constructed Bethlem lunatic asylum, and surrounding landowners leased plots to speculative builders.[35] As with marketplaces such as Smithfield, where Hunt had addressed a mass meeting in July 1819, Copenhagen Fields and other areas became encroached upon, polluted and regarded as 'unrespectable', according to the Chartists by the late 1830s.[36]

Oxford Street was not a regular procession route until later in the nineteenth century, even though it had been part of the Tyburn ritual. It is popularly assumed that the location of Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park was a direct legacy of the Tyburn gallows as a site for free speech and political oratory.[37] The connection is perhaps tenuous, given that there was a nearly ninety year gap between the pulling down of the gallows in 1783 and the Parks Regulation Act of 1872, which established Speakers' Corner as the only area within the park where political speeches could be given without permission of the authorities. Although the large parades of trades unions organized by the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union in 1834 and 1838, and the Chartist procession to parliament in 1842 followed Oxford Street and Regent Street westwards, these events do not appear to refer to the Tyburn ritual. Few political movements chose Oxford Street as their main route. This was in part because the Crown Estate restricted the use of Hyde Park for public meetings until after 1866, and also because of the continual pressure by shopkeepers on Oxford Street on the authorities to keep the thoroughfare clear of obstruction. Even today, procession organizers avoid using Oxford Street because of the difficulties of acquiring licences from Westminster city council for road closures and policing from the Metropolitan Police.[38]

[31] *Morning Post*, 14 Sept. 1819.
[32] *Drakard's Stamford News*, 15 Nov. 1822.
[33] J. Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, 2003); and C. Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London, 1790–c. 1845* (Canberra, 2010).
[34] Navickas, *Politics of Space and Place*, p. 180; and Griffiths, 'Lines on maps', p. 78.
[35] 'St George's Fields: enclosure and development', in *Survey of London*, xxv: *St George's Fields*, ed. I. Darlington (London, 1955), pp. 49–64, *British History Online* <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol25/pp49-64> [accessed 22 May 2025].
[36] D. Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838–1848* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 33; and *Charter*, 26 May 1839.
[37] J. M. Roberts, 'Assemblies, coalitions, and conflicts over free speech: from "trespass" to "encroachment" in urban space at Hyde Park, London, 1861–1962', *Antipode*, lv (2023), 916–34.
[38] 'Event guidelines', Westminster City Council <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/event_guidelines.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2025]. Under the 1986 Public Order Act, organizers have to give at least six days' notice to the Metropolitan Police of their intention to hold a procession.

The choice of procession routes was further shaped by legislation and the evolving strategies around policing of public meetings. Since the Gordon Riots, measures of police reform, including the Middlesex Justices Act 1792, introduced small forces of paid constables and salaried magistrates to instigate a wider net of preventative policing.[39] The holding of processions and demonstrations became a fraught process of negotiation with the magistrates, home office and sheriff of London, while the layers of different powers in the capital created opportunities for confusion or overlap. The Westminster Reform Society advertised the route of a procession to protest against the Peterloo Massacre on 1 November 1819, starting at the Crown and Anchor on the Strand to march with twelve banners, down Fleet Street to Finsbury Square in the City, a distance of around four kilometres. The demonstration was held while Lord Liverpool's government was pushing the 'Six Acts' through parliament, including another Seditious Meetings Act that prohibited the display of political banners and ensigns at demonstrations. The sympathetic *Morning Post* somewhat sardonically noted that while the sheriff had allowed the procession to take place, the home office had typically over-prepared by calling up the military: 'The Horse and Foot Guards are ordered to be in readiness in case of any disposition of the Radicals to stalk forth through the streets of London in open rebellion.'[40]

The Queen Caroline agitation of 1820 marked a brief opportunity for popular resistance to the government's suppression of democratic radical societies under the Six Acts. As Hunt astutely claimed in his open letter to the reformers in July 1820, 'No seditious meeting act can apply to her, no multitude, however numerous can be deemed seditious for its numbers'.[41] Deemed by the general public as their 'wronged Queen' during George IV's divorce case against her, Caroline's carriage journeys eastwards from her residence at Brandenberg House on the banks of the Thames in Hammersmith through Kensington to the house of lords regularly attracted mass crowds along the whole ten kilometre route. Trade societies and women's groups also processed westwards to present addresses to their heroine at her residence. For example, in October 1820 the shipwrights arranged an elaborate display, drawing on the ritual and symbolism of friendly society processions by marching six abreast, wearing ribbons and carrying flags and a model of a ship.[42] The popular response to the defeat of the Bill of Pains and Penalties in November 1820 further revived the mass procession as a form of elaborate theatre, highlighted by illuminations in the windows of houses en route. The route from Caroline's residence to St. Paul's Cathedral was a reclamation of public space by the unrepresented as well as a social occasion: the newspapers commented, 'as early as eight o'clock, crowds of elegantly dressed ladies took their seats in different houses along the line of procession'.[43]

Although her popularity had waned by the time of her death, Caroline's funeral procession in August 1821 was adopted by radicals and the ordinary populace as another means of demonstrating discontent against the regime. The approved route took the funeral cortege eastwards from Brandenburg House through Hammersmith and Kensington and then north through Bayswater, Edgware Road, Islington, skirting the northern edge of the City before travelling through the East End on its way to Romford and out to port. The huge crowds sought to force the procession through the West End and City as a protest against George IV. At Kensington, two wagons were drawn across the route and a chain thrown across the High Street, the crowd shouting, 'Through the City! Through the City!' At Hyde Park Corner, a regiment of life guards attempted to force a passage down Park Lane but, according to a contemporary sympathetic account, 'the dense mass of people and the coaches, carts and cars' blocked the route. The magistrates ordered the gates of Hyde Park to be opened to let the cortege through, but they were then shut against the crowds. Troops fired towards the assembled people to clear the route. At the top of Tottenham Court Road, reports claimed, 'the people, who at Cumberland Gate had been cut down and shot in their endeavours to turn the procession out of the bypaths chosen by the Government into the open Public Street, now made a successful attempt to effect the laudable object of having the Queen carried through the Metropolis instead of being hurried through its outskirts like

[39] J. M. Beattie, *The First English Detectives: the Bow Street Runners and the Policing of London, 1750–1840* (Oxford, 2012), p. 167.
[40] *Morning Post*, 1 Nov. 1819.
[41] N. Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 250, 257; and *London Packet*, 18 Aug. 1820.
[42] J. Robins, *The Trial of Queen Caroline: the Scandalous Affair That Nearly Ended a Monarchy* (New York, 2006), p. 219.
[43] *Morning Post*, 30 Nov. 1820; and *Leeds Mercury*, 2 Dec. 1820.

an object to be concealed'. The passage was blocked again by crowds at Holborn, and the cortege was compelled to go down the Strand and towards St. Paul's Cathedral. The authorities were unable to summon a legal pretext for reading the Riot Act to clear the huge crowds who forcefully pushed the cortege through the City. What the authorities had intended to downplay as a small civic procession became an extended contest of crowd control and negotiation between military, magistrates and the spectators. The radical commentary argued that trouble would have been avoided if the authorities had allowed the procession to take the 'regular route', which by then had settled on Hyde Park Corner, Charing Cross and along the Strand.[44]

The emergence of the mass democratic movement stressed the power of numbers in protest, and such early processions mirrored electoral parades in that spectators on the streets could easily merge into the march. By the 1830s, by contrast, the need to maintain order and negotiate with the new police meant that the processions were organized by ticket, and the order of the reform societies and trades' bodies was strictly defined in advance. The growth of trade unions following the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1825 further shaped the procession into a body distinct from the spectating crowd. Organizing committees were established early to co-ordinate routes, inform the magistrates and the police commissioner, and publicize the events. The trades and political movements developed a strict order of societies grouped around banners, and the rank and file marching four or six abreast in line. Marshals were employed as a response to police constables monitoring the routes and to prevent further bans on processions issued by police and magistrates. On 21 April 1834 one of the largest ever working-class demonstrations was held in the capital. The metropolitan trades unions presented a petition to the home office calling for the pardon of the Dorchester agricultural labourers, or the Tolpuddle Martyrs, as they later became known. The event was arranged by ticket and the order of the trades drawn by lot; *the Poor Man's Guardian* reported for example that 'there were tickets issued to 7000 tailors alone to attend the procession'. The central trades' committee, members of which were distinguished by 'a black crimson riband round the neck', accompanied the petition borne by a lavishly decorated cart at the head of the procession. This format of organization would prove to be a standard for the trades, reform and radical mass processions from the 1830s until well into the 1880s. A estimated 120,000 people, of whom 70,000 were trades union members, marched in their branches and lined up on Copenhagen Fields (Figure 5) before moving southwards. A delegation from the committee marched to Whitehall to deliver the petition, keeping technically within the regulations of the Tumultuous Petitioning Act, before the mass procession crossed the river Thames to St. George's Fields in Southwark for another rally, a total distance of around ten kilometres. The site, by then largely covered by Bethlem hospital, was too small for the crowds, and the procession continued southwards to Kennington Common.

The position of the new forces constituted under the 1829 Metropolitan Police Act, under two commissioners who were directly answerable to the home secretary, made the trades and political movements' claim to the right to hold processions in London as a broader issue of the state. The day before the march, Robert Owen, leader of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, and a separate delegation from the central committee of London trades, waited upon the home secretary, Lord Melbourne, to request that the Metropolitan Police did not interfere. The chief magistrate at Bow Street declared that the march would potentially endanger the public peace, and arranged for the police to line the route and extra military to be on duty, including the Royal Horse Guards stationed in Regent's Park, and twenty-nine pieces of artillery on standby, but the event passed off peacefully.[45] When the Tolpuddle Martyrs returned from transportation in April 1838, the Committee of Trades again organized a mass procession in their honour, in the reverse direction as 1834, starting on Kennington Common, heading northwards over Westminster Bridge to Pall Mall, Oxford Street and northwards to finish at Copenhagen Fields.[46]

The key concern of policing and legislation related to meetings and processions was to preserve the common law right of free passage along the streets and prevent obstruction, rather than on preventing

[44] *An Authentic and Impartial Account of the Funeral Procession of Her Late Most Gracious Majesty Queen Caroline* (London, 1821), pp. 5, 9, 12–16; I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (London, 1981), pp. 147–51; and *Kentish Weekly Post*, 17 Aug. 1821.

[45] *Poor Man's Guardian*, 26 Apr. 1834; *Public Ledger*, 22 Apr. 1834; and *Pioneer*, 26 Apr. 1834.

[46] *Northern Star*, 21 Apr. 1838; and *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 19 Apr. 1838.

Figure 5. *Meeting of the Trades Unionists at Copenhagen Fields*, 21 April 1834, by W. Summers. Source: The London Archives (City of London Corporation).

protest itself. The 1835 Highways Act contained provisions against obstruction of traffic. Section 52 of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act empowered the police commissioner to make regulations as to the routes followed by processions, to prevent obstruction of traffic as well as to prevent breaches of the peace. Police marshalled processions on the sidelines, alongside special constables and local magistrates. The Town Police Clauses Act 1847, section 28, gave the police commissioners powers to make orders 'in all times of public processions, rejoicings or illuminations and in any case when the streets are thronged or liable to be obstructed'.[47] The 1856 Metropolitan Police Act established a single Metropolitan Police commissioner, who remained answerable to the home secretary. The relationship between the two powers remained ambiguous and, as discussed below, engendered tensions over who controlled the policing of public order in the capital for the rest of the century.[48]

The procession was a key element of the Chartists' protest repertoire. In response to Chartists holding meetings at Smithfield market and Clerkenwell Green in North London in April 1839, the chief magistrate prohibited torchlit processions, and the lord mayor issued a proclamation banning further public meetings in the City.[49] On Tuesday 7 May fifty-two delegates from the Chartist Convention accompanied their national petition, transported on a carriage draped with a Union Jack, westwards along Fleet Street, the Strand, across Trafalgar Square, to the house of Thomas Attwood M.P. Attwood was taken by surprise by the appearance of the large roll of the petition outside his house, and only reluctantly agreed to present it to parliament.[50] In 1842, by contrast, the Chartist executive ensured the mass procession was the central feature of the presentation of their second

47 F. C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists* (Manchester, 1959), p. 105; and Channing, *Public Order Law*, p. 64.
48 J. Pellew, *The Home Office, 1848–1914: From Clerks to Bureaucrats* (East Brunswick, N.J., 1982), p. 47.
49 Goodway, *London Chartism*, p. 32; and *Charter*, 28 Apr. 1839.
50 *Northern Star*, 11 May 1839; and D. Moss, *Thomas Attwood: Biography of a Radical* (Montreal, 1990), p. 284.

national petition. Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, on the front page of his newspaper the *Northern Star*, boasted about the march to parliament on 2 May, 'Our procession took one hour and ten minutes to pass one spot. Procession did I say! We had no procession! It was a dense mass of streets full!! Procession means a number of persons marshalled four or five abreast, but our numbers could not have been marshalled'. Chartist branches marched from different districts across the capital including the expanding East End neighbourhoods of Bethnal Green, Shoreditch and Deptford, and converged at Lincoln's Inn Fields before setting off eastwards and then southwards down Regent Street and via Charing Cross to parliament. The order of the march was hierarchical, led by marshals on horseback, followed by brass bands and the members of the executive committee marching three abreast surrounding the national petition on a carriage.[51] Though the police commissioners reported in a return that only 1,960 people marched, the newspapers estimated that 20,000 joined the procession, which had seventy banners representing the different sections. When the front of the procession had reached the house of commons, the rear had yet to leave Oxford Street.[52] The huge crowds processing to parliament contravened the Tumultuous Petitioning Act, but the police and special constables were directed to not interfere, rather to occupy 'corner houses and others in commanding positions', given their relatively thin coverage compared with the numbers of Chartists and spectators.[53]

By the time of the presentation of the third Chartist national petition in April 1848, the Metropolitan Police and home secretary's position on policing public order and the right to march had tightened. 12,000 police and 85,000 special constables were called up in preparation for the Chartist meeting on Kennington Common on 10 April 1848.[54] Negotiations over whether the Chartists were allowed to march en masse to parliament manifested the authorities' fear of the mass crowds in an era of European revolution. The Chartist National Convention informed the home secretary, George Grey, on Friday 7 April of their intention to march from Kennington Common to parliament on the Monday. Grey cited the Tumultuous Petitioning Act in his justification of banning the procession and the stationing of forces across Blackfriars Bridge. During the weekend, the Chartist executive attempted to negotiate an alternative solution with the two Metropolitan Police commissioners, whereby the procession would cross Blackfriars Bridge and move along Oxford Street. To stay within the bounds of the Tumultuous Petitioning Act, the petition would be dispatched with a small group of the executive at Regent's (now Oxford) Circus, leaving the crowd to continue along the Edgware Road. Police Commissioner Mayne refused the compromise at 8.30 am of the morning of the demonstration. The convention sat at nine o'clock, where Feargus O'Connor persuaded the delegates of the dangers of holding the mass procession. O'Connor then met Grey at the home office to confirm the altered arrangements. Part of the assembled crowd at Kennington nevertheless sought to process over Blackfriars Bridge, where the police held a line for an hour until they were broken through and a confrontation ensued.[55] In part reaction to these events, in 1852 the local authorities enclosed the common and turned it into a park, the byelaws of which immediately prohibited all political gatherings. No meetings and processions were held until the twentieth century, when Kennington Park would regain its reputation as a key gathering point for protest marches.[56]

*

Procession routes, of all types of political and social composition, began to coalesce from the mid nineteenth century into regular routes across London, which were shaped by two main factors, geographical and political. The dominant direction of processions was pulled westwards as the built environment of the capital morphed. Trafalgar Square became the central site for political protest from the 1840s onwards, though earlier procession routes often did cross Charing Cross on its southern

[51] *Northern Star*, 7 May 1842.
[52] Goodway, *London Chartism*, p. 50; and *Northern Star*, 7 May 1842.
[53] Mather, *Public Order*, pp. 37–8.
[54] T.N.A., HO 45/2926, Home Office papers, Disturbances (Middlesex), payment of special constables, April 1848; HO 45/2410 part 1, Chartist Disturbances (London), April 1848.
[55] *Northern Star*, 15 Apr. 1848; and Goodway, *London Chartism*, p. 76.
[56] Channing, *Public Order Law*, p. 58; and M. Chase, *Chartism: a New History* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 301–2.

boundary before the site was completed (see Figure 6). The area was first laid out as Union Square in 1813 as part of the improvement of the Crown Estate, together with Regent's Park. The completion of Nelson's Column in 1843 confirmed the site as the centre of national symbolism and display. The 1844 Trafalgar Square Act established the square as Crown property. With the establishment of the metropolitan board of works in 1856, the square passed under its management, though the roads leading to it were under the authority of the Westminster local authorities.[57] Given that the site remained under the prohibition of demonstrations within a mile radius of parliament, few processions actually started at Trafalgar Square. One exception was the Reform League demonstration on Monday 11 February 1867, which marched from there through the West End to the Agricultural Hall, a newly opened showground in Angel, Islington.[58] The Victoria Embankment on the northern side of the Thames became the usual place of gathering for processions only from 1870, when it was paved and opened to the public.[59] Obviously the proximity to parliament and Trafalgar Square was the reason, but there were also material factors. The Reform League's newspaper, *Beehive*, reported in June 1873 on the London Trades' rally against the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 'The Thames Embankment is a good muster place for large numbers of men, because it offers an uninterrupted length of a broad roadway, with little traffic to obstruct, and plenty of side room for spectators'.[60]

Another major factor that influenced the choice of procession routes in central London was the opening up of royal parks. The Crown traditionally prohibited all political gatherings in its parks, including Green, Regent's and Hyde parks. The growth of the public parks movement from the 1840s

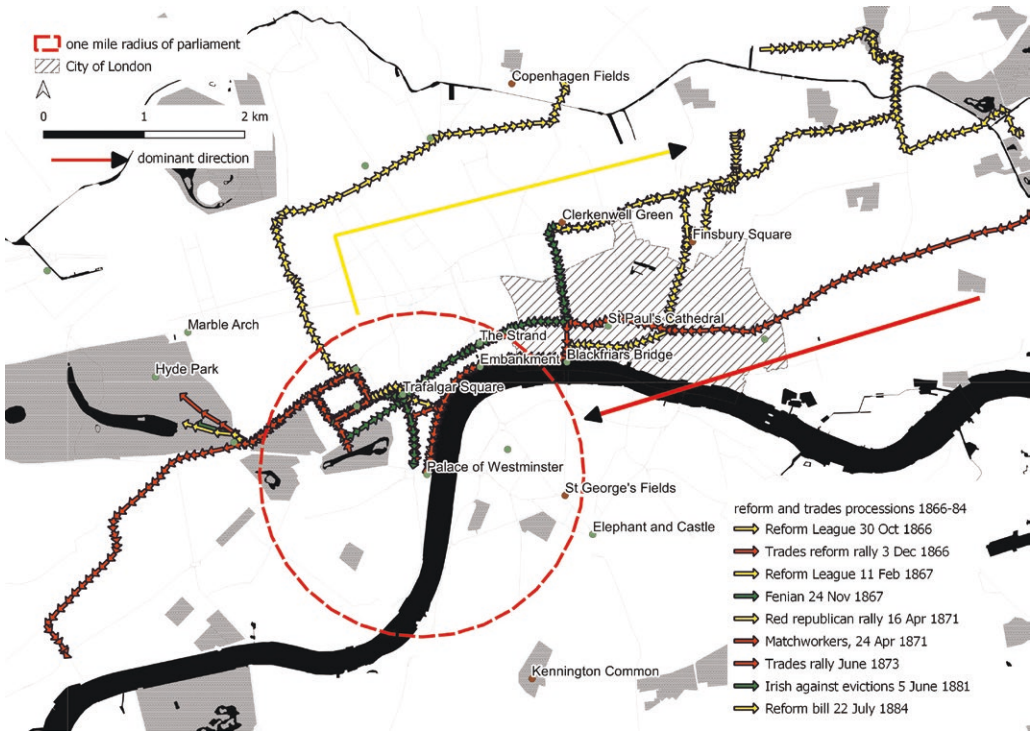

Figure 6. Reform and trades processions, 1866–84. Sources: *Beehive*, 3 Nov. 1866; *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 16 Feb. 1867; *Alnwick Mercury*, 22 Apr. 1871; *East London Observer*, 29 Apr. 1871; *Beehive*, 7 June 1873; *Birmingham Mail*, 6 June 1881; and *Weekly Dispatch*, 27 July 1884.

[57] 'Public meetings in the metropolis', Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., cccxxii (1 March 1888), col. 1880.
[58] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 16 Feb. 1867.
[59] W. Thornbury, 'The Victoria Embankment', in *Old and New London* (6 vols., London, 1878), i. 322–9, *British History Online* <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol3/pp322-329> [accessed 23 May 2025].
[60] *Beehive*, 7 June 1873.

encouraged wider access. The first new public park was Victoria Park in the East End, opened in 1845 on part of the site of the former Bishop Bonner's Fields. Democratic campaigners did not meet officially in Hyde Park until 1855, when Chartists attempted to hold a protest against the Sunday Trading bill, a piece of Sabbatarian legislation.[61] In response, the home office issued *Instructions on the Police as to Public Meetings in the Parks*, which enforced a ban on all political meetings held without permission.[62] The home secretary's intervention was challenged by Reform League from 1864 onwards as they campaigned for the second parliamentary Reform bill, culminating in a large crowd infamously pulling up the railings of Hyde Park to gain access on 23 July 1866.[63] After further challenges by the Reform League, Hyde Park became the key site for demonstrations and drew procession routes towards the space. Trades and radical societies settled into the pattern of a standard route westwards from Embankment, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus and Pall Mall to Hyde Park (see Figures 6 and 7).

The average distance of the 101 mapped processions in the period 1780–1915 was around 5.3 kilometres or just over three miles, that is, around an hour's walk in normal walking pace (see Table 1). The median length was 4.9 kilometres. The mean distance of the early radical and trades processions was around 7.9 kilometres, the shortest being the chairing of Sir Francis Burdett around Westminster in 1807 at around five kilometres, and the longest was the parade greeting the return of the Dorchester labourers in 1838 at around eleven kilometres (excluding the radical procession accompanying Queen Caroline's funeral cortege, which travelled across the whole extent of London and on into Essex). The

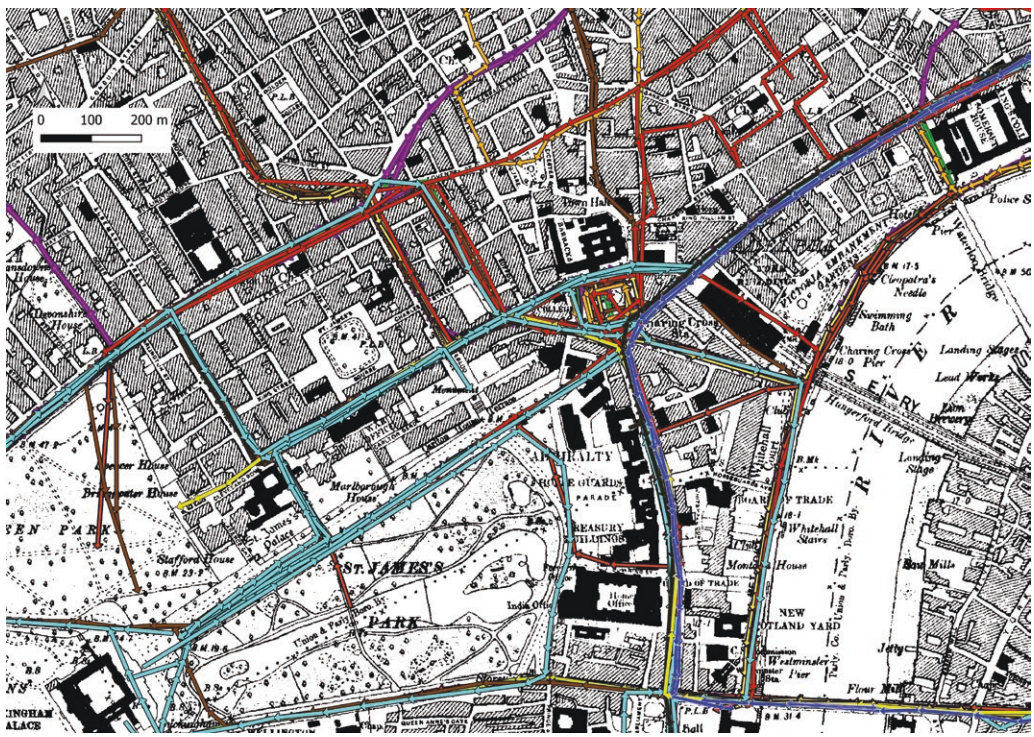

Figure 7. Central procession area, London, mapped on OS 1:10560 county series, Middlesex, 1896. Source: Historic Digimap, © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2024).

[61] J. M. Roberts, 'Spatial governance and working class public spheres: the case of a Chartist demonstration at Hyde Park', *Sociology Lens*, xiv (2001), 308–36, at p. 324.

[62] *Morning Herald*, 24 May 1864.

[63] A. Taylor, 'Commons stealers, "land-grabbers" and "jerry-builders": space, popular radicalism and the politics of public access in London, 1848–1880', *International Review of Social History*, xl (1995), 383–407, at p. 394; and H. Awcock, 'The geographies of protest and public space in mid-nineteenth-century London: the Hyde Park railings affair', *Historical Geography*, xlvii (2019), 194–217.

Table 1. Lengths of procession routes in London, 1780–1915.

Type of procession	Total number mapped	Mean distance (km)	Median distance (km)
Civic, patriotic, royal, 1789–1911	14	5.2	4.7
Protestant Association, 2 June 1780	3	4	4.4
Radical, reform, electoral, trades, 1807–36	13	7.9	6.6
Chartist, Irish, 1837–48	11	5.5	4.9
Reform, Irish, 1856–84	9	4.3	4.9
Trades union, unemployed, socialist, 1886–1914	24	4.8	3.7
Women's suffrage, 1907–15	22	4.8	4.5
Religious, temperance, charity, other, 1839–1912	5	6	5.7
Total	**101**	**Average of mean = 5.3**	**Average of median = 4.9**

Chartists marched smaller distances within the capital, with an average of around 5.7 km. The timing and dates of political processions varied, though Saturdays and Mondays were the most popular days to enable maximum attendance by the working classes. As with estimates of crowd numbers at demonstrations, it is difficult to quantify exactly how large political processions were. Newspaper reports were keen to chart how long it took for a march to pass a certain landmark, often around an hour, and stressed the huge number of spectators on the pavements and in surrounding houses en route. Most of the processions mapped in this article were at least several thousand participants strong, and the largest included the Grand Consolidated National Trades' Union march in April 1834 (120,000), and the Women's Social and Political Union's procession in June 1908, which, according to the *Times*, drew around 200,000 women from across the country.[64]

Pall Mall became the street most paraded by all processions (forty-three out of eighty events), while Trafalgar Square was crossed by at least forty-six of the events. Civic processions often had their starting point at the royal palaces around the Mall, and headed eastwards through the City to St. Paul's Cathedral and the Guild Hall. The lord mayor's parade and some royal processions took a circular route, for example Victoria's jubilee of 1887 and George V's coronation in 1911 (Figure 2).[65] Reform and trades' marches were all linear. While between 1807 and 1839 six of twelve processions travelled eastwards, the direction had shifted by April 1838, when the trades' parade in support of the Tolpuddle Martyrs reversed the route they had taken at the Copenhagen Fields demonstration of 1834, and turned westwards upon reaching Trafalgar Square from the south (Figure 4).[66] From then on, thirty-three out of forty-one reform and trades' processions travelled westwards, predominantly along the Strand or Embankment, through Trafalgar Square and along Pall Mall to Hyde Park. Once Hyde Park was available for political demonstrations from 1866, the westwards route along Piccadilly became popular, with five out of twelve reform and trades processions using it between 1866 and 1884, and ten out of twenty-three socialist and trades' processions following the route between 1885 and 1914. The reform movements between 1866 and 1884 made no use of the Strand or travelled through the City at all, preferring to use the newly opened Embankment (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, reform and trades' societies had implemented a complex organization of processions. The one exception to the ballot system to order contingents of marchers were the farriers' union, whose mounted representatives were regularly positioned at the head of processions. The earliest example of this in London appears to date from December 1866, when 100 members of the farriers' union led the London trades unions' demonstration for the

[64] *Votes for Women*, 25 June 1908.
[65] *Illustrated London News*, 2 July 1887; and *Yorkshire Post*, 21 June 1911.
[66] *Morning Chronicle*, 14 Apr. 1838.

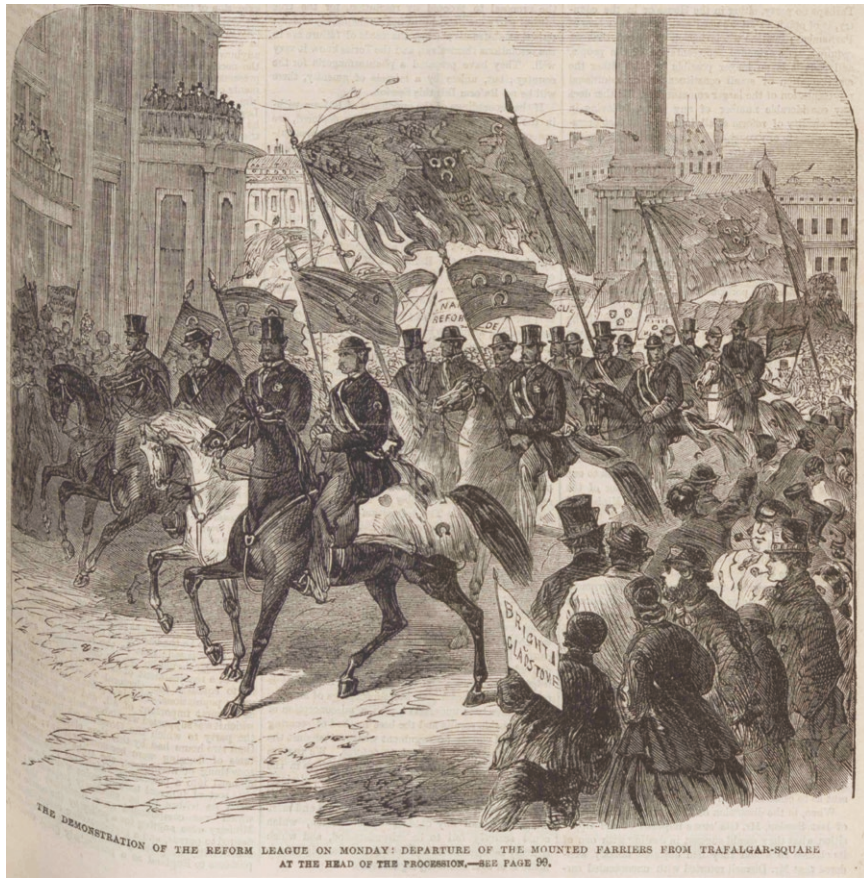

Figure 8. *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 16 February 1867, 'the demonstration of the Reform League on Monday: Departure of the Mounted Farriers from Trafalgar Square at the head of the procession'. Source: Content provided by the British Library Board; all rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [accessed 23 May 2025].

second Reform bill.[67] The illustrated press depicted the mounted farriers prominently at the head of the Reform League's procession during the passage of the bill in February 1867 (Figure 8). At the demonstration of London trades on Whit Monday 1873 protesting against the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 'the committee [were] accompanied by a mounted division of farriers – gentlemen arrayed in crimson and blue scarves, betokening their special grades as marshals and superintendents of the day's forces'.[68] During the agitation for the third Reform bill in July 1884, the farriers' union again headed the processions to Hyde Park Corner. A letter to the editor of the *Essex Herald* noted, 'What harm can happen to the House of Lords? Shall a procession of mounted farriers and 6000 labourers, which is to take place on the 21st [July], frighten them or deter them from doing their duty? I hope not'.[69] Horses were a prominent element of the front line of processions, providing visual display, height and order, and potential defence against attack by opponents or indeed police. The position of farriers in the trades' hierarchy may also have played a part. In 1891 the newspapers described the farriers at the head of a procession of the Eight Hours campaign as 'the aristocracy of labour', suggesting their dominance.[70]

[67] *Western Times*, 27 Nov. 1866; and *Northern Ensign*, 6 Dec. 1866.
[68] *Beehive*, 7 June 1873.
[69] *Essex Herald*, 21 July 1884.
[70] *Redford and Worksop Herald*, 9 May 1891; and *Weekly Dispatch*, 3 May 1891.

The processional geography of London further evolved as the city expanded eastwards around the docklands from the mid nineteenth century (Figure 9). Trades' processions began at the meeting sites of Mile End Waste (a long strip of paved land along the main road), Stepney Green, and Victoria Park. The striking matchworkers of Bow, for example, endeavoured to march to parliament in April 1871. They first attempted to rally in Victoria Park, eventually assembling outside Bow station, marching a mile until the police broke them up. The matchworkers retreated down side streets, reassembling half a mile further down the main road.[71] Trades and unemployed marches in and out of the districts around the docks intensified as newly formed socialist movements, most notably the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.), took up street meetings and marches as key tactics during the severe economic downturn of the late 1880s. Their headquarters were deliberately situated in residential areas of the East End, and marching became a recruitment tool.[72]

The home office advised that political processions were not illegal, but that the local authorities and police should prevent them if they suspected a breach of the peace.[73] The 1880s saw both parliamentary and Metropolitan Police attitudes to the practice harden, for two reasons. First, the spread of the Salvation Army across the country from 1865 onwards revived debate about the right to march. Anti-temperance campaigners reacted violently against the Salvation Army's parades through the streets of many towns, especially in coastal resorts. Both sides claimed protection by police. In 1882 an incident at Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, whereby a Salvation Army parade was attacked, resulted in an important legal case, Beatty versus Gillbanks. The appeal court rejected the claim by

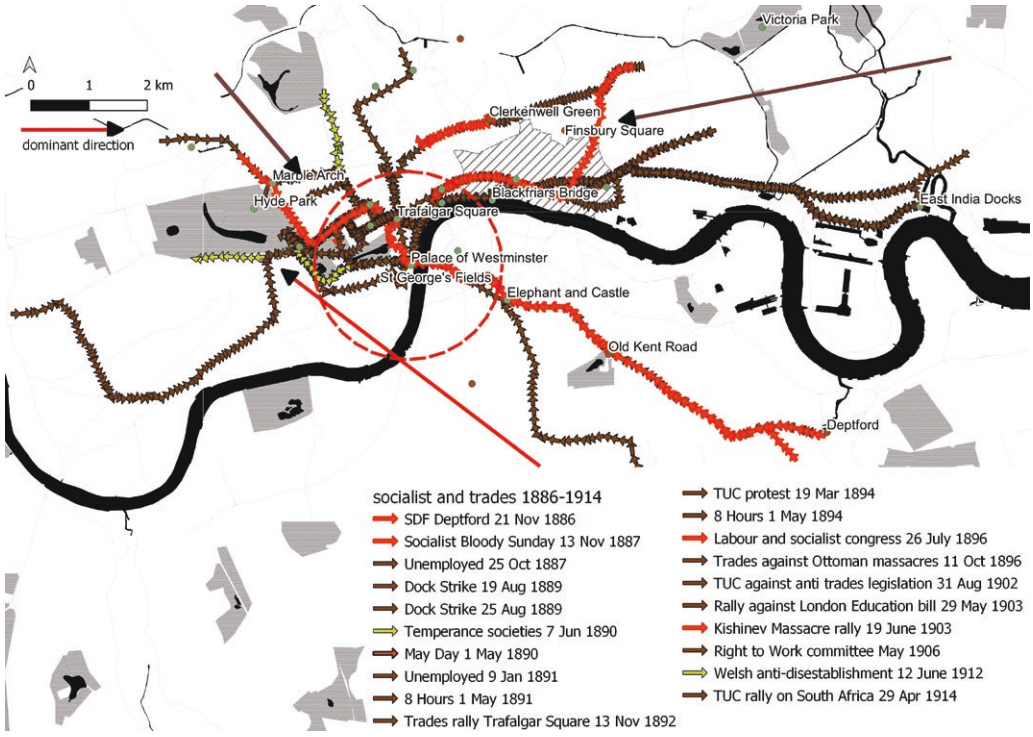

Figure 9. Trades, republican and Irish processions, 1885–1914. Sources: *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 25 Oct. 1887; *London Evening Standard*, 19, 25 Aug. 1889; *Daily News*, 1 May 1890, 9 Apr. 1891; *Weekly Dispatch*, 18 March 1894; *Justice*, 25 July 1896; *Morning Leader*, 10 Oct. 1896; *Standard*, 1 Sept. 1902; *Jewish World*, 26 June 1903; *Belper News*, 18 May 1906; and *Justice*, 5 March 1914.

[71] *East London Observer*, 29 Apr. 1871.
[72] M. Crick, *History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Keele, 1994), p. 47.
[73] E. Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980), p. 285.

the superintendent of police that the Salvation Army, though acting lawfully in parading, were acting unlawfully because they were knowingly inducing a breach of the peace by their opponents. The case however did not establish a legal right to march, nor did it confirm the responsibility of the police to protect marchers, only to maintain order against breaches of the peace.[74] The case of Beatty versus Gillbanks was often referred to in later debates around the right to march.[75] The socialists commonly complained that the police discriminated against them over the Salvation Army and other religious groups. In 1886 the S.D.F. took up the practice of processions by torchlight at night, in direct imitation of the Chartists from fifty years before. The Metropolitan Police commissioner consulted the solicitor general about the legality of the tactic, referring to the 1838 royal proclamation against torchlit processions, and asked if the police could refer to the decision in the Beatty versus Gillbanks case that a procession could be deemed illegal if there was reasonable suspicion that the marchers intended to cause trouble. The solicitor general concluded that torchlit processions were not unlawful, but the commissioners of police were able to prohibit the procession if it clashed with 'public processions (such as for instance the lord mayor's show), public rejoicings or illuminations'.[76]

The second factor was London specific. Following riots between the S.D.F. and rival groups in the West End and Trafalgar Square in February 1886, a new Metropolitan Police commissioner, Sir Charles Warren, was appointed. His determination to clamp down on disorder led to major confrontations between the socialist movements and the authorities over the right to march. Warren, who had returned from serving as military commander of the infamous expedition in Bechuanaland in South Africa, immediately imposed a militaristic style of policing on the capital. In February 1887 the S.D.F. planned to hold a torchlight procession along Fleet Street and the Strand to the West End. Warren banned the procession and stationed police to prevent the socialists gathering. Violence between protesters and police intensified over the summer. On 1 November 1887 Warren issued a police notice, without home office sanction, that Trafalgar Square would be closed in the event of disorderly crowds.[77] In defiance of Warren's notice, the Metropolitan Radical Association called a meeting in Trafalgar Square on 13 November 1887. The ensuing attack on the crowds by police was dubbed 'Bloody Sunday' in the socialist press (Figure 10). The socialist, radical and democratic clubs of Hackney and Finsbury assembled on Clerkenwell Green, and set off, headed by a red flag surmounted by a cap of liberty and two brass bands playing the *Marseillaise*. Warren had drawn up police cordons on the approaches to Trafalgar Square, and was determined to use force, in reaction against the criticism of his force's handling of the West End riots. The procession was forcibly dispersed on St. Martin's Lane by mounted constables and foot police. Similar scenes occurred where the other processions met the police cordon, including at the corner of Wellington Street and the Strand, and where Westminster Bridge met Parliament Street. The Paddington and Notting Hill Radical clubs marched from Edgware Road and past Marble Arch, but 'opposite the Haymarket Theatre the police had formed a line and when the head of the procession approached the police advanced and the mob was scattered, their banners being captured and destroyed'.[78] Warren's response was to issue further prohibitions against processions, leading to further debates in parliament about the policing the right of assembly.[79]

The late 1880s marked a peak of political processions in the capital. The Metropolitan Police compiled a return of public meetings and processions requiring extra policing within its district (Table 2), to illustrate the extent to which the socialists and unemployed had generated major demands on public order. The return recorded over 200 processions in 1889.[80] The home office estimated that what they classified as 'large processions' had increased from seventeen in 1887 to sixty in 1889.[81] The

[74] Beatty v Gillbanks (1882) 9 Q.B.D. 308; and V. Bailey, 'The Salvation Army riots, the "Skeleton Army" and legal authority in the provincial town', in *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. A. P. Donajgrodzski (London, 1977), pp. 231–53.
[75] 'Public meetings (metropolis)', Hansard, 3, cccxiv (12 May 1887), cols. 1746–70, at col. 1751.
[76] R. Vorspan, '"Freedom of assembly" and the right to passage in modern English legal history', *San Diego Law Review*, xxxiv (1997), 921–1046, at p. 925.
[77] *Eastern Post*, 12 Feb. 1887.
[78] *St James's Gazette*, 14 Nov. 1887; and Channing, *Public Order Law*, p. 117.
[79] 'Public meetings (metropolis)', Hansard, 3, cccxxxi (26 November 1888), cols. 159–60.
[80] T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, Commissioner of police, Note in connection with the question of processions in the streets, 13 May 1890.
[81] 'Street processions – metropolis', Hansard, 3, cccxliv (3 June 1890), col. 1871.

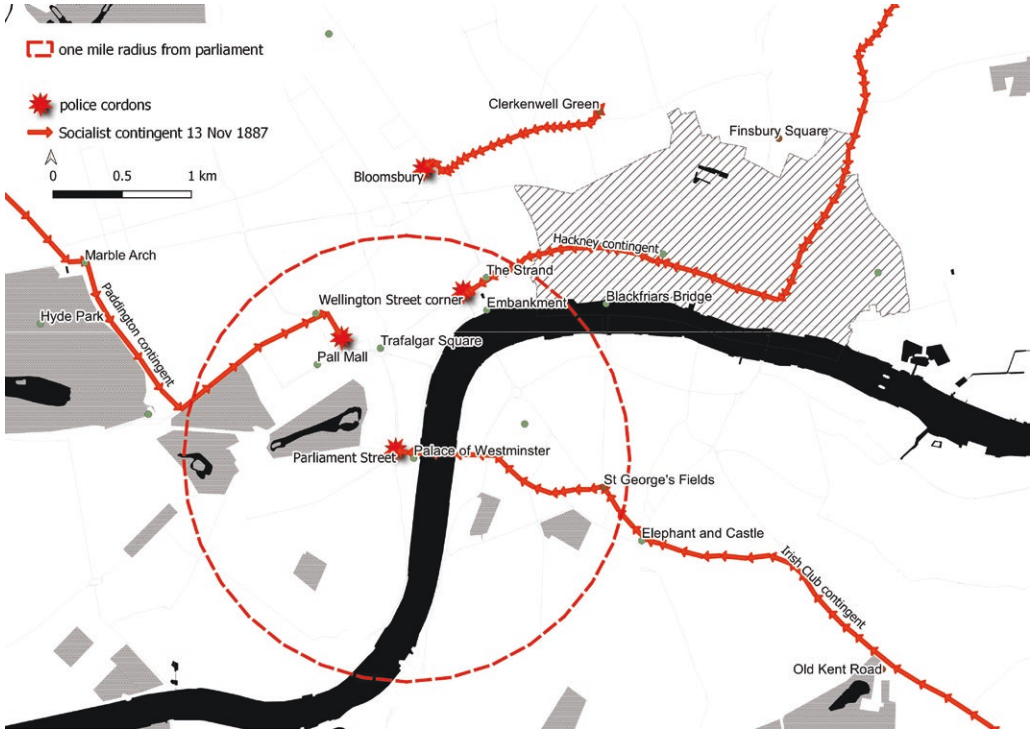

Figure 10. Routes of socialist processions, Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887. Source: T.N.A., MEPO 2/174.

Table 2. Number of meetings and processions recorded by the Metropolitan Police.

Date	No. of meetings	No. of processions
8 Oct.–31 Dec. 1887	177	21
1888	1,243	160
1889	975	202

Source: T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, 13 May 1890.

1889 dock strike involved highly choreographed parades of workers crossed from their territory of the docklands of the East End to the City and the West End. Led by key new union figures, notably John Burns and socialist activists such as Tom Mann, the dockers first spread the strike by parading around the docks, turning out workers. From 16 August onwards, up to 20,000 workers marched around eleven kilometres from the East India Docks to the City, where Ben Tillett presented the demands of the strikers to the employers at Dock House on Leadenhall Street. A few days later, Burns led the marchers to the Tower of London, and on successive Sundays, the strikers marched over twelve kilometres from the docks, along Embankment, to assemble in Hyde Park. As Sophie Nield's study of the processions argues, the choice of route enabled a symbolic and material occupation of the area seen to be wealthy and far removed from the working-class East End. The performative nature of the display of the dockers' identities and respectability crossing into the West End was a key factor in ensuring that their demands were met.[82]

[82] T.N.A., MEPO 2/226, Reports on the daily march from Poplar into the city; S. Nield, 'The sweater's baby and the doctor's cat: performing occupation of public space in the 1889 London dock strike', *About Performance*, xiv–xv (2017), 61–76, at p. 74; J. Balhatchet, 'The police and the London dock strike of 1889', *History Workshop Journal*, xxxii (1991), 54–68, at p. 66; and *London Evening Standard*, 19, 24, 26 Aug. 1889.

Tensions between the home office and Metropolitan Police commissioner continued. Warren's successor, James Munro, conflicted with the Conservative home secretary, Henry Matthews, who argued that marches should be allowed to go down Oxford Street on a Saturday.[83] On 13 May 1890 Munro issued a note 'in connection with the question of Processions in the Streets', which denied Matthews's allegations that he was enacting a new policy, and argued that he was continuing the regular practice of defending the 'public right of free passage' against obstruction, a matter of common law of nuisance and regular policing. For Munro, the same laws applied to processions as to open-air meetings, 'for a procession is nothing more than a meeting in motion'.[84] The *St Stephen's Review* commented, 'The friction between Mr Munro and Mr Matthews has grown to be so intolerable that the former gentleman has sent the latter an ultimatum, which must end in the resignation of one or the other'.[85] The law officers of the Crown gave their opinion that 'the powers of the commissioner do not extend to the prohibition of a peaceable procession either generally or in relation to its starting point or destination. But he possesses in our opinion ample power to make regulations as to the route to be taken and for requiring breaks or gaps or stoppages or other reasonable precautions for the convenience of ordinary traffic'. Their priority was to avoid obstruction, rather than to protect the right of protest.[86]

The S.D.F. and other extra-parliamentary groups posited the clashes as essential constitutional questions over the right of public assembly in the new civic spaces. Radical East End M.P.s used the issue of policing the demonstrations to attack the government, alongside their other complaints about the forcible dispersal of static assemblies. On 3 June 1890 debate was raised in the house of commons by Edward Pickersgill, radical Liberal M.P. for Bethnal Green, about the home office interfering in the policing of political processions, and whether a ban should be issued on a temperance march intended to be held along Embankment to Hyde Park.[87] James Rowlands, M.P. for Finsbury East, complained that the situation in the capital was unique because the government and police were directly restricting the right of assembly:

> We know that at the great Franchise Demonstration in 1884 the processions were allowed to pass from the Embankment, up Whitehall, and through Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park, and the Heir Apparent and his family occupied a seat in Whitehall, from which they viewed the citizens expressing their opinion in a Constitutional manner. There was no danger felt then; why should there be now?[88]

The policies of the individual Metropolitan Police commissioners determined much of whether processions were policed heavily or ended up in confrontations with the police and special constables. Later, in June 1890, Munro was succeeded by Sir Edward Bradford, who sought to regain stability with a less interventionist approach. He made arrangements for the socialist procession from Clerkenwell Green to Hyde Park on 9 July, employing 950 police to marshal the route, whereby 'the mounted men are to carry truncheons instead of swords and the procession is to be stopped from time to time when crossing main thoroughfares at any place where it may be deemed necessary to allow vehicular and ordinary foot traffic to proceed'.[89] The processions were then usually treated with a policy of non-interference by police unless there was a threat of breach of the peace.[90] Embankment westwards through Parliament Square to Hyde Park became the approved route, which was generally followed by unemployed and trades movements, for example for the May Days of 1890 and 1891.[91] The 1661 Tumultuous Petitioning Act and the 1817 Seditious Meetings Act were continually cited in later Metropolitan Police correspondence with the home office and the law officers of the Crown. While the former legislation, as we have seen, had an impact on preventing mass processions to parliament,

[83] T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, Returns of meetings and processions, 27 May 1890.
[84] T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, Commissioner of police, Note in connection with the question of processions in the streets, 13 May 1890.
[85] *St Stephen's Review*, 17 May 1890.
[86] T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, Opinion of the law officers, 6 June 1890.
[87] 'Street processions – metropolis', Hansard, 3, cccxliv (3 June 1890), col. 1872.
[88] 'Street processions – metropolis', Hansard, 3, cccxliv (3 June 1890), col. 1875.
[89] *St James's Gazette*, 5 July 1890.
[90] T.N.A., MEPO 3/1780, Metropolitan Police, General orders, 1906.
[91] *Daily News*, 1 May 1890; 9 Apr. 1891.

the latter act was less often applied in practice. The 1906 Metropolitan Police memorandum, 'Public meetings in the metropolis', explained the discrepancy, noting that 'considerable latitude in practice [is] allowed in complying with the statute of George III [1817 Seditious Meetings Act], in restraint of the number of persons at meetings within a mile of Westminster Hall, and the objects of the meetings; but the earlier statute of Charles the Second, limiting to ten the number of persons repairing to the Houses of Parliament with petition, is strictly adhered to'.[92]

Pressure on police during mass processions also originated from local residents and shopkeepers concerned about the impact on their businesses. For example, during the mass marches of the unemployed in spring 1890, the Metropolitan Police commissioner received several letters, including from Henry Keen, a merchant tailor of High Holborn, who complained, 'I am one of hundreds of tradesmen and residents along this thoroughfare who will view the announcement of another procession to Hyde Park on Saturday June 7th with annoyance', because of the 'loss of trade and loss of time on weekdays and loss of rest and quietness on Sundays on account of these senseless processions and demonstrations is becoming serious'.[93] Oxford Street, as we have seen, was rarely allowed as a route because of pressure from the shopkeepers and the impact on traffic. The march marking the culmination of the 1889 dock strike marches on 25 August had originally planned to go via Holborn, but 'the planners of the route had forgotten, however, that Oxford Street, like the Strand, is "up", so the line of march from Cheapside had to be changed to Queen Victoria Street, the Embankment and Piccadilly, entrance to the Park being gained at Hyde Park Corner'.[94] Not all procession sites were purposefully symbolic, therefore, because practical considerations such as roadworks could force changes in routes.

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By the turn of the century, political procession routes had evolved into feats of complex co-ordination. Trades' unions and the Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.) employed the multi-pronged tactic of multiple strands merging into one procession from different parts of the city, reflecting the cross-London support base and the importance of local branch networks as sources of strength to the movements. In 1896, for example, the International Socialist and Trades' Congress was held in London. The demonstration committee, chaired by W. C. Steadman, detailed assembly points across the thirty-five districts of the capital. Marshals were employed to direct each group in procession to the convergence point at Embankment. Again, the combined procession to Hyde Park was headed by the Farriers' Amalgamated Union and Battersea band. Each trade marched in small units, eight abreast. Marching fostered a sense of solidarity and indeed self-pride among the trades and local communities. A spectator remarked about the procession entering Hyde Park, 'It was curious to notice how a vivid sense of their own importance in taking part in such a demonstration and of marching along to the strains of the "Marseillaise" had given even the most wretched of the Jewish tailors an air of proud distinction'. Kevin Callahan's study of the congress noted the retrospective recognition by participants of the political symbolism of the route from Embankment to Hyde Park; one member explained, 'But what memories the route recalled! Here was Trafalgar Square, where in 1887 Cunninghame Graham and John Burns had their heads broken and poor Linnell was killed and all because they wanted to protest against coercion in Ireland'.[95] The socialists here referred back to Bloody Sunday, which had become a totem for reaction to police violence against the right to march.

Not all processions fostered unity and solidarity. The hierarchical organization of procession committees and the choice of routes could crystallize ideological and class differences. Chris Wrigley has charted the waxing and waning popularity of the trades' May Day marches in this period. Their size and popularity were dependent on the particular combination of labour politics and economic depression at

[92] T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, 'Public meetings in the metropolis', 1906.
[93] T.N.A., MEPO 2/248, H. Keen to Metropolitan Police commissioner, 10 May 1890.
[94] *Morning Post*, 26 Aug. 1889.
[95] K. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture: European Socialism and the Second International, 1889–1914* (London, 2010), pp. 132, 134, citing *International Socialist and Trades Congress Illustrated Report* (London, 1896), p. 10.

the time. In 1890 the May Day marches involved an estimated 100,000 to 250,000 people, with numbers boosted by Eleanor Marx and Tom Mann securing the support of London Trades' Council following the dock strike. Trades unions and the political left were not united, and throughout the heyday of May Day marching, different unions organized their own processions and separate stages at Hyde Park. For example, although in 1893 both Trades' Council and the Eight Hour Working Day Committee gathered their supporters at the usual starting spot of Embankment, they followed different routes.[96]

The female suffrage associations employed intricate levels of organization and pre-planning of routes. The W.S.P.U.'s largest set-piece demonstrations in 1908 and 1910 involved a complicated convergence of societies in multiple processions (Figure 11). The 21 June 1908 procession had seven contingents at the main railway stations to meet societies arriving from the provinces, and at Trafalgar Square, Embankment and Chelsea to converge on Hyde Park.[97] The march on 23 July 1910 had only two contingents, perhaps reflecting the lesson from previous marches that a simpler organization was more manageable.[98] The 26 July 1913 rally of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S.)' contingents marched from Kensington, Maida Vale, the British Museum and Piccadilly (Figure 12).[99] Reform, trades and Irish processions from 1856 to 1906 had an average of around 4.3 kilometres in length, while women's suffrage processions had an average length of 4.8 kilometres, with the longest being the 1915 East London Federation of Suffragettes (E.L.F.S.) march at 11.7 kilometres.[100] Ceremonial and mass processions took longer as they often involved a stately pace and more pageantry to be observed at various stopping points. *Votes for Women,* for example, commented

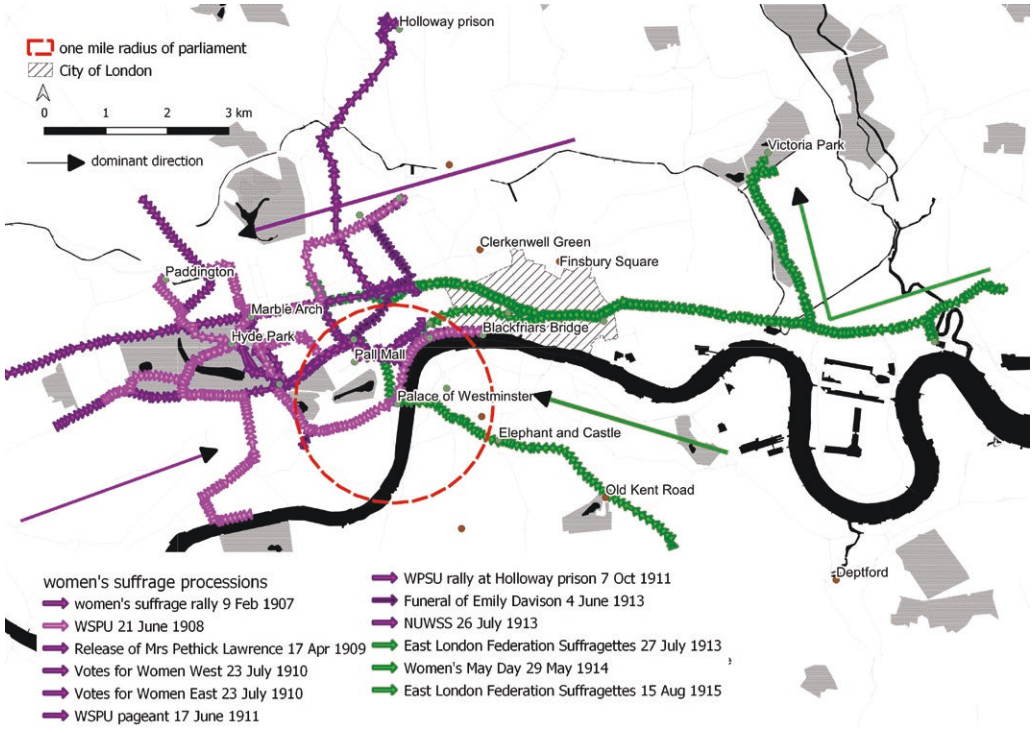

Figure 11. Women's suffrage processions, 1907–15. Sources: *Labour Leader*, 8 Feb. 1907; *Votes for Women*, 14 May 1908, 2 Apr. 1909, 15 July 1910, 16 June 1911, 6 Oct. 1911, 25 July 1913; *London Evening Standard*, 16 June 1913; *Suffragette*, 25 July 1913; *East London Observer*, 23 May 1914; and *Votes for Women*, 13 Aug. 1915.

[96] C. Wrigley, 'May Day in Britain', in *The Ritual of May Day in Western Europe: Past, Present and Future*, ed. A. Peterson and H. Reiter (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 133–59, at p. 137.
[97] *Votes for Women*, 14 May 1908.
[98] *Votes for Women*, 15 July 1910.
[99] *Votes for Women*, 25 July 1913.
[100] *Votes for Women*, 13 Aug. 1915.

on the suffragette procession of June 1911, 'The numbers both of the procession and the crowd were too vast for a single march. The police behaved with the utmost courtesy and judgement, but they were obliged to break the line at frequent intervals to let the traffic through. Hence arose gaps and long delays, interrupting the stream of banners and prolonging the march by hours'.[101]

The contrasting social and political wings of the female suffrage movement was also reflected in their different choices of route. The W.S.P.U. and N.U.W.S.S. preferred high-profile routes through upscale areas such as Knightsbridge and Regent Street, or towards their meeting sites of Langham Place or the Royal Albert Hall. The infamous imprisonment of suffragettes at Holloway prison also drew processions northwards. The working-class and militant E.L.F.S. under Sylvia Pankhurst, who had split from the central W.S.P.U., by contrast centred their activities in the East End. On Sunday 15 August 1915, for example, the E.L.F.S. organized an anti-conscription march across London, although their final destination, Queen's Hall, at the last minute reneged on their booking of the event space. In the same way as the 1889 dock strikers, the 'march from East to West', as George Lansbury described it in *Women's Dreadnought*, was a deliberate show of crossing class territories from their heartland in the docklands to the West End. Lansbury reported 'it was a long trudge. Nearly three hours on London streets is no joke and yet we were all cheerful and gay'.[102] The 'women's May Day' in 1914 marched from the docks at Canning Town through the East End neighbourhoods to rally in Victoria Park, reflecting the emergence of more localized carnival routes in the East End.[103]

Bodily discipline and physical organization especially mattered for these mass processions. Marshals monitored sections divided into the different geographical groups each led by a group captain and a banner captain, and the women were instructed to wear white with emblems and march five abreast. This preparedness was a tactic to demonstrate their legitimacy and orderliness to the authorities; it also ensured crowd control of the tens of thousands of participants who travelled from across the capital and from all parts of the country. The female suffrage associations' newspapers instructed attendees as to precisely what to do and wear. Practicality and visibility were prioritized in the instructions: 'Don't wear gowns that have to be held up; don't wear enormous hats that block the view'.[104] The level of

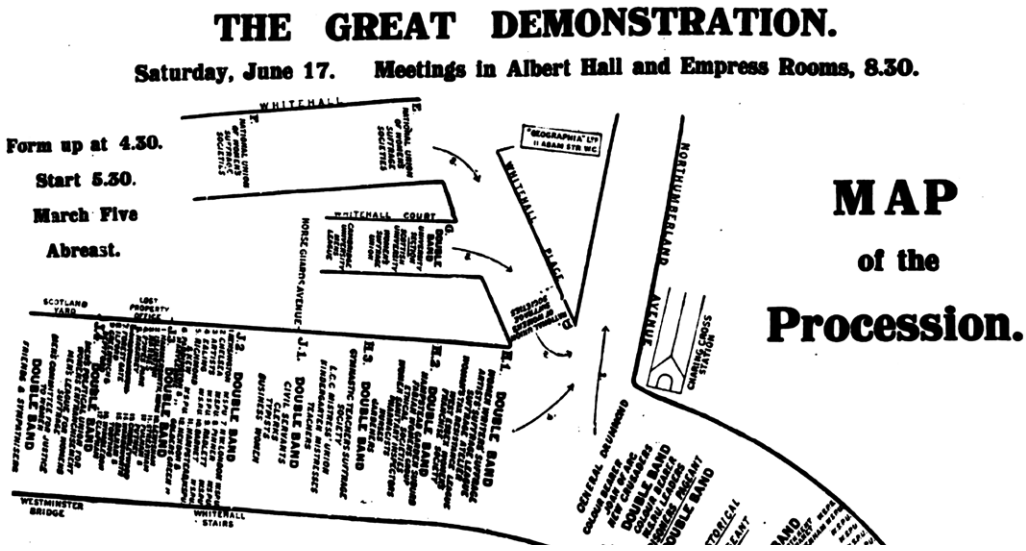

Figure 12. *Votes for Women*, 16 June 1911, showing part of the order of the suffrage procession of 17 June, Hungerford Bridge, London. Source: Content provided by the British Library Board; all rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [accessed 23 May 2025].

[101] *Votes for Women*, 23 June 1911.
[102] *Women's Dreadnought*, 21 Aug. 1915.
[103] *East London Observer*, 23 May 1914; and Georgiou, '"Drab suburban streets"'.
[104] *Votes for Women*, 15 July 1910.

detail reflected their desire to ensure both visual spectacle on the street, important for publicity and the press, and the orderliness of route. Self-defence against potential male violence, from both police and spectators, also motivated the use of strict ranks and swift pace.

The suffragettes were highly conscious of using the media spectacle of photography and newspapers to publicize their cause – hence used the visual elements of marching in white in strict order contrasting with the blackened buildings and dark clothing of spectators, which the newspaper photographs displayed as a distinctive contrast in print (Figure 13).[105] Even before its first meeting in London in February 1906, the W.S.P.U. held a procession from St. James's Park underground station round the corner to Caxton Hall and asked the *Daily Mail* photographer to record it. A year later, the *Daily Mirror* was invited to photograph the N.U.W.S.S.'s 'Mud March'. As Elizabeth Crawford's study of the protest notes, 'Images of orderly elegant banner bearing women were more likely to be included than their speeches'. Suffragettes were also keen adopters of historic pageantry, blurring the distinction between parade and march with the use of floats and symbolic mummery. Edith Downing designed the appearance of the W.S.P.U. processions, including the 'Prison to Citizenship' parade welcoming women out of prison on 18 June 1910, and the Pageant of Empire in the June 1911 Coronation procession.[106]

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The development of the mass procession in the long nineteenth century was a product of the new mass politics. The rise of the democratic radical and trades' movements from the late eighteenth

Figure 13. Funeral of Miss Emily Davison, 'passing along Hart Street', *Votes for Women*, 20 June 1913. Source: Content provided by the British Library Board; all rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [accessed 23 May 2025].

[105] B. Green, 'From visible *flâneuse* to spectacular suffragette? The prison, the street, and the sites of suffrage', *Discourse*, xvii (1994–5), 67–97, at p. 67.

[106] E. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: a Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (London, 1999), pp. 451, 172.

century onwards fostered a rich political processional life that differed from the older electoral and trades procession traditions, and solidified a more regular route of symbolic sites. London processions were unique because of their situation, being at the centre of power and the presence of parliament, the direct control over public order by the home secretary as well as by the Metropolitan Police commissioner, the slow development of open public spaces for demonstrations because of restrictions on the use of parks; and encroachment on other open spaces traditionally used for gathering. The development of the main sites of meeting of Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park and Embankment from the 1840s to the 1870s, respectively, established a regular route that is still followed today. Political movements and trades unions did not have a completely free choice to march where they wanted. Policing tactics, the tensions between Metropolitan Police commissioners and home secretaries in response to specific political movements, legislation and common law around public assembly and obstruction of the streets, and the complex layers of authority in the capital, had significant impacts that determined where and when processions were held.

Examining the practical and political conditions that shaped the form and routes of processions and protest marches sheds new light onto the history of British popular politics. This article feeds into renewed interest among historians in the 'practical politics' of the long nineteenth century. There is a growing recognition that the older debates around class and party politics during this period of democratization in Britain cannot be understood without a holistic view of the ways in which politics was practised and organized, from ground level to parliament.[107] Recognizing the logistics of organizing – in the case of processions, this includes the negotiations of permission from the authorities, the selling of tickets, the advertising of routes in the newspapers, the purchase of materials for banners and emblems, and so on – offers ways of understanding how the choices made by participants in political action were shaped by material considerations alongside intellectual and cultural influences.

The right to march was hard fought, and political movements asserted agency by claiming routes physically as well as symbolically. The period after the First World War brought new challenges and movements that again brought the right to march debates to the fore of policing and legislation. Earlier compromises of non-interference were no longer effective. The emergence of the communist movement and violent clashes between police and the unemployed in the 1920s and 1930s continued the conflicts of the earlier decades. Though there is not room to discuss in detail in this article, it is important to consider the significance of the development of mass protest marches in this period. The national hunger marches and the rise of the fascist movement focused their energy on claiming the streets of Central and East London.[108] Culminating in the Battle of Cable Street on 4 October 1936, the provocative militant marching of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists was opposed by a physical and material defence of territory by Jewish and Communist communities in the East End. The government's response to these physical contests over the right to march was a public order bill, rushed through parliament and which became law on 1 January 1937. Clause 3 (1) of the Public Order Act 1936 strengthened police authority to regulate public processions. Clause 5 made it an offence for anyone in a public place to use threatening words or behaviour with intent to promote breach of the peace.[109] But in effect, the legislation was a stop-gap that could not fully interfere with the popular right of assembly and protest. The tensions between protecting the freedom of passage and the liberty of assembly and free speech became inextricably entangled with issues of race, class and national politics for the rest of the twentieth century.

[107] See forthcoming special issue of *Parliamentary History*, 'Organise!', ed. N. Lloyd-Jones; and R. Goldsmith, 'Towards the vernacular, away from politics? Political history after the "new political history"', *Political Quarterly*, xciv (2023), 272–8.

[108] T.N.A., Home Office papers, HO 45/25383, Papers on fascist marches, 1934.

[109] Channing, *Public Order Law*, p. 79; and K. Ewing and C. A. Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 314–18, 325–9.