INTRODUCTION

Why was there no revolution in England in the nineteenth century? What can account for the remarkable stability of English society compared to others in Europe and its ability to go through profound processes of change without erupting in volatile conflicts or succumbing to the violent overthrow of state institutions? In the century following the French Revolution, England was no less confronted by the challenges of modernity than other European societies. Phenomena such as industrialization, urbanization, population growth and democratization, to name just a few, were experienced in England and throughout Europe at roughly the same time. At the end of the nineteenth century, England had a population of about thirty million; around 1800, its population had been less than nine million. In 1901, more than two-thirds of the population lived in cities, most of which had doubled, tripled or even quadrupled in size in a very short amount of time. In centuries prior, only about 27 per cent of the population lived in cities. Fewer and fewer people worked on the land as jobs in trade, transport and industry became more prevalent. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, England had officially become the greatest economic power in the world. Less than 3 per cent of the population was enfranchised at the beginning of the century, but by 1900 almost every adult man could vote and be elected to Parliament.[1] Regardless of the scholarly debate over whether the United Kingdom must be considered an *ancien régime* until the early nineteenth century, the fact of the matter is that by the turn of the twentieth century, England had basically become a democratically governed industrial society.[2] No other nation in Europe had experienced a similar social, economic and political transformation without a complete restructuring of its state.

It is important to bear these questions and facts in mind when embarking on an analysis of political culture among the English lower classes in the nineteenth century. Looking at the conservative aspects of this culture helps clarify why the massive social conflicts that were rife in England in the nineteenth century did not escalate as they did in other countries. This is not to say that England followed a *Sonderweg* ('special path') to modernity. A long tradition of popular conservatism by itself cannot explain the absence of an English revolution in

the nineteenth century. Yet the aspects of popular conservatism analysed in this book point to the complexity of political conflicts in Britain and the variety of ways in which England could face its social challenges. Plebeians, like all other social groups, interpreted their world and the changes that they experienced and endured very differently. Many sought stability by holding tightly to positions that opposed rapid change or promised a safe path into the future without the disappearance of traditional structures. Consequently, it was rather difficult, if not completely impossible, to turn these plebeians into the bearers of revolutionary ideals.

But this is not to say that English society was fundamentally conservative, which ultimately made it unsusceptible to revolution. Nor is the intention to discredit the efforts of all those who fought for radical social change based on experiences of despair or social destitution. On the contrary, a large portion of the English lower classes took part in these struggles, full of hope for a better future and fuelled by democratic ideals coupled with a commitment to equality and social justice. Yet, as the following chapters will exemplify, ideas of 'Church and Crown' fell on fertile ground between 1815 and 1867 in those very places in which calls for reforms, the fight for the People's Charter or opposition in the form of strikes, social protests or the breaking of machinery were usually considered a natural political expression of class experience.

Specifically conservative notions of the monarchy and Protestantism, of the constitution and the nation as well as of social justice, gender relations and the English way of life greatly influenced the political actions of social groups within the English lower classes in the nineteenth century. These ideas were paramount in celebrations of the monarchy, local conflicts during parliamentary elections and the control of local administrative bodies. They were also reflected in confessional conflicts between Anglicans and Nonconformists as well as between Catholics and Protestants, which in turn fostered disputes between Irish and English workers. They could also feed into social protest movements or encourage workers to support the Tories. But, above all, they were anchored in the culture of English plebeians – in their associations, in their traditions and celebrations, and in their everyday lives. It is these ideas that this book is all about.

Working from premise that the cultural interpretation of shared social experiences differs from one individual to the next, this book suggests that there was a plurality of possible political identities circulating within the English lower classes. These political and social identities were heterogeneous and complex. They were also constantly in a state of flux and sometimes contradictory and mercurial. In a nutshell, political contests between popular traditions of radicalism and conservatism did not take place between 'above' and 'below', but rather within all levels of English society and particularly among the lower classes.

In the past, historians who have studied the English lower classes have been preoccupied with finding explanations for the remarkable stability of English

society in the age of revolution. As a result, much of the scholarship on the history, identity and political activities of 'ordinary Englishmen' has approached the English lower classes in a singular sense, ignoring the plurality of perspectives within this broadly defined social group. Consequently, the 'English working class' appeared to be a product of the major social processes of the nineteenth century as well as the big loser in the grand scheme of politics and economics. Yet the experiences of this class raised doubts as to the harmonious development of English society.

In contrast to the older Whig interpretation of English history with its master narrative of the triumph of liberalism marked by organic reform as well as the slow, but steady blossoming of a deeply English notion of liberty, social historians focused on the conflicts between social classes well into the 1980s.[3] In particular, E.P. Thompson was influential in the development of this field of research. Thompson's unorthodox Marxism did not define categories such as 'social classes' or 'class consciousness' in a strictly economic sense; he sought to come to a better understanding of English history by looking at class struggles. For followers of Thompson's approach, these kinds of struggles reached a climax with the appearance of Chartism, which was seen as the first comprehensive articulation of a new self-conscious working class that was democratic in its goals, but sometimes revolutionary in its means.

Building on this premise, it became all the more imperative to tackle the question of why there was no revolution in England.[4] This question, in turn, sparked some of the great debates in labour history over the social disciplining of the lower classes through the dominance of the middle class, the downfall of Chartism, the reformist tendencies of a well-educated class of Labour aristocrats among the workers and the late establishment of a political party representing the English labour movement.[5] Given the generally widely accepted significance of social class for English history as well as the early strength of the English labour movement, the stability of English society seemed highly improbable, and thus particularly in need of explanation. As an answer, social historians suggested dividing the nineteenth century into three characteristic periods. The early phase, marked by the initial formation of the English working class, was replaced by the era of the Victorian consensus, which emerged out of the economic upswing that took place around 1850. The rise of the Labour Party in the late nineteenth century then reflected the once again increasing importance of class differences. The focus of these sociohistorical interpretations of the 'long nineteenth century' from 1815 to 1914 was not a revolution, but rather a fundamental caesura in English history around 1850.[6]

Today, this perspective seems both timely and curiously outdated at the same time. The move away from the concept of 'class' and towards the construction of social identities through language or symbolic forms of communication sparked by the 'linguistic' or 'cultural turn' generated a fundamental scepticism

for these older socioeconomic interpretations of history. The many studies that grew out of this turn over the last few decades have coagulated into a kind of 'revisionism' that shares a common thread despite many individual differences.[7] With respect to the absence of an English revolution, the most important commonality within this scholarly trend is the strong emphasis on long lines of continuity within English history and the political behaviour of social groups from the lower classes. Whereas earlier studies of the social protests of the 1830s and 1840s identified the formation of independent workers' organizations as a clear break with older forms of social conflict, the revisionists situate Chartism and other protest movements within the tradition of English radicalism that emerged in the eighteenth century. From a revisionist perspective, the language of reform was not marked by a new understanding of society whose roots lay in the economic differences generated in an industrial society, but rather defined by democratic ideals carried over from the French Revolution. Well into the nineteenth century, according to this line of thought, demands for political reforms, such as universal suffrage or civil liberties, stood at the forefront of fights for reforms, and not social issues or conflicts between classes with opposing economic and political interests. Moreover, when workers and other groups from among the lower classes became more and more involved in politics in their own right, revisionists argue, they did not represent a new social formation, but rather they were part of an older, cross-class reform movement. Working from this kind of approach, the break in English history around 1850 becomes less significant because the defeat of Chartism no longer appears to be a deep schism in an inevitable series of class struggles; rather, the failure of the Chartists marked a shift within a long-lasting conflict over the reform of the English constitution. A strong emphasis on heterogeneous identities at all social levels can be easily reconciled with this revisionist view of English history. These theses of continuity and the new image of the heterogeneity of English society are in fact mutually contingent.[8]

At the same time, another commonality among revisionist approaches points in the opposite direction. As revisionist scholarship still tends to focus on social protests and demands for reforms when examining the political activities of the English lower classes, conservative viewpoints are largely depicted as products of the late nineteenth century, if they are dealt with at all.[9] Indirectly, this limited perspective reaffirms the old periodization suggested by English social history. The clearest formulation of this argument can be found in Neville Kirk's *Change, Continuity and Class*, which was published in 1998. Especially with regard to the late emergence of a popular conservative tradition after 1850, he defends the idea that there was a fundamental break within English history around 1850. Likewise, Kirk portrays the working class as a unified entity prior to the mid century. Given the general dominance of the Chartists among the lower classes, he also maintains that it would be impossible, if not

downright absurd, to suggest that popular conservatism existed earlier in the century.[10] From a completely different perspective, Philip Harling has recently argued that the old division of the nineteenth century into three phases holds true for England, regardless of all the debates over lines of continuity within the major political controversies of the time. Harling also asserts that the shift in political culture around 1850 was one of the most important phenomena over the course of the entire century; the revisionists, he claims, provided a more differentiated perspective with their new methods, but they had not shaken the foundation of this older thesis.[11]

This book's analysis of conservative traditions among the English lower classes and their importance in the political conflicts waged in England in the nineteenth century takes up with this thread of scholarship. It draws on different scholarly discussions that have by and large existed independent of one another and weaves them together to suggest a more nuanced approach to the political culture of the English lower classes. In detail, these discussions revolved around the interpretation of expressions of loyalism and patriotism in the era after the French Revolution; Conservative electoral success among lower-class voters in the late nineteenth century; the role of the constitution as a reference point in the broad social debates on reforms and confessional conflicts; and the importance of religion in the lives of the English lower classes.

Patriotism and Loyalism

Since the mid 1980s, scholars of the Early Modern period have led the discussion over loyalist reactions to the French Revolution in England.[12] On the one hand, they have emphasized the demonstrative loyalism of broad swathes of the English population. To do so, they have cited the huge number of anti-revolutionary flyers and pamphlets that were printed; the role of the churches (of all confessions) as a platform for the dissemination of conservative ideas through loyalist sermons; and the extensive network of Reeves Associations, which actively opposed radical followers of the revolution in numerous cities and parishes after 1792.[13] Based on this research, there is no doubt that the ideological positions of conservative thinkers spread among the middle and lower classes in the late eighteenth century in a popularized way. Alongside a positive view of the monarchy and the Church as well as the English constitution and the liberties anchored therein, these thinkers emphasized an acceptance of the existing social and political order as well as patriotic notions as to the superiority of English as well as particularly British characteristics. First and foremost Harry Dickinson has pointed out how well conservative political elites were able to mobilize a substantial portion of the English population after 1789 by calling for the preservation of the existing order.[14] Similarly, Eckhard Hellmuth has noted the existence of a genuine

plebeian antipathy to the 'radical cause' and suggested that conservative notions were at least as popular as radical ones around 1800.[15]

On the other hand, historians such as John Dinwiddy, David Eastwood and Mark Philp have focused on the limits of the conservative consensus within English society around 1800 and the ambiguity inherent within demonstrations of loyalism.[16] They argue that the waves of loyalism in the 1790s were merely temporary occurrences. At the same time, they suggest that loyalist mobilization among the lower levels of society changed the general perception of political processes, often unleashing demands for political participation or social reforms. Alan Booth, for example, describes a transformation in the prevailing popular attitudes towards economic crises in the second half of the decade in his examination of the massive outbreak of Church and King mobs from 1792–93.[17] Philp's analysis of the propaganda of the Reeves Associations leads him to the conclusion that radical thoughts had at least partially infiltrated loyalist arguments, lending them a somewhat subversive tone.[18] Studies of volunteer associations have noted a widespread willingness to fight for king and country, but also cited examples in which some volunteer units refused to ensure public order during strikes, for example, and also expressed demands for democratic command structures coupled with radical suggestions for ways to improve the situation of the population at large.[19] Moreover, these studies emphasize the close connection between radical demands and patriotic arguments. From this perspective, as early as 1800 and by the end of the Napoleonic Wars at the latest, reformers could equate patriotism and radicalism without contradiction.[20]

In sum, this scholarship suggests that England was a society in conflict, shaped by radical protests movements and riots in which even waves of loyalism and patriotism undermined the existing order and a long-lasting, unstoppable dynamic of reform was unleashed. The parallelism between the classic division of the nineteenth century in England into three phases and the rise of a self-conscious radical working class was as unmistakeable from this point of view as the mid-century caesura. Those scholars who follow this interpretation first detect a fundamental change in the tone of English society after 1850; they argue that parallel to the emergence of a high-Victorian consensus, patriotism developed into a right-wing political concept.[21] But this line of thought leaves a number of essential questions unanswered. How, for example, were radicals able to almost completely suppress clearly popular loyalist notions of Crown and Church even during the Napoleonic Wars? Were ambivalent political tendencies enough to turn Church and King mobs into crowds of radicals ready to protest? Did conservative counterstrategies really disappear or were they just innocuous for decades? Questions such as these become all the more pressing if entirely different aspects of the elections at the end of the nineteenth century are taken into account.

Electoral Victories

The electoral victories of the Conservative Party following the suffrage reforms in the last third of the century as well as the ability of the Tories to mobilize large portions of the unorganized working classes attracted considerable scholarly attention quite early on. Around 1900, at least a third of the newly enfranchised voters from the lower classes cast their ballots for Conservative candidates; even in the twentieth century, around fifty per cent of the votes for Conservatives almost always came from plebeian circles.[22] Contemporaries at the time were also astounded by these Conservative electoral victories, especially given the fact that the Conservatives themselves had expected that the democratization of English society would permanently weaken their party – regardless of the fact that a Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, was seen as responsible for the suffrage reform of 1867 and portions of the party propagated the notion of the 'Tory Democracy' just a few years later.[23] Among Leftists, Conservative voters from among the working classes caused shock and dismay. Marx and Engels, for example, reacted to the Conservative electoral victories in 1868 with hefty accusations directed at workers who had been led astray.[24]

For a long time, historians concentrated on the organizational basis for this electoral success, such as the activities of the Conservative Primrose League from 1883 or the expansion of party organizations, as well as the weakness of the Liberals in the respective elections. Moreover, they looked at the views of the party leadership on social questions in England.[25] Until the 1990s, labour historians referred to the voting behaviour of workers who voted Conservative as 'deferential voting': this voting behaviour, they claimed, demonstrated a traditional respect for social elites as well as the rather uncritical acceptance of their leadership.[26] This explanation rested on the equation of the social and economic interests of the working class with the goals of the early labour movement. From this perspective, workers who voted Conservative deviated from the norm. Their voting behaviour was then sometimes explained as the temporary expression of pragmatic interests or the result of a direct dependent relationship with the Conservative candidate; usually, however, the reason cited for such 'deviance' was an ideologically imbued false consciousness.[27]

It was not until the beginning of the 1990s that Jon Lawrence published his path-breaking cultural history studies on the late nineteenth century in which he demonstrated that the voting behaviour of social groups cannot be explained by merely looking at their social and economic positions in the strict sense of the word. Lawrence focused on the construction of identities, the conscious creation of political coalitions through symbolic activities and binding elements such as the culture of the pub and sport as well as they ways in which masculinity and gender roles influenced this construction process.[28] His seminal work prompted a series of publications that have emphasized the

way in which patriotic, imperialistic and religious elements in Conservative ideology created a bond with voters from the lower classes and working-class neighbourhoods.[29]

The question remains as to whether there was a link between the great loyalist mobilization that took place in England around 1800 and the success of the Conservative Party in the last third of the nineteenth century. The loyalist patriotism and conservative notions of nation, empire and society propagated by the Tories around 1900 bear a great resemblance to this earlier phase of loyalism. Is it really plausible that these ideas just disappeared for over fifty years and had no influence over political conflicts involving the lower classes? What were the political consequences of conservative ideas anchored in everyday life and the perceptions of gender roles and social responsibility in the world of work between 1815 and 1860? Furthermore, not much scholarship has dealt with the organizations that preceded the Tory working men's clubs and the Primrose League in the late nineteenth century. The establishment of so-called Operative Conservative Associations in the 1830s, for example, has received scant scholarly attention.[30] For the most part, these clubs have been brushed aside as a consequence of Tory Radicalism.[31] Apart from the temporary alliances that were formed between Tories and Radicals in England's industrial north in the 1830s, little is known about the continued influence of loyalist traditions from around 1800 and the supposedly sudden appearance of a popular form of conservatism after 1867.[32]

The Constitution

The great significance of popular notions of the constitution for the scholarly debates between older proponents of labour history and the revisionists has already been touched upon. Even E.P. Thompson argued that radical notions of reform in the early nineteenth century stemmed from a widespread appreciation of the English constitution, which basically reaffirmed the inviolability of certain institutions and conventions such as the monarchy, the aristocracy and the Church as well as the traditional privileges of large landowners. Constitutional rhetoric shaped the political thought of most political groups. Likewise, the almost ritualistic accentuation of the advantages of the English constitution was a quite common topos.[33] Whereas Thompson cited the replacement of this rhetoric with that of a democratic Republicanism drawing on Thomas Paine as the crucial moment marking the emergence of an independent working class, these notions of the constitution once again took centre stage in scholarly debate following Stedman Jones' reinterpretation of Chartism. For the revisionists, the similarity between the constitutional language of early radicals, Chartists and later Liberal leaders and the constitutional rhetoric of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was striking. Consequently, they see a long tradition of reform-oriented

constitutionalism associated with the radicalism of the nineteenth century rather than a break with older forms of constitutional veneration.[34]

Two aspects of more recent scholarship on this subject merit further attention. First of all, John Belchem and James Epstein have made an attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the noticeably positive view of the existing constitution among English radicals and the revolutionary tendencies within radicalism itself. Belchem in particular coined the term 'popular constitutionalism' to describe this political ideology of the radicals in the early nineteenth century.[35] He argues that the specifically radical understanding of the constitution did not aim at social consensus, but rather allowed for all social institutions and values to be called into question if they deviated from the established ideal English constitution of the past. For the radicals, he notes, comprehensive reforms were necessary because absolutism and corruption had destroyed the truly democratic constitution that had once existed. Concrete demands for rights or authority were therefore justified because they corresponded to the original English (Anglo-Saxon) constitution that had been instituted prior to the Norman Conquest. In particular, according to Belchem, radicals understood the struggle against oppression and absolutism as the basic premise of the English constitution. Belchem also maintains that this constant recourse to the constitution allowed radicals to counter accusations that they sought revolutionary upheaval without forcing them to abstain from making demands for far-reaching social changes.[36] Epstein has pointed out, however, that these constitutional arguments were only one strain of thought, albeit a dominant one, within radical discourse. Republican arguments, he adds, had been just as prevalent in radical discussions since the 1790s and they were often mixed into the language of popular constitutionalism, which meant that they also characterized the general outlook of the English lower classes.[37]

In contrast, Patrick Joyce situates the radical recourse to the constitution within the idea of 'populism' in order to describe the construction of political identities outside the boundaries of class interests through universal categories such as the 'nation' and 'the people'.[38] In his studies of the language of politics and popular mass culture, he outlines a broad ideology of 'the people' that revolves around the opposition between 'ordinary people' or 'decent folk' and a corrupt ruling class. Unlike Epstein, he emphasizes that 'the people' and the 'working class(es)' cannot be used interchangeably. With reference to his studies of popular conservatism, he interprets the typical elements of popular constitutionalism simply as part of this ideology. Alongside the dominant radical populism, he maintains, there was also a conservative form, especially after 1860. James Vernon has broadly identified the constitutional aspects of the conservative variant in which the obligation to defend tried-and-true structures and to resist demands for reform stemmed from a general veneration of the constitution. The Tories, unlike the radicals, believed that the existing

constitutional order was an expression of the original English ideal of liberty, which was closely linked to the notion of a Protestant nation and the sanctity of property and prosperity. 'Liberty' in this sense was not based on individual social participation, but rather on the good of the nation as a whole. As such, it was not defined by natural law because it was an English privilege that had to be defended against domestic and foreign enemies, including reformers and radicals, Catholics and Jews, and rival nations like France in particular.[39] Although Joyce's contradictory use of the term 'populism' does not hold up in this context, the inclusion of a popular Tory tradition in broader debates on the constitution proves to be quite helpful.[40]

Vernon, moreover, has expanded the concept of 'popular constitutionalism'. He turns what Belchem and Epstein use as a category to define radical arguments into a master narrative of English politics in the nineteenth century.[41] This, in turn, begs the question as to what extent a conservative interpretation of the constitution met with support among lower-class social groups in the early nineteenth century as well. Vernon himself only vaguely discusses the social background of those who adhered to these conservative notions of the constitution in his portrayal of the popular Tory constitutional discourse. Moreover, he does not go beyond general statements as to the surprising popularity of these ideas. Furthermore, he does not look at the role of the monarchy in terms of his discussion of popular constitutionalism. How could it be, however, that the Tory variant of popular constitutionalism in the second half of the century was not in some way linked to the popular loyalism that had emerged around 1800 whose anti-revolutionary societal ideal was propagated by means of a positive perspective on the existing constitution as well as an affinity to the Crown, the Church and the constitution? To what extent do the beginnings of a Conservative organizational structure in the 1830s and 1840s indicate that conservative constitutionalism became a crystallizing point for Tories from among the lower classes just as radical groups and protest movements made demands for far-reaching social reforms based on an alternative understanding of the constitution? What brought Tories from the social elite together with supporters from the lower classes outside the context of Tory Radicalism?

Religion and Politics

Studies of religious culture in nineteenth-century England sketch out a complex and sometimes contradictory image of the dissemination of religious convictions and their role in defining political identities among the lower classes. For over a hundred years, historians have been discussing the influence of evangelical movements and especially Methodism, which is sometimes seen as a conservative phenomenon and sometimes as a politically ambivalent one because its

organizational structures as well as the central role of workers in its parishes contributed to the development of a self-conscious working class.[42] At the same time, the impression that the lower classes lacked religion or an affinity to the Church, especially within the context of the debates on secularization, still persists.[43] However, a number of local studies have been published in recent years that attest to closer bonds between the lower classes and their churches or confessions in both rural and urban contexts.[44] Callum G. Brown, for example, has impressively shown that between 1800 and 1960, the majority of those who attended church services, regardless of confession, stemmed from the lower classes. Moreover, he notes, the involvement of better-educated workers in particular in parish life did not differ from that of parishioners from other classes. For the entire nineteenth century, he does not detect any period in which the lower classes on the whole became alienated from their churches due to factors such as accelerating urbanization or political radicalization.[45]

The results of Brown's study raise important questions: did religious positions and confessional conflicts directly influence political attitudes among the lower classes? To what extent were plebeian Englishmen, as non-voters, integrated in the classic political-confessional milieus of the parties? Can the front line between an Anglican Tory milieu and the reform-oriented milieu of the traditional Nonconformist denominations (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers) be extended to the very bottom of the social ladder?[46] Could candidates and local party organizations capitalize on these kinds of developments within the constituencies to gain support beyond the normal links between the parties and confessions by emphasizing individual positions and stressing dominant issues? What role did regional differences play in the respective strength of the individual confessions?

Last but not least, anti-Catholic positions often complicated conflicts among Protestant denominations. The Nonconformists' personal experiences with legal disadvantages, for example, could generate a feeling of solidarity with Catholic demands for emancipation, especially when they were coupled with the fundamental rejection of any kind of ties between the State and the Church espoused by many liberals. Accordingly, Catholics, whose numbers grew steadily with the influx of Irish immigrants, tended to support liberal politicians, which in turn brought a detectable Catholic-Irish element into English radicalism.[47] On the other hand, the conservative opposition to Catholic emancipation and other legal concessions to the Catholic Church brought together Protestants of different denominations. Misgivings about Catholics and racist attitudes toward Catholic immigrants from Ireland provided a substantial foundation for the political success of the Tories in the late nineteenth century and generated sympathy for the party among the lower classes in particular; this kind of anti-Catholic Protestantism had already played a key role in defining the British national consciousness in the eighteenth century.[48]

All told, when these four strands of scholarship are woven together, they indicate that a complex interplay of different factors influenced the formation of political identities as well as the political behaviours of lower-class social groups. Debates over loyalism and patriotism as well as the constitution and social justice not only reflected long-lasting ideological convictions, but also different social experiences within the age of industrialization. In this respect, religious bonds and ethnic differences were just as significant as habitually communicated notions of English traditions, the relationship between the sexes or the expectations that ordinary people harboured for social elites. Within this context, three overarching questions guide this book's analysis of the nuanced ways in which these political identities developed: Do political conflicts in which plebeian agents were directly involved as well as the popular culture associated with their celebrations, daily life and work indicate that conservative attitudes spread among the English lower classes between 1815 and 1867? How and why was the Conservative Party, together with its closely associated organizations, able to win political support among the lower classes prior to 1867? What was the relationship between conservative politics and the political alternatives offered by radicalism and liberalism as well as the emerging labour movement?

As these questions illustrate, this book sets out to trace different facets of the development of popular conservatism. On the one hand, it looks at how conservative views, ideas and identities were anchored in different ways in the lives of English plebeians, and outlines how these factors influenced political conflicts in general and not just the inclusion of plebeians in the party's political milieu or its organizations. On the other hand, it examines the ways in which the Conservative Party could use these attitudes to bring conservative-minded members of the lower classes into their associations, electoral campaigns and other political activities. By looking at both these aspects, this book will widen the scholarly perspective on popular politics in England between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the Second Reform Act to include a conservative dimension. In doing so, it will help better understand that curious being known as the 'conservative working man'.

However, what exactly does 'conservative' mean in the English context?[49] Existing scholarship on conservatism in Great Britain usually focuses strongly on the English Conservative Party and tends to neglect the ideas that defined English conservatism as a political ideology. Given the long organizational continuity of the party, its ideological shifts and the difficulties it has faced in formulating a stable ideological core stand out, especially in a European comparison.[50] Consequently, most of the English attempts to outline basic conservative values stem in some way from the party itself or can be found in the programmatic writings of conservative theorists and corresponding anthologies.[51] Most political history accounts of the party emphasis the focus on power in Conservative politics and analyse content almost exclusively in terms of the party's parliamentary leaders.[52]

The Conservative Party is therefore often depicted as representing traditional landed interests and landed property; at the same time, over the course of the nineteenth century, it opened up to the upper echelons of the middle class in industry and finance as well as increasing numbers of middle-class families with social ambitions.[53] Three main goals are usually cited for the nineteenth century in relation to the parliamentary elite of the party: the defence of the traditional position of the Crown and other constitutional institutions, especially the House of Lords; the defence of the Anglican Church as the church of state and Protestantism as the dominant religion across the country; and the defence of traditional elites as leaders in society (i.e., the aristocratic ruling class as well as the landed interests) and the protection of their economic interests within the context of a paternalistic understanding of society.[54] Over the course of the nineteenth century, the spectrum of Conservative politics expanded, especially under Benjamin Disraeli, who brought a more patriotic tone to the party as the 'national party' and added imperial goals. His tenure as the leader of the party is commonly associated with a period of mobilization in which the party loosened its ties to rural structures, thereby building a bridge to the middle classes without sacrificing aristocratic claims to leadership. The economic-based insistence on protective roles, which led to a split in the party in 1846, faded to the sidelines as the fight against radicals and democracy increasingly necessitated the reconciliation of urban and rural interests and extended the notion of property beyond land to include money and education. The party of the landed interests, as it were, integrated manufacturing interests. As such, it was able to push through defensive reforms such as the Second Reform Act in 1867 under the guise of 'anti-radical radical conservatism'.[55]

Such a description of the Conservative political platform along the lines of the development of the Conservative Party in a parliamentary sense, however, is inadequate when it comes to questions related to political identity among the lower classes. On the one hand, a narrow perspective focusing on the leading circles of the party neglects differences of opinion within the party, such as those between the administrative 'liberal conservatism' of Robert Peel in the 1820s and the older traditions of country politics akin to that of the so-called 'Ultra Tories'.[56] On the other hand, it makes it impossible to take into account developments taking place outside the confines of Parliament, especially given the fact that no real unified party in the modern sense existed for much of the nineteenth century and local political constellations often differed from those in Parliament. Moreover, it fails to explain the prevalence of conservative values and ideological aspects in social circles beyond those of the aristocratic bearers of the landed interests and the aspiring middle class with its manufacturing interests.

An expanded definition that goes beyond an abstract assessment of fundamental conservative values and the political attitude of the Conservative Party at

a national level is needed in order to analyse conservatism at the level of popular politics. A sociopolitical matrix needs to be taken into account as conservative groups only partly derived their political identity from the canon of conservative thought begun by Edmund Burke or the central political goals of the Conservatives in Parliament. Pronounced patriotism and loyalism; the defence of a traditional English way of life and the liberties and rights associated with it; a decisive anti-Catholicism and committed Protestantism were the substantial markers of 'popular conservatism'. As a political identity, it was also constructed through local celebrations and rituals, the culture of the pub and of sport as well as the adherence to paternalistic social structures in public life, within the family and in the realm of work. 'Conservative' therefore describes a specific mix of political convictions, a paternalistic understanding of society and an appreciation for traditional ways of life; being a conservative was not just about casting a ballot for a Conservative candidate or supporting the policies of the Conservatives in Parliament. Rather, an amalgam of ideas, traditions, rituals and practices shaped the contours of this political identity.

Moreover, the rejection of liberal and radical notions of society had a unifying force among conservatives and served to delineate them more clearly as a group separate from the 'Whigs' or 'reformers' in general. Like the term 'conservative', however, 'liberal' and 'radical' did not refer to clearly defined political parties nor static political programmes, but rather conglomerations of positions and views linked to varied efforts to reform English society, which were spread through different kinds of social, symbolic and ritual practices.[57] The meaning associated with these terms within the English context also differed from the continental uses of the terms. In England, for example, 'liberal' was used by conservatives after 1815 as a polemic description of views traditionally associated with the parliamentary Whigs, which revolved around a libertarian interpretation of the English constitutional tradition. This entailed, above all, demands for parliamentary reform through the expansion of the vote or budgetary constraints on the state as well as the critique of what was perceived to be the corrupt governing practices of the Tories. Over the course of the 1820s, and especially within the reform debates surrounding the expansion of the franchise in 1832, the term came to be used as a positive self-description by parliamentary proponents of reform who were increasingly identified as the Liberal Party.[58] The term 'radicalism', in contrast, had been used since the late eighteenth century in conjunction with plebeian protest movements and extra-parliamentary demands for a reform of the political system, which derived the right to universal suffrage from the libertarian tradition of English constitutionalism.[59]

After 1820, as outlined above, liberals and radicals shared a constitutional language that called for the expansion and redefinition of existing constitutional liberties without raising the spectre of revolution, while also emphasizing the sovereignty of the people and the authority of Parliament over the Crown as well as

traditional elites.[60] In the semantic separation of the two, 'liberal' was connected to the Whigs in Parliament as opposed to the more plebeian character of 'radical'; differences also appeared between the two in terms of the extent of the reforms that they believed to be necessary. For example, specifically 'radical' demands included democratic calls for universal suffrage, secret ballots, annual elections and the equitable distribution of constituencies. But not all political groups and agents who called themselves radicals adhered to this programme. Between rather more moderate liberal notions of reform and radical demands, there was a broad spectrum of suggested reforms that conservatives easily whittled down to the label 'Whig liberalism' or 'Whig radicalism'.[61] The politicians, associations and movements that are referred to as 'liberal' or 'radical' in this book stem from this spectrum of reformers.

Furthermore, given the broad debates over the 'language of class' and the problems inherent within unifying social terminology, it is important to stress the heterogeneous character of social formations.[62] People whose social status was considered below that of the 'middle classes' and who were commonly referred to as the 'lower orders' (or alternatively lower ranks or classes), 'operatives', or the 'working classes' (or alternatively the 'labouring', 'humbler' or 'poorer' classes) in the language of the nineteenth century will be described in this study as the 'plebeian lower classes'. This label applies to a variety of different groups, ranging from skilled workers in factories to beggars on city streets to farm labourers or domestic servants.[63] These groups can be separated easily from middle-class groups such as businessmen and manufacturers or solicitors and vicars. But it is not as straightforward to differentiate between these groups and small shop owners such as bakers or butchers as well as self-employed craftsmen and those in the cottage industry who often had a respectable income, but who were also culturally as well as socially integrated in lower-class circles and whose standard of living was not better than an average worker. For both radicals and conservatives, these lower-middle-class groups played an important role in associations and other political activities. That said, however, it is rather difficult to treat them as a distinct social formation, especially in the early nineteenth century.[64]

As the emphasis in this analysis is on the heterogeneity of these groups, socio-economic parameters such as income or vocation, level of education or place of residence will not be used to develop a definition of the 'lower classes' nor corresponding definitions of the middle classes or the aristocracy. Instead of socioeconomic terms of class or status, descriptive terms such as 'social groups', 'milieus' and 'political camps' more accurately capture political agents within the lower classes as well as among local elites. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's definition, 'social groups' describe real ensembles of agents who build connections within social space on the basis of similar positions, conditions or conditioning and display similar behavioural dispositions; correspondingly, they can be easily mobilized en masse and come together through shared experiences.[65]

This description applies to active groups that also defined themselves vis-a-vis socio-economic criteria, although not exclusively, as the cohesion of the group was based on cultural conditioning, religious identities or a shared 'habitus'. Accordingly, members of a single vocational group such as plebeian craftsmen or middle-class businessmen often appeared as political agents in different social groups.[66] Alongside these 'social groups', broadly defined 'milieus' and 'political camps' are used to describe social formations that bridge across groups. 'Milieus' refer in particular to political and religious associations or organizations and their members or circles directly associated with them (for example the Anglican Tory milieu in individual constituencies). However, as suggested by Karl Rohe in particular, there were also 'political camps' identified as conservative or reform-oriented that crossed class boundaries and were shaped by opposing political identities defined by the spectrum of opinion attached to these political terms.[67]

With its focus on the heterogeneity of political identities and the language of popular politics, this study moves in a direction similar to that of revisionism, but it is neither a revisionist analysis nor is it intended as a programmatic 'post-revisionist' attempt to combine sociohistorical accounts with revisionist analyses of political languages.[68] Nonetheless, the questions and goals of this book have been influenced by the revisionist emphasis on the relative independence of politics as well as the language used by individual agents in social conflicts. Furthermore, it must be said that the revisionist approach, with its focus on political discourses and the historical analysis of social practices, does have its merits. As Stedman Jones has pointed out with respect to Chartism in 1983, it is necessary to look at what political agents 'actually said or wrote, the terms in which they addressed each other or their opponents' in order to adequately understand the way in which they thought and acted.[69] However, his emphasis on the importance of words and texts needs to be expanded to include forms of symbolic communication and the ways in which meaning and identities were constructed. At the same time, the weakness of radical revisionist studies in particular cannot be forgotten. The lack of sociohistorical background in the revisionist works of Patrick Joyce and James Vernon, for example, often resulted in conclusions lacking in nuance and complexity, such as Vernon's highly over-simplified contrast between the elite and 'the people' or Joyce's problematic use of the concept of populism.[70]

In order to circumvent this danger, this study uses more accurate social analyses of the groups involved in order to provide a firm basis for its examination of social praxis. It draws on Clifford Geertz's theory of 'thick description' as well as the theory of social praxis developed by Pierre Bourdieu.[71] As such, it proposes a praxeological approach to the history of popular politics. Especially with regard to conservative groups within the lower classes, most of whom did not leave behind any explicit documents attesting to their political thought, this approach promises to shed new light on the variety of political views that

abounded. Looking at the symbolic actions of groups within the context of their social praxis lays bare the often unconscious and habitual structures governing the actions of historical agents who were themselves often unaware of these structures. More importantly, it allows for an analysis of the identities and mentalities as well as political ideals and goals of those groups who left little record of their activities, apart from the information that appeared in reports and descriptions of their social behaviour. Such an analysis is guided by a cultural history perspective that approaches politics along the lines of Thomas Mergel as 'social actions, as a network of meanings, symbols and discourses in which realities – often contradictory ones – are constructed'; the perspective of the historian is like that of the ethnologist in that he approaches the political conflicts of the past from the perspective of an outsider.[72]

A discussion of popular politics involves an analysis of local political contexts that does not stop at the edge of town, but rather crosses from one locality to the next. This study mainly outlines conservative phenomena in which the lower classes participated in three English cities, but neighbouring towns as well as counties and the region as a whole are also taken into consideration as the situation merits. The focus lies on the greater London area; the West Riding in Yorkshire with its major city, Leeds; and the Bolton area in Lancashire. Ancillary material from other locations is sometimes included in order to offer a point of comparison or reference. Likewise, numerous other local studies are called upon to offer a corollary perspective, from Exeter in the south-west to York in the north-east and from Liverpool in the north-west to the Isle of Sheppey in the south-east. Further examples also stem from the counties of Devon, Kent, Sussex, Northamptonshire and Worcester. This is a book about popular conservatism in England, not Great Britain or the United Kingdom: Ireland, Scotland and Wales are beyond its scope.

The focus on Bolton, Leeds and London may seem to reflect the classic perspective of labour history, which has been rightly criticized, but these localities were actually chosen on the basis of several different criteria. First of all, they represent three different types of cities: London as the great metropolis, Leeds as a provincial centre and Bolton as a small industrial city with strong economic links to Manchester. Bolton and Leeds were also 'new cities' that first voted as constituencies following the Reform Act in 1832. Moreover, the source material from these cities also offers a look at the political structures of the counties in which they are located. Likewise, the greater London area, which went from being divided into three constituencies to encompassing seven constituencies in 1832, includes both new and old urban constituencies as well those in nearby counties.[73]

Secondly, the three cities with their surrounding areas represented different industrial structures, which were often traditionally associated with varying mentalities and influences that affected political attitudes among the lower classes. For

example, London as well as Birmingham were cities whose economic structures were shaped by trade, administration and the strong presence of independent craftsmen and self-conscious master artisans. In addition to its function as the seat of government and a cultural centre, London's economic structure is often cited as the reason for the low level of militancy associated with the labour movement in the capital. For many historians, this factor also explains the dominance of a strand of radicalism dominated by craftsmen who were willing to form alliances with middle-class circles and who were strongly reform-oriented in their outlooks.[74] In contrast, Leeds and Bolton embody relatively young industrial cities shaped by different structures associated with the northern English textile industry. As a mill town about fifteen miles north-west of Manchester, Bolton was a typical town representative of the sprawling cotton industry in Lancashire. Thanks to its large spinning mills and dye works, it was more deeply defined by factory work and industrialization than London.[75] Leeds, as a provincial centre for the surrounding towns of Bradford, Huddersfield and Halifax, was also significant as a trade centre and a transportation hub. But, like Bolton, it was also dominated by the textile industry, although the regional economic structure in the West Riding with its varying emphases on wool, linen, worsted yarn and cotton was more diversified than in Lancashire. The manufacture of machinery as well as the mining industry both left their mark on Leeds.[76] Both Leeds and Bolton were also situated in industrial regions often associated with the militant northern English variant of the labour movement, the breaking of machinery and the physical force of Chartism.[77]

Lastly, these three cities followed different patterns in terms of the Conservative electoral success among voters from the lower classes in the late nineteenth century. After 1868, Bolton developed into a Conservative stronghold that regularly sent Tory candidates to Parliament and whose local politics were dominated by Conservatives. In the decades prior, Conservatives were also repeatedly able to exercise their political influence in the city and win at least one of the city's two parliamentary seats. In the 1840s, they also controlled the city council for a number of years.[78] In Leeds, the Tories were able to reduce the long-standing Liberal dominance over parliamentary elections as well as in local politics after 1868, but they were not able to muster the same strength as the Conservatives in Bolton. Before the Second Reform Act of 1868, the exclusively middle-class electorate in Leeds was split into relatively even Liberal and Conservative blocks. Yet the primarily Nonconformist Liberal milieu was almost always able to control the city's political structures when it closed its ranks. In 1874, 1885 and 1900, however, the Tories in Leeds were able to win the majority of the three or sometimes five seats in the different constituencies within the city; twice they won more than 50 per cent of the ballots.[79] Unlike Leeds, London developed into a bastion of conservatism in the late nineteenth century along with other urban centres such as Sheffield and Birmingham. The political constellation in the capital before

1868 clearly differed from that of Bolton and not just because of its more complex administrative structures. In the early nineteenth century, London was a stronghold of the liberals and radicals, and Conservatives could hardly muster support on a large scale. Not counting parliamentary circles, it was often said that London was bereft of Conservatism.[80] Given their many differences, these three cities thus provide a broad panorama of the many facets of lower-class participation in Conservative politics between 1815 and 1867.

In terms of its temporal scope, this study stretches from the debates over popular loyalism during the Napoleonic Wars to the Conservative electoral victories following on the heels of the Second Reform Act in 1867. The faces of all three cities changed considerably over this time span. In particular, they experienced population explosions largely generated by the influx of residents from surrounding regions. At both the beginning and end of this time frame, London was the largest city in the world; however, its population grew from around a million to well over three million during this period. With a population of 62,000 in 1811 and almost 260,000 in 1871, Leeds grew even faster. Bolton, on the other hand, grew about at the same rate as London from 24,000 to 92,000.[81] Urban planning issues as well as transportation and sanitary problems associated with this massive population growth greatly impacted the daily lives of the residents of all three cities; they also generated local political conflicts, particularly in the last third of the century. Around the middle of the century, the rate of urban growth began to slow down and the general economic recovery after 1850 provided the financial means to deal with this population explosion under the rubric of 'improvement'. In the decades prior to this shift, the long-lasting crisis that ensued at the end of the war in 1815 was felt in all the cities. Local economies were affected differently by this economic situation, but they all suffered similar lows from 1817 to 1820, from 1829 to 1831 and from 1837 to 1842.[82] Whereas the country's high war debts weighed heavily on the public treasury, industrial innovations and the strong growth of the population brought social upheaval to the cities. This general framework sets the stage for the analysis of popular conservatism outlined in this book.

The main sources that form the backbone of this study are local English papers as they best speak to the level of popular politics. English newspapers from the nineteenth century have been rightly described as minute books of the social, culture and political life of their respective cities. The papers offer a better account of what was happening in local administrative bodies as well as parishes and city councils than official records and minutes, many of which have not survived. For the most part, these newspapers are the only sources that cover local events, including public celebrations and the activities of parties and associations as well as different protest movements. At the same time, sources like these are shaped by a mostly urban outlook because newspapers circulated largely in cities or reported on the events in local towns or market centres in rural regions. Similar sources are

lacking at the village level, although the English provincial press made an effort to offer its readers regional coverage that also included events taking place in the countryside.

As the development of the English press in the nineteenth century in all its variety has already been well documented in historical scholarship, only a brief overview of the press landscape in the three cities in question will be provided here.[83] In most cities, there were at least two newspapers that belonged to different political camps and therefore presented two different perspectives on local happenings. The structure of the press in Leeds was quite typical in this respect. For the entire period under question, Leeds was home to the liberal *Leeds Mercury* and the conservative *Leeds Intelligencer*. These two weekly newspapers competed with each other economically as well as politically. The *Leeds Mercury*, however, had much higher circulation figures. In addition, there were also other weekly newspapers that appeared for a limited time in Leeds such as the most important publication of the Chartists, the *Northern Star.* In Bolton, however, this diverse press structure developed a bit later. The *Bolton Chronicle* first appeared in the mid 1820s as a radical-leaning weekly newspaper, but it later adopted a conservative voice. About a decade later, it was joined by the liberal *Bolton Free Press* that collapsed in 1847. A series of other liberal papers appeared in its wake. The press in London, however, was dominated by the national newspapers, in particular *The Times* and a series of other important dailies and weeklies. The dominance of the national press made it difficult for local 'London' papers covering events and conflicts below the parliamentary level to gain a foothold in the city. Special papers for the different boroughs appeared one after the other in quick succession after 1850. The lack of local coverage makes it more difficult to reconstruct popular politics in London, but the national perspective offers a broader look at other counties, cities and regions in England.

As the primary focus of this analysis is the reconstruction of local events through these newspapers, the question of the respective readership of these newspapers is somewhat secondary. The reports and countless minute-book-like descriptions of events, speeches and celebrations generate a quite nuanced picture of what was taking place on the streets. As the goal of this analysis is not to recreate the role of local papers in shaping the opinions of the mostly middle-class readerships, commentaries and feature articles play only a minor role. Despite the 'middle-class' profile of the local and national press, however, the influence of newspaper coverage on the lower classes should not be underestimated. Even though the rather high price of these newspapers, especially in the early nineteenth century, made them largely unaffordable for a plebeian public, they nonetheless circulated among a broader readership through a variety of different channels. In this respect, pubs and inns played a key role, not only because the newspapers were often passed from table to table and widely discussed among the patrons, but also because they were sold at a discount a

few days later. Additionally, small reading circles and libraries were established in the early nineteenth century that also subscribed to the newspapers and later sold them. Plebeian neighbourhoods as well as lower-class clubs and associations also joined together to purchase newspapers.[84] In fact, it is generally estimated that up to about twenty people read a single copy of a newspaper. Thus, apart from the significant number of radical newspapers, some of which were circulated illegally without a tax stamp, the middle-class newspapers also had a plebeian readership. Indeed, it was not without reason that continental observers referred to England as the land of newspaper readers.

Other types of sources were also consulted in order to supplement newspaper coverage. These include the records of the Home Secretary on riots, reports on local moods by the military and local civil servants, planning materials for public events such as coronation celebrations, and local administrative records and minutes from meetings of municipal bodies. A few reports from the comprehensive records on the proceedings of special inquiries in Parliament provided further material as did the papers of prominent politicians and local archival collections of campaign posters and flyers, election materials, poll books and local directories. Contemporary reports, flyers and pamphlets offered key insights, especially Richard Oastler's extensive collection on the factory movement and the protest against the New Poor Law of 1834, which is housed in the Goldsmiths' Library in London.

Alongside the detailed reports in the press, sources such as these offer a broad perspective on local political culture in the cities in question. This material also allows for a two-pronged analysis. On the one hand, discourses among the lower class can be inferred from the speeches made during election campaigns or before assemblies of workers as well as the messages conveyed during demonstrations or within religious organizations. Whether as plebeian activists themselves or as politicians, clergymen or others, these speakers sought to directly address a plebeian public. On the other hand, the reconstruction of social practices in terms of celebrations, the world of work or daily life within the framework of conflicts over elections or between plebeian groups provides insight into the behaviour of plebeian agents, which in turn points toward influential mindsets and attitudes that were prominent within the lower classes. That said, however, it must be noted that discourse and social praxis cannot always be reconciled with one another as there was often a tension between the two. For example, the participation of much of the population in official public celebrations cannot be read as indicative of political support for the views of those who organized them. Yet, in many cases, a detailed analysis of the actual events that takes into account the general context can trace connections between the level of discourse and that of praxis. These links in turn expose the nature of popular conservatism and attest to the extent of its influence among the lower classes.

The book as a whole is divided into three thematic parts, each of which stretches over the entire period in question. Although discourse and social praxis are constantly woven together, the individual chapters alternate between a focus on praxis and on discourse respectively. The first section deals with phenomena associated with 'loyalism and patriotism'. Whereas the first chapter covers the celebrations of the monarchy up to 1832 with an in-depth look at the behaviour of the crowds in attendance, the second chapter traces the further development of these celebrations within the context of local politics as well as the establishment of Operative Conservative Associations from the 1830s onward. The conflicts over the proper understanding of the Crown and the constitution as well as the question as to the extent to which conservative views on these issues resonated among social groups from the lower classes form the focus of this first section. Under the banner of Protestantism, the second part examines the role of anti-Catholic sentiments and conflicts between Protestant groups in the manifestation of conservative tendencies among the lower classes. The third chapter discusses the active resistance against the emancipation of the Catholics and the religious dimension of notions of the constitution that were prevalent among lower-class conservatives. Social practices that played out on the streets locally as well as in mass demonstrations make up the bulk of the fourth chapter; it looks at the celebrations of Guy Fawkes Day on the fifth of November, anti-Catholic and anti-Irish riots and the reactions to the so-called 'Papal Aggression' as well as its consequences in the 1850s and 1860s. The third section discusses aspects of popular conservatism associated with 'social justice and conservative morality'. Chapter 5 examines cooperative efforts between radicals and Tories in the protests against child labour and the New Poor Law in 1834. It questions whether presumably conservative sentiments among the lower class resulted merely from pragmatic decisions on the part of plebeian agents who sided with the Conservative opposition rather than the governing Liberals when it came to the struggle for social reforms. The last chapter clarifies the nature of the link between popular conservatism and efforts to improve the lives of ordinary English men and women through education and 'moral reform' by looking for evidence of a populist 'beer and Britannia' strategy among Conservatives and by tracing the significance of traditional ideas of gender in the mobilization of support for the Conservative cause.

Notes

1. On these figures, see C.M. Law, 'The Growth of the Urban Population in England and Wales, 1801–1911', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 11 (1967), 125–43; B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846*, New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). The figures apply to England, not the United Kingdom as a whole, but they can be easily extended accordingly.