“Harry the Ninth
(The Uncrowned King of Scotland)”

Henry Dundas and the Politics of Self-Interest, 1790-1802

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Abstract

The career of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville underscores the importance of individual self-interest in British public life during the 1790-1802 Revolutionary Wars with France. Examining the political intrigue surrounding Dundas’ 1806 impeachment, the manner in which he established his political power, and contemporary critiques of self-interest, this thesis both complicates and adds nuance to understandings of the political culture of ‘Old Corruption’ in the late-Georgian era. As this thesis demonstrates, despite the wealth of opportunities for personal enrichment, individual self-interest was not always focused on obtaining sinecures and financial windfalls. Instead, men like Henry Dundas were primarily focused upon amassing their own political power. In the inherently chaotic politics of the period, the self-seeking concerns of individuals like Henry Dundas, very quickly could, and indeed did, become the thread upon which the whole British political system turned.
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Introduction:

‘Harry the Ninth (The Uncrowned King of Scotland)’¹

In the wake of the British general election of 1790, a furious Marchioness of Stafford wrote to King George III, complaining bitterly about the wheelings and dealings of the Scottish ‘political manager’ Henry Dundas:²

“I am anxious to inform you how my brother³ has been treated by Mr. Dundas... [He] has no view in life but his own interest... he has brought in Scotch Lords who, in point of fortune &c., are more likely to be his followers... The whole of the management of this election has been so full of intricacy and deceit that I cannot well explain it.”⁴

The complaint of the Marchioness, that Dundas had “no view in life but his own interest,” underscores the importance of individual self-interest in British public life at the end of the eighteenth century. This thesis examines the career of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville during the 1790-1802 Revolutionary Wars

¹ James Boswell, A Letter to the People of Scotland, on the Alarming Attempt to Infringe the Articles of the Union and to Introduce a Most Pernicious Innovation, by Diminishing the Number of the Lords of Session, (London, 1785), p. 6.
² Susanna, Marchioness of Stafford (1745-1805), 2nd daughter of the 6th Earl of Galloway, was the 3rd wife of Granville Leveson-Gower (1721-1803), 1st Marquess of Stafford. She was a Lady of the Bedchamber to Princess Augusta.
³ The Marchioness’ brother was John Stewart, 7th Earl of Galloway (1736-1806), a Scottish Representative Peer (1774-1790), Lord of the Bedchamber (1784-1806) and Lord Lieutenant of Wigtownshire (1794-1806).
with France. In doing so, it explores the manner in which the self-interest Dundas epitomised throughout his career could become the dominant factor in British politics in this period. The political landscape at this time was a chaotic place. The culture of ‘Old Corruption,’ combined with the effective lack of limits on politicians’ powers, created a fluid environment in which government decisions were largely improvised based on contested and competing centres of power. As this thesis demonstrates, in such a system, the self-seeking concerns of men like Henry Dundas, very quickly could, and indeed did, become the preeminent factor that determined the political life of the nation.

In doing so, this thesis both complicates and adds nuance to understandings of late-Georgian politics which have primarily been categorised by the rather one dimensional epithet of ‘Old Corruption.’ As this thesis argues, in histories of the period, this term has become somewhat of a blanket expression for an era of avarice and embezzlement, whose only real historical function was to provide a backdrop from which the reform movements of the 1830s could advance. This simplistic depiction has placed an inordinate focus on the financial side of ‘Old Corruption,’ which necessarily underestimates the complexities of the system it is supposed to describe. As the career of Henry Dundas demonstrates however, despite the wealth of opportunities for personal enrichment, the self-interested ambitions of individuals were not necessarily focused on the pursuit of sinecures and other financial windfalls. Instead, for politicians like Dundas, the pursuit of self-interest involved amassing and maintaining political power by any and every means at their disposal.
The era of Revolutionary Wars with France dovetailed with Dundas at the pinnacle of his power and influence. While the 1780s had established his political career, the long decade of the 1790s saw it in its fullness. Although known to his contemporaries by the inauspicious sounding title of the Scottish ‘political manager’, Dundas was no mere functionary. He represented the epitome of political influence. Known colloquially as “Harry the Ninth, (the uncrowned King of Scotland),” Dundas was, his peers argued, a man in whose person was concentrated “the sole and absolute management of Scotland, and the exclusive patronage in this quarter.”

In such a tiny political nation, this concentration of power effectively amounted to autocratic rule. As Lord Henry Cockburn noted, Dundas acted as “the Pharos of Scotland... It was to his nod that every man owned what he had got, and looked for what he wished.”

The choice for the Scottish political classes was simple – either they supported Dundas, or they would quickly find themselves out of favour and bereft of the spoils of government. By the mid-point of the decade his dominion over Scotland was complete. At the 1796 general election Dundas was effectively able to deliver Scotland to the government on a plate. All but two of the forty-five Scotch MPs, and all sixteen of the elective Peers were his personal followers.

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Furthermore, as the confidential friend and principal ally of the Prime Minister William Pitt, Dundas’ authority was no longer merely confined within the borders of Scotland. Unlike any of the other Scottish ‘managers’ before him, such as the Earl of Bute and the Dukes of Argyll, he was now a prominent British politician, and an influential figure on the conservative side of politics. As one insider noted, he had become one of the three most prominent and powerful figures in the cabinet, and it was common knowledge that the ministry was “Pitt, Dundas and Grenville.” Already a dominant member of the Board of Control of the East India Company, the salaried position of President was created for Dundas in 1793, and he continued to reign supreme until 1801. Having been Treasurer of the Navy since 1784, he also added the Home secretoryship in 1791, before exchanging it for that of War and the Colonies in 1794. In these guises, Dundas’ power thus reverberated throughout the British world, influencing the great affairs of state, and carrying particular resonance in the colonies of the West Indies and India at the furthest reaches of the British Empire.

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8 As ‘manager’ Dundas in effect took over what had been a vacant position since 1761, or at least not one upon which any single figure had a sizeable hold. Before that the ‘managerial’ role had been the domain of John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll; his brother Archibald Campbell, 3rd Duke of Argyll, 1st Earl of Ilay; and John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute.


11 Thorne, The House of Commons 1790-1820, I, pp. 79, 635-643. Dundas held the following major offices during his career: Solicitor General for Scotland, 1766-75; Lord Advocate, 1775-83; Treasurer of the Navy, 1782-3, 1784-1801; Home Secretary, 1791-4; President of the Board of Control (EIC), 1793-1801; Secretary for War, 1794-1801; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1804-5. He was also Chancellor of St Andrews University, 1788-1811; and Governor of the Bank of Scotland, 1791-1811.

12 His influence within the workings of Empire was a commonplace and much remarked on piece of knowledge at the time, especially his control of patronage in India which stemmed from his position on the Board of Control of the East India Company, see for instance: Nowell C. Smith (ed.), The Letters of Sir Sydney Smith, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), Vol. I, p. 79; Sir Herbert Grierson (ed.), The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932-7), Vol. 6, p. 489. Although Dundas’s connection with the West Indies colonies attracted less
Paradoxically however, despite his position at the pinnacle of late-Georgian politics, Dundas remains somewhat of a mysterious figure in British history. For all his prestige and importance, comparatively little has been written about him. There exist only four published biographies of Dundas, one unpublished PhD dissertation, and a handful of articles that deal with aspects of his career. At one level this scarcity in the historical record can be explained by a coincidence of circumstance. George W. T. Omond, the one Victorian scholar who set out to chronicle the Dundas family of Arniston, originally planned for it to include a memoir of Henry Dundas. However, having found “that a complete account of his career... could not be given without entering upon a variety of subjects inconsistent with the scope of the present volume,” Omond decided to set it aside for a separate work, which he ultimately never completed. Similarly, the dispersal of Dundas’ papers in various scattered archives meant that he was overlooked by the renewal of interest in Scottish history in the 1950s.


Yet coincidence alone cannot explain the lack of scholarship on Dundas, and the barren state of the historical record is also a reflection of the ignoble manner in which his career ended. In 1806 Dundas was impeached for misappropriating public money during his tenure as Treasurer of Navy between 1782 and 1801. Although by the final vote of the Peers, Dundas was acquitted of all charges, on a number of them, the majorities were quite small. Exacerbated by his uncooperative behaviour throughout the trial, the slim margin by which Dundas was exonerated meant that his guilt ultimately lingered in the public consciousness. Certainly the stain of it was never effaced, and the impression of him as an ‘ogre of corruption’ remained. As a result, he was an unpopular figure of study. Few thought to write about him, and even less sought to do so from any sort of positive standpoint.

However, although he has consequently been described as being widely “unpopular with most Scots,” the attitudes of his contemporaries towards him seem on the whole, to be incongruous with such an interpretation. At one level certainly, like most of his contemporaries in politics, he has been seen as being unpopular with the common people, or to be more precise as being unpopular in the pages of the popular and radical press, for whom his personal and political foibles offered enticing targets for satire and criticism. Yet if Dundas’

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16 For a contemporary account of Dundas’ impeachment, see: [Anon], The Trial by Impeachment, of Henry Lord Viscount Melville: for High Crimes and Misdemeanours before the House of Peers in Westminster Hall, between the 29th of April and the 17th of May, 1806, (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1806).
17 The two charges that drew the smallest majorities, were those that alleged Dundas’ connivance at his secretary Alexander Trotter’s misuse of public funds for his own personal gain (Trotter was arraigned alongside Dundas in the trial). For the actual voting numbers, see: Matheson, The Life of Henry Dundas, p. 371.
18 Brown, Henry Dundas, pp. 489-491; and Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 274.
19 See, for instance: Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 1.
impeachment did much to colour the folk memory of him as a villain who escaped justice, the widespread celebrations in Scotland upon his acquittal, belie the assertions of his universal unpopularity with his contemporaries. Sir Walter Scott wrote that Dundas’ return to Edinburgh had “been very flattering to his feelings – nothing but huzzaing and cheering in almost [all] the towns they had occasion to pass through.” Likewise Dundas’ nephew Robert reported back to him that “no event almost ever occurred which has excited such warm & general feelings of joy in Scotland.” Moreover, the judgements of his political colleagues and opponents were also generally favourable. The Marquess Cornwallis, who though a close collaborator was never a political crony, said of Dundas “I never met with a more fair and honourable man,” while the chaste William Wilberforce remarked that “people have thought him a mean and intriguing creature; but he was in many respects a fine, warm-hearted fellow.”

Given his contemporaries predominantly positive reckonings of his career, the dramatic slide in Dundas’ reputation during the two hundred years

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21 SRO, Melville, GD 51/1/198/12/12, Robert Dundas to Melville, 19 June 1806, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 491. Robert Dundas further remarked to his wife “It would have done your heart good to have witnessed what I have done today, the universal joy of all persons here on your father’s acquittal. I really could hardly get along the street, being stopped by every person I met” – SRO GD 235/10/18/238, Robert Dundas to Elizabeth Dundas, [1806?], cited in Fr, The Dundas Despotism, p. 275; Furthermore, the attempts of the Edinburgh Solicitor General to discourage celebrations, earned him the nickname of “Extinguisher General,” and in defiance of his edict 500 exultant supporters of Melville saw fit to organise a very drunken public dinner, see: Anna Maria Wilhelmina Stirling, The letter-bag of Lady Elizabeth Spencer-Stanhope, comp. from the Cannon hall papers, 1806-1873, 2 Vols., (London: John Lane, 1913), I, pp. 54-55 [Entry for June 13, 1806]; and SRO, Melville, GD 51/1/198/12/6 & 11, Letters of Robert Dundas to Melville, 16 & 24 June, 1806, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 491.
since his death is surprising. Indeed, Dundas’ fall from grace has largely been a product of historical revisionism, as his position in history has seemingly been shaped, not by the opinions of his contemporary’s, but by subsequent shifts in the Scottish political landscape and conceptions of Scottish nationalism. The first of these followed the rolling back of the ‘Dundasian Domination’ by the Whigs who at length defeated the Dundas interest in the later half of the nineteenth century. While some, such as Lord Henry Cockburn, could still see in Dundas, “a Scotchman of whom his country may be proud,” others were less forgiving.23 The heavy-handed suppression of opposition interests that Dundas had presided over, excited powerful animosities amongst those who had been excluded from the privileges and patronage offered by political power. Determined “that no shred or rag, no jot or tittle, of the old system will be left” the Whigs sought to implant in the Scottish mind their own negative account of the Dundasian system, and especially its resistance to democratic reform.24

This hostile perception was further reinforced by the focus on radicalism and political reform displayed by Scottish historians such as H.W. Meikle and W.L. Mathieson in the early 1900s. Given the emphasis of their studies lay with the Scottish political movements Dundas had worked so hard to bring down, they understandably ended up portraying him as a knee-jerking reactionary, and

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23 Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, I, p. 66.
24 Whig leader Francis Jeffrey, former editor of the Edinburgh Review, and Lord Advocate after 1830, gloried “that no shred or rag, no jot or tittle, of the old system will be left” – Christopher Harvie, Scotland & Nationalism: British Society and Politics 1707 to the Present, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 51. See also: Fry, Dundas Despotism, p. 306; and Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 520-522.
anglicising toady.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, as John Mackenzie and Tom Devine have highlighted, Scottish nationalism was undergoing something of a cultural and political revival during this period.\textsuperscript{26} No doubt spurred on by the establishment of a separate Scottish Office and Secretary of State in the 1880s, the Scots were attempting to throw off the spectre of their submission to English dominance. Consequently, Dundas’ combination of Scottish and British politics, sat poorly with these resurgent notions of Scottish nationhood. As such, Dundas was a conspicuous absence from the favourable assessments of Victorian historical biography that were lavished on some contemporaries, such as Warren Hastings, with equally chequered pasts.\textsuperscript{27}

This negative legacy can also be seen in the three early biographies of Dundas. Lacking access to Dundas’ private papers, James Lovat-Fraser’s 1916 account sought to “delineate a character… and portray a personality rather then describe a political career.”\textsuperscript{28} While praising his Indian policies and mediating some of the worst accusations of impropriety levelled at Dundas, he largely refrained from making any assessment of his domestic politics. Instead, he preferred to cast him as the ‘master of the commonplace’ – or as average rather than evil.\textsuperscript{29} It was a similar story with the biographies written by Holden Furber and Cyril Matheson twenty years later. Spurred on by a resurgence of a Scottish


\textsuperscript{28} Lovat-Fraser, \textit{Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville}, p. ix.

\textsuperscript{29} Lovat-Fraser, \textit{Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville}, pp. 139-141.
nationalism in the 1930s that proclaimed the importance of the Scottish role in the British Empire they sought to defend Dundas' imperial efforts, but again did little to appease his domestic critics.\(^{30}\) As such, Dundas continued to be perceived as an enemy of Scotland and its people. By the time Alistair Campsie's novel, *The Clarinda Conspiracy* appeared in 1989, Dundas' reputation had become a dustbin into which any accusation could be shovelled. The novelist was able to reveal the ultimate depths of his unredeemed depravity – a paranoid, alcoholic, drug-addicted, and impotent cuckold who was responsible for the murder of no less a man than the 'Scottish Saint' Robert Burns.\(^{31}\)

Having reached its lowest ebb, Dundas' historical legacy was then reinvigorated by the publication of Michael Fry's *The Dundas Despotism*. Fry provides a much more comprehensive, and indeed nationalistic defence of Henry Dundas, ultimately portraying him as the man who personified the triumph of the Union of 1707, and who was able to make 'partners of England and Scotland.'\(^{32}\) Preferring not to look at him as a bogeyman, nor a misunderstood paragon, but as an effective politician, Fry argues that the full incorporation of Scotland into the Empire – on the strength of which it could justly be dubbed 'British' and not just English – was largely, though not exclusively, Dundas'
achievement.\textsuperscript{33} Equally though, Fry is at pains to stress that Dundas was a Scottish hero, not just a British one. While completing Scotland’s integration into the Union, Dundas was nevertheless able to preserve a degree of internal autonomy and a vestige of sovereignty. This ultimately proved crucial to the maintenance and further development of a Scottish national identity, as it allowed Scotland to perceive herself as England’s partner and not merely as her dependent.\textsuperscript{34}

While not wishing to contradict the claims that Dundas was influential in effecting the ‘completion’ of the Union of 1707 or the establishment of a Scottish Imperial identity, this thesis does seek to complement them, by cautioning against the temptation to equate the ultimate outcome of peoples actions with the impulses that animated and inspired them. While Dundas and those associated with him may well have played an important role in the development of modern Scottish nationhood, and the increased involvement of Scots in the British Empire, they did so unintentionally. These outcomes were only achieved as the accidental by-products of their more pragmatic pursuits of their own self-interested ambitions.

\textbf{II}

The networks of patronage and influence dominated by Henry Dundas provide a striking example of the parasitical late-Georgian political system. Both contemporary critics and subsequent historians have come to equate this style

\textsuperscript{33} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 309.
\textsuperscript{34} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 384.
with William Cobbett’s famous image of ‘Old Corruption.’\footnote{Philip Harling, ‘Parliament, The State, and ‘Old Corruption’: Conceptualizing Reform, c. 1790-1832,’ in Arthur Burns & Joanna Innes (eds.), Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 98. Cobbett (1763-1835) was an English pamphleteer, farmer and journalist. Through his weekly newspaper The Political Register (1802-1835) Cobbett shaped much of the Radical critique of ‘Old Corruption,’ see: H. T. Dickinson, British Radicalism and the French Revolution, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 64-71.} What Cobbett and fellow members of the Radical press meant by ‘Old Corruption,’ or ‘the Thing’ as it was so often called, was the manner in which the government and ruling classes, were able to perpetuate their political dominance through the widespread and systematic use of pensions, sinecures, and gratuitous emoluments.\footnote{Philip Harling, The Waning of ‘Old Corruption’: the Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 1; Martin Daunton, Trusting Leviathan: The Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1799-1914, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 55-57.} It was in many respects an all-pervasive feature of British politics between the middle of the eighteenth century and the Age of Reform. Indeed, as W.D. Rubenstein has argued, the existence of this form of corruption was the distinctive quality that separated the eighteenth century political landscape from that of the later nineteenth.\footnote{W.D. Rubenstein, ‘The End of “Old Corruption” in Britain 1780-1860’, Past & Present, No. 101 (Nov. 1983), p. 55.} Only with the passage of the Great Reform Act of 1832, and the steady democratisation of the electorate did this culture of endemic corruption slowly recede into the past.

While ‘Old Corruption’ was a constant presence in the politics of the Georgian era, it reached its zenith under Dundas. Although the Radical critique of the systemic rapacity of ‘Old Corruption’ was derived from the traditional ‘country’ suspicion of placemen and stockjobbers, in many ways, as Philip Harling has argued, it was also a critique of something quite new.\footnote{Harling, The Waning of ‘Old Corruption,’ p. 136. The Radical critique also built Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man, which devoted much attention to the maldistributive effects of a ‘government of loaves and fishes’ that thrived on chronic warfare, See: Harling, ‘Parliament, The State, and ‘Old Corruption’, pp. 98-9.} When
Cobbett and the other Radicals decried the reprehensible features of ‘Old Corruption,’ they were in fact attacking a novel system created by the outbreak of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. The enormous scale of the British war effort prompted the government to not only suppress traditional liberties, but to also greatly enlarge the central bureaucracy alongside public spending.\footnote{Indeed, net public spending nearly quadrupled over the course of the wars with France and at the peak of the conflict with Napoleon the government was engorging over 30 per cent of national income, see: Philip Harling, ‘Rethinking ‘Old Corruption,’” \textit{Past & Present}, No. 147, (May, 1995), pp. 127-9.} Given that, through Radical eyes, the scope of elite corruption grew more or less in direct correlation with the growth of the fiscal-military state, these developments meant that the opportunities for peculation, nepotism, and corruption were perceived to be manifest.\footnote{See also: E.P. Thompson, ‘The Peculiarities of the English,’ in E.P. Thompson, \textit{The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays}, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), p. 259; and Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’ in Gareth Stedman Jones, \textit{Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 171-3.}

‘Old Corruption’ is thus a staple aspect of historical understandings of public life in late Georgian Britain. However, as this thesis argues, there are a number of gaps in its historiography that continue to render the self-interest of individuals like Dundas a fruitful field of inquiry. Historians have tended to approach the subject primarily through the publications and writings of the Radical critique.\footnote{Harling, ‘Rethinking “Old Corruption,”’ p. 130; and Martin Daunton, \textit{State and Market in Victorian Britain: War, Welfare and Capitalism}, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 67-68.} Rather than being studied as interesting in its own right, this has advanced a somewhat myopic understanding of ‘Old Corruption’ as a hold-all antagonist in the broader narrative of its gradual demise during the Age of Reform in the 1830s. W.D Rubinstein focused on the continued outrage of the Radical press in order to demonstrate the persistence of elements of the system...
even beyond 1832, while Gareth Stedman Jones and E.P. Thompson similarly based their understandings of the extent of the system on a close analysis of the language of the Radical critique. ⁴²

As the more recent histories of Harling and Martin Daunton have highlighted, the reliance of these earlier historians on the claims made by the Radical rhetoric led them to overstate the actual scale of ‘Old Corruption,’ which while still substantial, was less massive than they had implied. ⁴³ Equally though, while Harling and Daunton have underlined the danger of uncritically accepting the assertions of the Radical press, they nonetheless share the historiographic predilection for the Radical critique. The focus in their works on the subsequent reform movements of the early nineteenth century leads them to replicate the earlier historians’ tendency to portray ‘Old Corruption’ only in the essence of its gradual demise. ⁴⁴ As such, while the general shape of the system is recognised as the backdrop from which the reform movements of the 1830s developed, there remains a lacuna regarding the way in which those such as Dundas actually worked the system, and ultimately made their decisions in terms of their own self-interest.

Given that nothing could be calculated to more enrage the members of Radical press than instances of government peculation, the historiographical

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⁴³ Harling, The Waning of ‘Old Corruption’, pp. 89, 137-9, 144-50; and Daunton, State and Market in Victorian Britain, pp. 67-68.

reliance on their critique has placed inordinate focus upon the avarice of the system. As this thesis argues, this financial focus leads to the depiction of the late Georgian political system as merely a vast morass of iniquitous peculation and embezzlement. As Judith Lewis has argued, this both simplifies and vulgarises what were in reality much more nuanced and complex sets of practices. While the Radical critique viewed the patronage and privileges of government as akin to daylight robbery, they equally served to nullify some of the tensions of what was an incredibly turbulent period. The distribution of places, pensions and sinecures by those such as Dundas, helped to coalesce and level out divisions amongst the political elite, thus precluding Britain from following France down the path of revolution and social upheaval.

The focus on the financial aspects of ‘Old Corruption’ also necessarily underestimates the importance of those who played the political game in pursuit of other rewards. As the career of Henry Dundas demonstrates, whilst self-interest remained central, that which was embodied by the ultimate ‘game-players,’ and by those who best mastered the system, was often centred in fields distinct from the pursuit of sinecures and financial windfalls. Instead their

45 In particular historians have focused on texts such as John Wade, The Black Book; or, Corruption Unmasked! (London, 1820); Rubenstein is emblematic of this approach, charting the lives of those that made a fortune in the course of clerical, public administrative and defence occupational careers: Rubenstein, ‘The End of “Old Corruption”,’ pp. 56-57; See also W.D. Rubenstein, Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution, (London, 1981), pp. 71-2.

46 Judith Lewis Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class and Politics in Late Georgian Britain, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 68.

interests were focused primarily on the exercise and maintenance of their own personal political power.

Similarly, although the focus on the Radical critique of self-interest amongst public figures has undoubtedly been important, it remains only one of a number of competing languages of reform.\textsuperscript{48} The historiographical reliance upon it has seen historians neglect the range of contemporary criticisms of political corruption, especially amongst the more ‘respectable’ ranks of British society. Boyd Hilton’s \textit{Corn, Cash, Commerce}, J.E. Cookson’s \textit{Lord Liverpool’s Administration}, and Norman Gash’s \textit{Pillars of Government} have acknowledged the importance of these critiques in the period after 1815. However there is a dislocation between these accounts and the similar critiques of corruption and the social threat of ‘new money’ developing amongst the Scottish landed gentry from the 1760s onwards that have been highlighted by Dwyer, Mason & Murdoch.\textsuperscript{49} This thesis will address this lacuna, thereby uncovering the nuances of British society’s attitudes towards the self-interested motivations of their political leaders.

Although the impact of ‘Old Corruption is acknowledged in Britain, the influence of it as an over-arching political culture dominated by individual self-

interest, has not yet been fully explored. This is particularly so in relation to the colonial experience, a field where Dundas excelled. Wealth acquisition and the economic imperative have always been recognised as integral facets behind imperial endeavour. However, historians of empire have placed a heavy reliance on the notion there was an element of truth behind the Victorian notion of ‘the white man’s burden’ and that the Empire was in part driven by an altruistic commitment to the advancement of its colonial subjects. In her study of the Colonial Office between 1815-1845, Zoë Laidlaw argues that there was a growing adherence to the ideals of ‘good governance’ after 1776, which resulted in an increasing preoccupation with rational and measurable approaches to colonial government. Similarly, Eric Stokes asserted, “a shrewd blend of altruism and self-interest... represented the permanent political instinct of British colonial policy.” However this altruism was largely absent during the period of the Revolutionary wars of 1790-1802. As Linda Colley has made clear, the British Empire in this period was overstretched and precariously placed, “its power rested less on capital, or on force simply, than on opinion and imagination, on an idea of invulnerability sustained by sporadic bouts of efficient and successful violence.” In such an empire, locked in a furious life and death struggle with revolutionary France, there was little room for such high-minded antics as

53 Linda Coley, Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850, (New York, 2002), p. 274. This line of argument is also indebted to David Armitage’s The Ideological Origins of the British Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which demonstrated the inaccuracy of many of the assumptions that fuelled previously accepted notions of the British Empire before 1775 creating a more haphazard and contradictory image of the empire.
altruism. In the same vein that the threat of France helped to crystallize a sense of ‘British’ identity, this thesis argues that it also produced an Imperial outlook run entirely in terms of material gain and strategic necessity, and which fostered no sense of responsibility for the welfare of those colonised peoples in its charge. Understanding the British Empire as a precarious, tremulous, under-resourced, and ‘jerry-built’ entity, this thesis thus posits that the empire very quickly became a smash-and-grab venture. In such a setting, the endeavours of Scots like Dundas to further their own interests, could have, and ultimately did have, a major impact in determining the nature and character of ‘British’ imperial expansion.

This thesis is divided into three principle chapters. The first, entitled: The Manger in Distress, looks at the events surrounding Henry Dundas’ impeachment in 1806, for misappropriating public money while serving as Treasurer of the Navy between 1782 and 1801. In examining the political intriguing that led up to the impeachment trial, the chapter uncovers an irregular and tumultuous political system in which the business of governance was subverted by the whims of individual self-interest and the volatility of the personal relationships that connected and divided the political elite. The second chapter, A Fine Warm Hearted Fellow, contextualises the claims made by the most recent scholarship on Dundas, which position him as ‘completing’ the Union of 1707. As the chapter demonstrates, while his actions may have facilitated the greater incorporation of

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Scotland into the British world, Dundas did not plan to do so. In light of his employment of government patronage and the manner in which he manipulated his private life to further his political ambitions, it must be realised that Dundas was solely concerned with the pursuit of his own political power. The final chapter, *Wha Wants Me?* explores the contemporary criticisms of both Dundas, and self-interest more broadly. Dundas himself was heavily involved in critiques of corruption and ‘new money’ developing amongst the Scottish landed gentry from the late 1760s onwards. This participation, combined with the pointed critiques of him advanced by Radical pamphleteers and cartoonists, makes him an ideal figure through which to uncover the sites of contestation within British attitudes towards political self-interest.

In light of this framework, this thesis will argue that Henry Dundas was emblematic of a pervasive culture of self-interest that wielded a considerable influence in determining the nature and character of British public life. In doing so, it seeks to complicate and add nuance to the historical understandings of the political culture of ‘Old Corruption’ in late-Georgian politics. As this thesis demonstrates, despite the wealth of opportunities for personal enrichment, individual self-interest was not always focused on obtaining sinecures and financial windfalls. Instead, politicians like Henry Dundas were primarily focused upon amassing their own political power. As this thesis argues, in the inherently fluid and chaotic politics of the period, their pursuit of power could very quickly become the preeminent factor in determining the shape of the political landscape.
Chapter 1: The Manager in Distress

The Trial By Impeachment of Henry Dundas

This chapter explores the events surrounding the 1806 trial by impeachment of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville, for misappropriating public money while Treasurer of Navy between 1782 and 1801. As this chapter demonstrates, the political intriguing and manoeuvring that led up to Dundas’ impeachment provides a telling insight into the political culture in Britain at the close of the eighteenth century. The picture that emerges depicts a system of government in which political matters were ultimately subsumed by the concerns of individual self-interest and caprice resulting from the networks of personal relationships that connected and divided the political elite.

Party politics, at least in the form that we understand them, did not exist. Ever since 1787, the spectre of the French revolution, and the possibility that it could be replicated in Britain, had cast a long shadow across the political landscape. Politics had been transformed by the dual threats of radicalism and foreign invasion emanating from Paris. As David Brown has highlighted, the resultant social upheaval and wartime political climate helped to nullify political differences. The challenges posed to the collective British ruling class forced them to band together in order to repel these threats.\(^1\) Manifestly aware of the

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fate that had befallen their French counterparts, the majority of the British elite in this period chose to subvert their political principles in favour of political stability, resulting in the absence of any real party dynamic. Instead, as Dundas himself described to the Duke of Argyll and Lord Douglas, in the late-Georgian era friendship and kinship remained the most prominent political binding agents. Consequently much of the political action was driven by the wrangling between the factional groups that coalesced around individual loyalties and animosities. Certainly this is borne out by the saga of Dundas' impeachment. The events surrounding this affair were undeniably propelled, either by Dundas' loyalty to William Pitt, or by the squabbles between himself and his predecessor as First Lord of the Admiralty, John Jervis, 1st Earl of St Vincent. Also, in the background moved Henry Addington, Pitt's successor as Prime Minister and a man who shared no love for Dundas.

The manoeuvrings of these leading figures also demonstrate the inherently chaotic nature of this political landscape. These were not men who had their powers rigidly defined, or who had to follow strict procedural etiquette. Instead they found that the power they exercised, was largely unregulated and unchecked – indeed Dundas, the only government minister taken to task in this period for abusing his power, was ultimately acquitted by his peers despite being manifestly guilty. Faced with a maelstrom of

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2 Stephen Conway has charted a similar process during the earlier Seven Years War (1756-1763), whereby the Whigs and Tories formed an informal partnership in support of the Pitt-Newcastle government's prosecution of the war. See: Stephen Conway, *War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

3 Dundas particularly commented on the ties of kinship and loyalty that bound together the Argyll interest in 1775 and the Hamilton interest in 1811: SRO, Melville, GD 51/1/196/9 [Henry Dundas, Lord Advocate to Duke Argyll], [n.d., but 1775]; NLS Melville, MS 1, ff. 232-3, Melville to Lord Douglas, 30 January 1811, both cited in Brown, *Henry Dundas*, p. 10.

opportunities, men of Dundas and Pitt’s ilk, notorious for living beyond their means, ultimately flew by the seat of their pants. These men made their decisions solely based on what worked best for themselves and their friends, and on what would cause their political enemies the most discomfort.\(^5\)

As the first suggestions of spring 1803 struggled to overcome the remnants of a Scottish winter, Henry Dundas, newly raised as Viscount Melville, was attempting to affect a rebirth of his own.\(^6\) Faced with King George III’s refusal to discuss their proposals for Catholic emancipation, Dundas and his Prime Minister, William Pitt, had felt compelled to resign from office in March 1801.\(^7\) Despite long having claimed to covet a life of leisure, Dundas found himself wonderfully unprepared to relinquish public life and political power.\(^8\) This was hardly surprising coming from a man who had candidly admitted to his

\(^5\) Pitt’s recklessness with his personal finances will be described in more detail below, for Dundas’ similar extravagance see: Lord Henry Brougham, Historical Sketches of Statesmen who Flourished in the Time of George III, (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1839), p. 233, which argues “That Lord Melville was a careless man, and wholly indifferent to money, his whole life had shown”; Harold William Thompson (ed.), The anecdotes and egotisms of Henry Mackenzie, 1745-1831, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 144, describes Melville’s carelessness, depicting him as “the worst manager of money matters”; and [Anon], Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines Vol. 6, (Philadelphia: John F. Watson, 1811), p. 422, depicts Dundas as living a hedonistic lifestyle, having always “tasted deeply of all the gratifications of luxury and dissipation” and maintaining his own house in the style of “the resort of the bon vivant.” See also: Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 313.

\(^6\) Dundas was raised as Viscount Melville and Baron Dunira on Christmas Eve 1802 by the ministry of Henry Addington, later 1st Viscount Sidmouth (Prime Minister 14 March 1801 – 10 May 1804) as part of an attempt to ensure his ongoing electoral support, see: Fry, The Dundas Despotism, pp. 252-253.

\(^7\) It is also worth mentioning that although Pitt and Dundas’s resignation has largely been attributed by historians to their disagreement with George III over Catholic Emancipation, the private correspondence between the two reveals that there were a number of issues behind it, not least the King’s refusal to support their war plans, see: William Pitt to Henry Dundas, 25 July 1800, Melville Mss., William L. Clements Library, Michigan, cited in William Hague, William Pitt the Younger, (Harper Collins: London, 2004). p. 477.

\(^8\) Indeed, the desire to leave politics and retire to more leisurely pursuits had become a decidedly hackneyed theme of Dundas’ writings by this point, see: Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 239.
young acolyte, George Canning, that he found power ‘intoxicating.’ Although Dundas had been left cowed by the anger that his and Pitt’s proposals had awoken in George III, such a situation was never going to last.\(^9\) Having always regarded Pitt’s successor Henry Addington as “totally incapable,” and predicting that his government would “crumble into pieces almost as soon as formed,” in the spring of 1803, Dundas began plotting a means through which to bring this prediction to fruition.\(^11\) In doing so, he hoped that very soon both he and Pitt would be returned to power.

Strangely however, while Dundas’ attempt to revitalise his political career ostensibly entailed a return to the prestigious position he had formerly enjoyed, at another level it also involved a determined effort to break with this same past. In March 1803 he started burning many of his papers and correspondence relating to his earlier career.\(^12\) The exact reasons as to why Dundas embarked

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\(^9\) The confidential remark made by Dundas to George Canning can be found in Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 382.

\(^10\) George III’s reaction to the plans for Irish Emancipation was so violent, that he is reported to have publically railed at Dundas at his levee at St. James’s on the 28\(^{th}\) January 1801, “What is the Question which you are all about to force upon me? What is this Catholic Emancipation which this young Lord, this Irish secretary has brought over, that you are going to throw at my Head... I will tell you, that I shall look on every Man as my personal enemy, who proposes that Question to me... I hope All my Friends will not desert me.” When Dundas attempted to explain the King exploded, “None of your damned Scottish metaphysics, Mr Dundas!” see: Earl Camden, *Memorandum on Pitt’s Retirement*, (circa. August 1803 – May 1804), Kent Record Office, Pratt MSS, U840/012, reprinted in full in Richard Willis, ‘William Pitt’s Resignation in 1801: Re-examination and Document’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 44, no. 110, (Nov. 1971), pp. 252-3.


\(^12\) In 1803 Dundas began to burn papers relating to his early career. He refers to this work in a letter to the Duke of Buckingham, see: SRO, Buckleuch, GD224/30/2/1, Melville to Buckleuch, 7 March 1803, cited in Brown, *Henry Dundas*, p. 53; and again in a letter to David Scott his supporter on the board of the East India Company, see: C. H. Philips (ed.), *The Correspondence of David Scott Director and Chairman of the East India Company Relating to Indian Affairs 1787-1805*, 2 vols. (London: Camden Society, 1951), II, p. 418, Melville to Scott; 8 May 1803; and again in a letter to the Commissioners of Naval Inquiry, see: *Parliamentary Papers: Tenth Report of the
upon this incendiary course of action remain unclear, although certainly his backroom manoeuvring had not gone unnoticed. In the corridors of power, Dundas’ contortions were viewed with distaste. In the process, he had aroused animosities amongst powerful figures, not least of whom was the influential Lord Minto, who derided Dundas as “another eel [who] winds about too much to be followed or much attended to.”

Addington too was aware of his attempts to regain office. In June 1803 he endeavoured to dispense with Dundas as ‘Scottish manager’, aiming instead to govern Scotland himself directly from London. “By its conduct” Addington argued, the government would show, “that it is determined to keep clear of narrow influence, and cabal, and to act fairly, and impartially by the people of Scotland.” It was a slight aimed directly at Dundas, and one that did not go unnoticed, with the deposed manager accusing Addington of having “trifled with the spirit of the country.” However, catastrophically for himself, Addington failed to signal this distinctly high-minded (and novel) approach to the Scottish

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*Commissioners of Naval Enquiry: The Office of the Treasurer of His Majesty’s Navy, 21, (1805), p. 189 Melville to Commissioners, Wimbledon, 30th June 1804.*

13 Countess of Minto (ed.), *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto, from 1751 to 1806, when his public life in Europe was closed by his appointment to the vice-royalty of India*, 3 Vols., (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1874), III, p. 266. Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 1st Earl of Minto (1751-1814) was a Scottish politician and diplomat, who served as President of the Board of Control (EIC) in 1806, and was subsequently appointed Governor-General of India from 1807-1813.


16 In October 1803, an enraged Dundas accused Addington of having “trifled [sic] with the spirit of the country” and wrote of the “diffidence and discontent” it was causing him, SRO, Hope of Luffness, GD 364/1/1136, Melville to Col. Alexander Hope, 9 October 1803, cited in Brown, *Henry Dundas*, pp. 449. Dundas had already made clear his displeasure at Addington’s increasing attempts to intervene in Scottish politics. In February the year before, he wrote to Addington, warning that “If, under those circumstances, you chuse to proceed in the line of conduct you letter points at, the consequences must rest with you, not with me,” NLS, Melville MSS, lot 746, [Henry Dundas to Addington], Edinburgh Feb. 5, 1802, cited in Holden Furber, *Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville, 1742-1811*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 274.
MPs and Peers. Going against tradition, he decided to forego appointing a replacement manager and took the role upon himself. However, he immediately undermined this decision, by continuing to consult Dundas on matters pertaining to Scottish governance. As a result very few of the Scottish political class appeared to notice the change in Dundas' official status. Indeed, his political sway remained such that his old secretary at the Navy, Alexander Trotter, a full month later, could still write, “every thing in the quarter you mention still remains under the recommendation of [Dundas]. It wou'd therefore be ruin to the business to make application in the 1st instance to any other person.”

Nonetheless, while Addington’s efforts had little impact on the political reality in Scotland, Dundas had come to regard the exercise of government patronage in that country as his by right. Addington’s attempts to take away from Dundas the control over its distribution, not only enraged the former ‘manager’, but, stingingly, served as a reminder of the extent to which the political tides were turning against him. Manifestly aware of the disapproval of his political colleagues, Dundas’ letters reveal a growing paranoia, in one instance even going so far as to caution Pitt to “beware the Post Office when you

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18 This was even true of Addington’s supporters, as his friend the Duke of Montrose, who might have been expected to know better, would later say that Dundas had never been out of power, see: Pitt Papers, PRO 30/B/160, ff. 269-270, Montrose to Pitt, 14 May 1804, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 458.
20 Having already accused Addington of having “trifled [sic] with the spirit of the country” (see footnote 15), by December 1803 that year Dundas was almost incandescent with rage, recounting in a bitter letter to the Chief Baron, the ‘gross insensitivity’ of Addington, who had ignored a list of people nominated by Dundas to receive pensions. What made this refusal more galling was the Addington had excused himself by telling Dundas that the treasury could not afford to fulfill these pensions requests, however as Dundas found out through other sources, Addington had simultaneously granted a separate list of his own of almost equal value. See: SRO, Dundas of Arniston, RH 4/15/6, letter book 8, no. 26, Melville to Robert Dundas, Chief Baron, 15 December [1803], cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, pp. 451.
and I [have] occasion to correspond on critical points or in critical times.”

With his mood vacillating between bouts of pique and paranoia, Dundas’ decision to destroy many of the papers relating to his earlier career begins to look increasingly suspicious.

This is further exacerbated by the fact that although in his letters to both David Scott, and to the Commissioners of Naval Inquiry, he described the papers he had destroyed as ‘useless', they were patently not so.

In the first instance, the incinerated papers referred to ongoing electoral disputes in Fifeshire, which were causing major tensions between Dundas and Addington. Dundas’ efforts to get his brother in law John Hope elected had been usurped and undermined by Addington’s truculent endeavours to support the notoriously unbalanced Sir William Erskine.

Similarly, those referred to in Dundas’ letter to the Naval Inquiry can hardly have been of negligible importance considering, on the one hand, the Commissioners’ repeated insistence on seeing them, and on the other,

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21 Philip Henry Stanhope, Secret Correspondence Connected with Mr. Pitt’s Return to Office in 1804: Chiefly compiled from the Mss. at Melville Castle. Not published. (London: Spottiswoodes and Shaw, 1852), p. 21, Melville to Pitt, Melville Castle, April 3, 1804.

22 In his letter to Scott, Dundas refers to “destroying useless correspondence,” under which fell nearly “everything respecting the Fife election” of 1802, see: Phillips (ed.), The Correspondence of David Scott, II, p. 418, Melville to Scott, 8 May 1803. Similarly, in his letter to the Commissioners of Naval Inquiry, Dundas described the papers he had destroyed as not being of “the smallest use to myself or any other person,” see: Parliamentary Papers: Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry, p. 189, Melville to Commissioners, Wimbledon, 30th June 1804.

23 R. G. Thorne, The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790-1820, 5 Vols. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), II, p. 538. Major-General Sir William Erskine, 2nd Baronet (30 March 1770–1813) was a British Army officer who served under the Duke Wellington in the Napoleonic Wars. Upon being told Erskine was being shipped to Portugal, Wellington complained that he “generally understood him to be a madman,” to which the Horse Guards breezily responded: “No doubt he is sometimes a little mad, but in his lucid intervals he is an uncommonly clever fellow... though he looked a little wild as he embarked.” His career came to an ignoble end, ultimately being declared insane and subsequently cashiered, and he took his own life in Lisbon in 1813, reportedly jumping out of a window with the last words “Now why did I do that?” See: Michael Glover, The Peninsula War 1807-1814: A Concise Military History, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974), p. 146.
Dundas' own subsequent admission of their incriminating nature. As such, it is apparent that, aware of manoeuvres of his political enemies, Dundas was furtively attempting to obscure some aspect of his earlier political career and keep it concealed from prying eyes.

Certainly he had good reason to be nervous. Upon Pitt’s return to power in May 1804, Dundas initially appeared reluctant to take up the proffered post as First Lord of the Admiralty. Despite this, throughout the political intrigues of 1803 and 1804 his anxiety to secure that position had been a popular topic of parliamentary gossip. Perhaps in no small part due to these murmurings, one of the political figures that had been upset by Dundas’ intriguing was Lord St Vincent, the incumbent Admiralty chief. Indeed, at least according to the rumours, it was St Vincent’s investigations into naval malpractices and frauds that were the motivating factor behind Dundas’ ambitions in that department.


25 Dundas’ reluctance stemmed from his protestations that the precarious state of his personal finances would not allow him to resume a political career. However they were eventually overridden by Pitt’s ultimatum that he would not form a government unless Dundas was a part of it see: Dacres Adams papers, PRO 30/58/5/9, Melville to Colonel Alexander Hope, 5 April 1804, cited in Brown, *Henry Dundas*, p. 455; Buccleuch Papers, SRO, GD2245/30/6, Memoir by Henry Viscount Melville, May 6 1809, cited in Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 257; and SRO, Buccleuch MSS, GD224/689/2/2, Melville to Buccleuch, 8 May 1804, cited in Brown, ‘The Government of Scotland’, p. 278. For Pitt’s ultimatum see SRO, Melville Castle Mss., GD51/1/195/28, memorandum of 16 Aug. 1807, cited in Brown, ‘The Government of Scotland’, p. 278.


27 John Jervis, 1st Earl of St Vincent (1735-1823) was an Admiral in the Royal navy and a member of parliament. Made his name with his victory at the Battle of the Cape of St Vincent in 1797, and ironically, considering his appearance here, made his fortune having been appointed by Dundas to lead the 1793-1794 West Indies expedition alongside Sir Charles Grey. He was First Lord of the Admiralty from 1801-1804. See: Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: the British Expeditions to the West Indies and the war against Revolutionary France*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 106-114.

In his *Memoirs of the Administration of the Board of Admiralty*, St Vincent certainly made it apparent that he harboured both a deep-seated antagonism towards Dundas, and a desperate need to indulge in self-aggrandisement. The tone of this memoir could only be described as outrageously partisan – attributed as ‘a defence of St Vincent by his friends’ and published anonymously it was promptly withdrawn because of the libels it contained. However the dissemblance of being written in the third person allowed St Vincent to refer to himself as “the greatest seaman that ever existed” and to advance a number of similarly ‘modest’ claims about his other talents. He was no less hyperbolic when it came to the subject of his hated successor. Raving that Dundas had allowed “the very sanctuary of the Constitution [to be] profaned and rifled by [his] sacrilege at the Treasury,” St Vincent further accused him of having presided over a “despotism of improbity, [an] impure and foul dominion of imperious vice over coward imbecility,” which was now “killing the verdure and the vigour of the land, and burying the cities “ under the “liquid columns of aspiring depravity” that it had spewed forth. The violence of St Vincent’s language again reinforces the chaotic nature of politics in this era. Politicians of his stature were evidently not to be concerned by petty trifles such as slander.

29 [John Jervis, Earl St Vincent], *Memoirs of the Administration of the Board of Admiralty under the Presidency of the Earl of St Vincent*, (London [1805], withdrawn). All copies save one were destroyed, presumably because of its inflammatory and embarrassing nature, but one survived in the Grenville collection in the British Library, and is reprinted in D. Bonner Smith (ed.), *Letters of Admiral of the Fleet, the Earl of St Vincent, whilst the First Lord of the Admiralty 1801-1804*, 2 Vols. (London: Navy Records Society, 1922-1927), II, pp. 423-516.
31 St Vincent also claimed that "upon one temper, the constitution of a single mind, and the firmness of a single wrist [all his], depend sometimes the fate and glory of an Empire;” see: Bonner Smith (ed.), *Letters of the Earl of St Vincent*, II, pp. 434, 439; and Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, pp. 261-262.
and libel – St Vincent had set out to savage his rival Dundas, the consequences be damned.

However, hidden deep beneath the rhetoric, St Vincent’s denunciations that “proclaimed the high crime and misdemeanour of the Viscount Melville [Dundas],” actually did have some substance to them.  

Although the memoir was quickly pulled from circulation, the accusations and acrimonies that it contained regarding Dundas lingered. St Vincent’s blistering attack on his probity in office stuck in the minds of his contemporaries. In particular, he had charged Dundas with withdrawing “from the Bank of England... the money issued from the Treasury for the service of the Navy” which he “converted the use... to his own profit, at the hazard of his personal solvency.” Such was St Vincent’s reputation and influence that his accusation formed the basis of the charges laid by the commission of naval inquiry which ultimately led to Dundas’s impeachment in 1806.

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34 Bonner Smith (ed.), *Letters of the Earl of St Vincent*, II, p. 512. Ironically in committing this act Dundas was acting contrary to the law (st.25 of the King, c. 31), which he himself had put in place in 1785 to crack down on corruption in the Naval treasury. Under this the Treasurer’s account had been changed from a private to a public account and it was required of him to keep all unspent money at the Bank and forbade its use for any other purposes. However the Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry had shown that Dundas had had standing in his name at the Bank, a sum lower than the unspent budget of his department in nearly every year under investigation, with the deficit rising from £6,500 in 1784 to £104,625 in 1785, falling to £53,800 in 1790 before rising again to £75,413 in 1796 and then finally disappearing by 1800, see: *Parliamentary Papers: Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry*, p. 128; and also: Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, pp. 263-264.
While the main aim of the commission was undoubtedly to score political points for those, like St Vincent, who had been done out of office by Dundas and Pitt’s return, it must also be recognised that the accusations were not entirely groundless.\textsuperscript{36} While Dundas was ultimately acquitted on all accounts, this was less the result of his unblemished innocence, and more the fault of the convoluted and ill-drawn nature of the charges against him. Moreover, in getting off, Dundas was also assisted by his lawyers who artfully drew an impenetrable maze of technicalities and cryptic evidence that further weakened the prosecution.\textsuperscript{37} As the Whig grandee Lord Holland would later write, “the trial was miserably conducted by the Commons. Though there were five or six lawyers... the articles were so ill drawn that it was difficult to ascertain to which act of Lord Melville each respectively referred.”\textsuperscript{38}

Certainly, in the lead up to the impeachment proceedings, Dundas’ correspondence with his son gave clear indication that he was undoubtedly guilty, if not exactly as charged, then at least of malversation, and by his own admission.\textsuperscript{39} Having withdrawn to Bath to await the findings of the Commissioners, on January 30, 1806, Dundas wrote to his son: “I confess to you”

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\textsuperscript{36} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 262. \\
\textsuperscript{37} Brown, \textit{Henry Dundas}, pp. 489-491; and Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 274. By the final votes of the Peers, Dundas was acquitted on all the charges, however on the two charges alleging his connivance at Alexander Trotter’s misuse of public funds, the majorities were quite small, which effectively meant that the suspicion of Dundas’ guilt lingered and the stain was never effaced, Cyril Matheson, \textit{The Life of Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville, 1742-1811}, (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1933), p. 371 prints the actual voting numbers. This lingering mark was further exacerbated by his uncooperative behavior towards the investigating commissioners, as he refused to answer their questions for the non-confidence inspiring reason that he was not legally compelled to incriminate himself, and that he had destroyed the relevant records, \textit{Parliamentary Papers: Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry}, pp. 141, 189. \\
\textsuperscript{39} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, pp. 272-275.
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he opined, “that if these papers are to be produced, I mean that which contrary to the truth contains the statement of the Iron Chest [the internal accounts of the Treasurer’s office] and my being debtor to it, it would be better to stop the trial by pleading guilty.” As Dundas’ letter went on to admit, he had borrowed sums of upwards of £20,000 from the Navy accounts, which he had then employed towards his own purposes.40

But where had the money that Dundas borrowed from the Navy gone? Despite the public perception that he had “robbed the public of great sums of money and that [he] was wallowing in wealth,” Dundas had not diverted the Navy funds for his private emolument.41 While his secretary Alexander Trotter, who had been indicted alongside him, was able to retire to a castled estate at Dreghorn with a personal fortune of £50,000, Dundas had never attempted, or at least been able to convert his public position into financial security. As he himself complained, his accounts contained “irresistible proof that I have all my life been poor, that it was never an object with me to be otherwise, and that I am at all times greatly in debt and was paying large sums annually in interest and annuities.”42 Indeed, so dire was his financial position at the time of his impeachment that he would have had to abandon his own cause and plead guilty

40 NLS Acc. 9140, Jan. 30, 1806 [Melville to Robert S. Dundas], cited in Fry, The Dundas Despotism, pp. 272-273. See also: [Anon], The Trial by Impeachment, of Henry Lord Viscount Melville, pp. 7-9; and Anna Maria Wilhelmina Stirling, Annals of a Yorkshire House from the Papers of a Macaroni & his Kindred, 2 Vols., (London: John Lane, 1911), ii, p. 286.
42 NLS, Acc 9140, Melville to Robert S. Dundas, 17 February, 1806, cited in Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 273. Alexander Trotter in comparison to Dundas, did very well for himself out of his position as Paymaster of the Navy, utilising his familial connections in the City of London to ensure his financial security, by privately investing the Treasury funds that passed through his hands, see: Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 263.
had he not received a massive loan from his brother-in-law Lord Hopetoun, with which he was able to cover the legal costs of his defence.43

Moreover, Dundas’ lack of cupidty was also an acknowledged fact amongst those determined to indict him for corruption and the misuse of public funds. Even his chief accuser Samuel Whitbread, was careful never to attribute personal avarice as one of his sins. He was forced to concede publically that “a love of money, for its own sake, was never imputed to him, by me or any man.”44 Indeed, as the Whig Henry Cockburn would later write of Dundas, “to those who knew the pecuniary indifference of the man, and who think of the comparative facility of peculation in those irregular days, the mere smallness of the sums which he was said to have improperly touched, is of itself sufficient evidence of his innocence [on the charge of personal gain].” Cockburn went on to argue, “if he had been disposed to peculate, it would not have been for farthings.”45

Yet if not for his own personal financial advantage, for what purpose had Dundas usurped the treasury’s money? What was he so desperate to keep clandestine that he would burn papers and correspondence, and then, when questioned before the House of Commons, imperiously declare that there was

43 See: Hopetoun House, Hopetoun muniments, NRA(S), Survey 888, Bundle 1236, Melville to Hopetoun, 15 July 1805, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 490. James Hope-Johnstone, 3rd Earl of Hopetoun (1741-1816) was a Scottish Representative Peer who was also Dundas’ brother in law through his second marriage to Lady Jane Hope in 1793.
44 [Anon], The European Magazine, and London Review, Vol. 59-60 (London: Philological Society, 1811), p. 191. Similar sentiments can be found in: [Anon], Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines, p. 422, which describes Dundas as a “man in whom the love or care of money, was never a predominate passion.”
“no human power which could compel him to give an account of it”? While those in the circle of the government, such as Lady Bessborough were certain that Dundas “never dreamt... of embezzling the public money, and his fault [was] on the contrary extravagance and carelessness,” they were nonetheless aware of the realities of the irregular and tumultuous political world he inhabited. This was a world, Bessborough argued, in which “there are many things which may have been necessary to carry on Government in a time of difficulty which may be known and winked at, but if once brought before Parliament must be reprobated and punished.” Certainly, this was what Dundas hinted at in his submissions to the Commission, when he claimed he could not answer “without disclosing delicate and confidential transactions of government, which my duty to the Public must have restrained me from revealing.”

However in doing so, Dundas was deliberately flirting with the truth. The uses to which he had employed the Treasury’s money were not ‘governmental’ in the way he had implied, even if they had undoubtedly played their part in maintaining the government to which he belonged. Indeed, in one instance

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47 Countess Castalia Granville (ed.), *Lord Granville Leveson-Gower (First Earl Granville) Private Correspondence 1781-1821*, 2 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1916-1917), Vol. II, p. 136, Lady B. [Bessborough] to G. L-G. [Granville Leveson-Gower], Nov 16 1805. Henrietta Ponsonby, Countess of Bessborough (1761-1821) had an unhappy marriage to Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, as both were habitual gamblers, often in debt, and Frederick was known to be abusive of her, often humiliating her at social gatherings. As a result Henrietta had a number of lovers, the most notable being Granville Leveson-Gower (son of the Marchioness of Stafford) with whom she had two illegitimate children. Her brother was the Earl of Spencer, a close ally of Lord Grenville, who served as First Lord of the Admiralty under Pitt (1794-1801) and later as Home Secretary under Lord Grenville in the Ministry of All the Talents (1806-1807).
48 *Parliamentary Papers: Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry*, p. 189, Melville to Commissioners, Wimbledon, 30th June 1804.
Dundas had even improperly directed the Navy money to the Prime Minister himself.

As William Hague and Michael Fry have noted in their respective biographies of Pitt and Dundas, one of the more incongruent aspects of Dundas’ impeachment was the fact that, although Pitt publically professed to abhor financial irregularity, he nonetheless provided Dundas with staunch support up until his death in January 1806. This support was made even more remarkable by the vindictive manoeuvres of Addington, who had obviously seen a chance to rub salt in Dundas’ wounds and settle an old score. Having already once traded on the fragility of Pitt’s ministry in the Commons – agreeing to join the cabinet only on the condition that he be raised as Viscount Sidmouth, and that future sinecures be guaranteed to his family and friends – Addington was no stranger to venality. He set about depriving Dundas of his most powerful supporter, threatening to resign if Pitt refused to turn on his erstwhile Scottish ‘fixer.’ However, even in the face of these threats, Pitt steadfastly maintained his commitment to Dundas.

49 Hague, *William Pitt the Younger*, p. 547; and Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 266. Dundas himself made clear how important this support was to him personally, writing later that “Mr Pitt’s death appeared to be a mortal blow to my cause and left me totally in the hands of my enemies,” see: SRO, RH 4/15/8/6, cited in Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 272.
50 Addington had never forgiven what he saw as Dundas’ ‘treachery’ in bringing about the demise of his Premiership in 1804, see: Brown, *Henry Dundas*, pp. 457-458; and Fry, *the Dundas Despotism*, p. 266.
51 Addington had been brought into the cabinet in the hopes that his followers would supply the extra votes needed to safeguard a clear majority in the Commons. However, he came at a very steep price, see: Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 266; and George Pellew, *The Life and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth*, 3 Vols., (London: John Murray, 1847), II, pp. 324-344.
The question remains however as to why Pitt chose to remain loyal to his friend in the face of such public scandal? The simplest explanation is that put forward by both Hague and Fry, who choose to view Pitt’s continued defence of Dundas as a mark of the long friendship between the two.\textsuperscript{53} In light of these two historians’ efforts to eulogise the careers of their respective protagonists, this attributing of Pitt’s loyalty to the bonds of friendship is perhaps understandable. However, according to gossip amongst their contemporaries, there was apparently another, more sordid motive, behind Pitt’s loyalty to his old ally.\textsuperscript{54} Belying his public reputation, Pitt was in fact notoriously hopeless at managing his own finances, a fact not lost on his biographers. John Ehrman, writing his benchmark three volume history, the Younger Pitt, marvelled at the contradiction of “the guardian of the national finance so regardless of his own, the dedicated Chancellor so ignorantly profligate in private.”\textsuperscript{55}

In 1801, after making an attempt get to the bottom of the Prime Minister’s financial woes, his friend George Rose uncovered “a History of Debt and Distress” which, Rose commented, “sickened me.”\textsuperscript{56} To his horror, Rose found that by running his household on a perpetual cycle of short-term loans, and losing a negligent fortune to dishonest servants and tradesmen, Pitt was heavily in debt

\textsuperscript{53} See: Hague, William Pitt the Younger, pp. 547-548; and Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 266.
\textsuperscript{54} It is important to note that Fry does hint at this more sinister motive in his book. However, he concludes that “in any event... Pitt was not the sort to leave an old companion in the lurch.” See: Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 266.
\textsuperscript{56} Rose to Pretyman, 18 October 1801, Pretyman Mss, 435/44, cited in Hague, William Pitt the Younger, p. 489. George Rose (1744-1818) was a self-made placeman who, after serving for a number of years as a government secretary, eventually entered Parliament in 1784. He was very attached to Pitt, and wished only to be regarded as his right hand man.
and had been consistently so for most of his public life. Indeed, so bad were his finances at the time of his death that, in an unprecedented step for a commoner, the government was forced to step in to repay the £40,000 he still owed his various creditors. Dundas was evidently too good a friend to let this pass without trying to help, and along with others, had come to Pitt’s aid in 1801 by contributing £1000 towards the servicing of his debts. While this was conducted above board, according to the correspondence of Lady Bessborough and others such as Charlotte Grenville, eldest sister of Pitt’s former ally and confidant Lord Grenville, Dundas had also done so at earlier times, albeit by illegally employing the Treasury money, and in much larger sums. As Bessborough wrote, Pitt would have faced the ruinous political consequences of a personal financial disaster “had not Lord Melville been able to lend him a large Sum entrusted to his care... This money was repaid, but there were other large sums gain’d by successful speculations and appropriated to the same use.” Pitt was therefore not only indebted to Dundas, but also deeply implicated in his

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58 For the decision of the Commons to service Pitt’s debts after his death see: Ehrman, The Younger Pitt, III, p. 834.

59 Hague, William Pitt the Younger, p. 490.

60 In March 1805 Lady Bessborough reported gossip that “Ld. Melville has ask’d to be re-examin’d... as it is said Mr Pitt has given him leave to account for Sums lent to him in his public capacity, and however illegal such loans may be, they are much better than its passing for private profit.” See: Castalia Granville (ed.), Lord Granville Leveson-Gower (First Earl Granville) Private Correspondence 1781-1821, II, p. 43, Lady B [Bessborough], to G. L-G. [Granville Leveson-Gower], Fri. 29 March 1805. Further gossip suggesting developments “implicating the great man Pitt himself” in Dundas’ misuse of treasury money can be found in Rachel Leighton (ed.), The Correspondence of Charlotte Grenville, Lady Williams Wynn and her three sons, (London: John Murray, 1920), p. 110, Lady W. W. to Charles W. W., Brook Street, March 27th, 1805. Similar rumours that “Pitt knew more of the true facts than the public supposed” are reported in Stirling, Annals of a Yorkshire House, II, p. 283.

financial misdeeds. As such, Pitt’s decision to overlook the financial irregularity of his Scottish underling begins to appear a far more cynical and self-serving exercise then has usually been understood.

Bessborough’s letters are damning. Given Dundas’ own habitual poverty, his ability to provide, at such short notice, the wherewithal for Pitt’s financial salvation can only have stemmed from his improper employment of the Navy money. As such, this episode underscores Dundas’ perfidy to the Commissioners of Inquiry. Although Pitt was certainly central to the government in this period, Dundas would have been stretching the limits of credulity if he believed that contributions to his personal finances could be properly justified as a ‘governmental’ expense. Plainly, behind this wilful miscomprehension, he was endeavouring to conceal more self-interested concerns. Dundas had not personally derived a financial advantage from his misdistribution of the Naval Funds. However, in rescuing Pitt from his debtors, he was nonetheless acting in pursuit of his own interests – by preserving Pitt’s premiership, Dundas was ultimately securing his own grip on the reigns of power.

In a letter to his son, Dundas also made it clear he was not above misappropriating the Treasury funds in order to help fund his electioneering schemes in Scotland. Laying bare the deceit behind his protestations to the

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62 Certainly this was the gossip amongst the Grenville clan: “It is curious, but I know of a certainty, that Ld. Melville, four days ago, said to a common friend of his and Pitt, ‘Do you not think that Pitt should go out upon this’; you must not repeat this, but I know the fact.” See: Historical Manuscripts Commission, The manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, Esq, VII, p. 260. See also: Stirling, Annals of a Yorkshire House, II, pp. 287-291, for rumours of another set of loans made by Dundas with Treasury Money, this time to save Walter Boyd, a banker in the firm of Boyd, Benfield, & Co. who was an intimate friend of Pitt and Dundas, from bankruptcy.
commission about the ‘confidential transactions of government’, Dundas advised his son to warn his lawyer "not to suppose that the sums I refuse to disclose any account of arose from what is properly called secret service." 63 Dundas argued that while ‘the secret service’ may have been a sufficient explanation for expenses in England, in Scotland the money was really for “electioneering purposes.” 64 This again, is another example of the deliberate semantic confusion that littered Dundas’ correspondence in this period. As with his re-interpretations of ‘governmental,’ what was evidently hiding behind these linguistic acrobatics were the concerns of his own political interest.

Throughout the eighteenth century it had been common practice for the monarch to withhold part of the civil list to intervene in elections. In an electoral climate where money ultimately secured seats, paying secret pensions to candidates allowed the King to stack parliament with those favourable to him. 65 While the use of public money, in the form of these secret pensions, had been commonplace twenty years earlier, the practice had been made illegal by the Civil List and Secret Service Money Act of 1782. 66 Despite this, Dundas had evidently continued the custom of using government money – in this case Navy Funds – to influence elections. In usurping what had previously been royal

65 An example of this can be found in the Parliamentary Election of 1780, in the lead up to which, £1000 per month were diverted from the Civil List to a private account of the King’s, from which ‘secret pensions’ were paid to friendly candidates in more than 50 seats in order to help with their re-election. See: Thomas Laprade (ed.), The Parliamentary Papers of John Robinson 1774-1784, (London: Royal Historic Society, 1922), pp. 56-60.
66 The practised was effectively outlawed by the Rockingham administration’s Civil List and Secret Service Money Act of 1782 which was famously championed by Edmund Burke, see: Edward Porritt, The Unreformed House of Commons: Parliamentary Representation before 1832, (New York: Kelley, 1963), p. 214.
privilege, Pitt’s Scottish ‘fixer’ was thus well and truly living up to his nickname as “Harry the Ninth, (the uncrowned King of Scotland).\textsuperscript{67} As the furtive calculations that complete his letter to his son demonstrate, he therefore knew full well that his silence was not conditioned by any perceived ‘duty to the Public.’\textsuperscript{68} What he was Endeavouring to keep concealed was self-interest, pure and simple, albeit in a form that was geared towards maintaining power rather than financial gain.

From amid these webs of intrigue and deception, the saga leading up to Dundas’ impeachment provides a telling insight into the culture of British politics at the close of the eighteenth century. The politics of the era were primarily orchestrated and animated, not by ideology or policy, but by the personal loyalties and animosities that connected and divided the leading public figures. Consequently, within the late-Georgian political milieu, self-interest enjoyed the ultimate freedom of expression. As the actions of the leading protagonists in the impeachment drama reveal, it was often the ultimate determinant of a politician’s endeavours. If stripped back to the bare essentials, at the heart of all their exertions - Dundas’ machinations in the spring of 1803 and Addington’s subsequent truculence and politically-edged rapacity, Dundas and Trotter’s misappropriation of Treasury funds, and the explosion of vitriol that raged forth from the 1805 memoirs of Lord St Vincent – lay the stubborn and deliberate pursuit of each individuals’ own personal objectives. These

\textsuperscript{67}James Boswell, \textit{A Letter to the People of Scotland, on the Alarming Attempt to Infringe the Articles of the Union and to Introduce a Most Pernicious Innovation, by Diminishing the Number of the Lords of Session}, (London, 1785), p. 6.

\textsuperscript{68}NLS, Acc 9140, Feb. 7, 1806 [Melville to Robert S. Dundas], cited in Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 275.
motivations ranged from the cultivation or maintenance of political power, to a more venal quest for pecuniary advancement. The snapshot provided by the impeachment story also demonstrates the lengths to which these public figures would go to achieve these ends. While Addington showed no aversion to appearing petty and grasping, and Lord St Vincent was recklessly prepared to risk public embarrassment in a desperate attempt to retain office, Dundas was ultimately willing to break, or at least substantially bend the law, in order to advance his own interests.

Although Dundas’ trial would appear to substantiate the worst accusations levelled against the political system now commonly associated with ‘Old Corruption’, i.e. that it was a vast morass of depraved peculation, in actual fact, the case underscores the nuances and complexities that allow that epithet to continue to defy such simplistic depictions. While self-interest was evidently at the forefront of the Georgian politician’s mind, the events leading up to Dundas’ impeachment demonstrates the variety of manners and forms in which it could be expressed. Certainly, for those who could aspire to no greater feats, such as Trotter and other minor political players and hangers-on, this self-absorbed predisposition evidently entailed grasping whatever financial advantages came their way. This resulted in a climate of blatant embezzlement that has since come to symbolise the political culture of the era. However, in the higher echelons of

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70 As stated previously, this is largely due to the focus on this aspect of the system by the Radical critique in texts such as John Wade, The Black Book; or, Corruption Unmasked!, (London, 1820), which has exerted a disproportionate influence over subsequent historians of the subject, such
the political game, the key contenders were playing for vastly different stakes. As Dundas' career demonstrates, despite the wealth of opportunities for personal enrichment, self-interested ambitions were not necessarily focused on the pursuit of sinecures and financial windfalls. Instead, for Dundas, they were chiefly directed towards amassing and maintaining political power by any and every means at his disposal.

Chapter 2: ‘A Fine Warm Hearted Fellow’

Patronage, Personality, and the Pursuit of Power

Building on the insights provided by the impeachment saga, this chapter explores the 1790-1802 period of Henry Dundas’ career, re-examining the manner and means by which he was able to so assertively dominate the late-Georgian political system. In doing so, this chapter argues that while the exploits of Dundas may have ultimately facilitated the ‘completion’ of the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707, it was never his primary intention. Instead, like most involved in British politics during the era of Revolutionary Wars with France, Dundas was largely focused on his own self-interest. As demonstrated by the manner in which he employed government patronage, and manipulated his personal relationships, the pursuit of political power ultimately predominated Dundas’ life.

In advancing the case that Dundas was chiefly concerned with his own self-interest, this chapter engages with the claims made by the most recent scholarship on Dundas, particularly those advanced in Michael Fry’s The Dundas Despotism. At the core of Fry’s spirited, and indeed nationalistic, defence of the man is his assertion that Dundas personified the triumph of the Union of 1707 by making ‘partners of England and Scotland.’ According to Fry, Dundas’ position as a British politician of increasing importance – and in particular his command

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of great networks of patronage – both reflected and advanced the integration of Scotland with the rest of the United Kingdom and the British Empire.\textsuperscript{3} Through his political endeavours, Fry contends that Dundas was able to successfully overturn the ‘imperial’ legacy of the relationship between those two countries. Furthermore, although he facilitated the broader incorporation of Scotland into the ‘British’ political system, Dundas simultaneously ensured that the Scottish institutions continued to enjoy a degree of internal autonomy.\textsuperscript{4} Portraying Dundas as a ‘Scottish’ hero, Fry further posits that by ‘completing’ the Union in a manner that preserved “a vestige of the sovereignty derived from erstwhile nationhood,” Dundas was able to position Scotland as England’s partner, and not merely her supplicant, thus giving “the nation its one era of genuine historical importance and claim to imperishable fame.”\textsuperscript{5}

However as this chapter demonstrates, the nationalism of Fry’s interpretation ultimately overreaches itself. Succumbing to the temptation of retrospection, it wrongly equates the eventual outcomes of Dundas’ actions with the desires that motivated them. While Dundas’ era may have seen the ‘completion’ of the Union, the achievement of such a lofty goal did not figure in his calculations. Instead, that process occurred accidentally, as a by-product of his pursuit of his own self-interested ambitions. As this chapter argues, the distinctive structure of the Scottish political system in this period meant that political power was ultimately dependent upon the provision of places and sinecures. In bestowing patronage upon the members of the Scottish political

\textsuperscript{3} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{4} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, pp. 308-310, 383-384.
\textsuperscript{5} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 384.
classes who formed his power base, and by preserving the historic Scottish institutions over which he already held sway, Dundas was therefore not advancing Scottish interests, but his own. Although Dundas’ actions may have eventually helped to forge a ‘partnership’ between Scotland and England, it must be recognised that their primary intention was to gather political power in his own hands.

By exploring the rise of the ‘Dundas Despotism’ in the 1790s, this chapter also adds nuance to historical understandings of the broader political culture, now characterised by the term ‘Old Corruption.’⁶ As the career of Henry Dundas demonstrates, the politics of the era were more than just the quagmire of endemic peculation and embezzlement pilloried by the Radical press. While self-interest remained central, Dundas’ political manoeuvres were not primarily aimed at personal enrichment. Instead, he represented the ultimate player of the political ‘game’ – power not wealth was what he craved – and as such his endeavours were first and foremost focused on amassing and consolidating his own political influence.

In this regard, Dundas was well equipped to achieve his objectives: as Lord Henry Cockburn would later reflect, he was “well calculated by talent and

⁶ Although Michael Fry uses the phrase ‘Dundas Despotism’ for the title of his book, whether such a phrase was actually used in Dundas’ lifetime is unclear. James Boswell by inference described Dundas as a ‘despot’ in his A Letter to the People of Scotland, on the Alarming Attempt to Infringe the Articles of the Union and to Introduce a Most Pernicious Innovation, by Diminishing the Number of the Lords of Session, (London, 1785), p. 84; however the phrase does not seem to have entered common use. The more common phrase was apparently the ‘Dundassian Domination,’ see: BL, Pelham, Add Mss 33109, ff. 7-10, Col William Fullarton, MP to Pelham, [n.d. but ante 3 January 1802], cited in David J. Brown, Henry Dundas and the Government of Scotland, [unpublished PhD dissertation], (Edinburgh University 1989), p. 22. See also: David J. Brown, ‘The Government of Scotland under Henry Dundas and William Pitt’, History, 83, 270, (April 1998), p. 266.
manner to make despotism popular.”

As described in the previous chapter, in the politics of this period, self-interest and personal relationships were of paramount importance. Building on this characterisation, this chapter argues that the extraordinary degree of influence wielded by Dundas, was dependent upon the two essential qualities of the man. Firstly, his ‘talent’ in developing, mastering, and employing the extensive networks of ‘pillage and patronage’ for which he was famous. And secondly, his convivial and sociable ‘manner,’ which allowed him to manipulate his private life in pursuit of his self-interested political ambitions.

‘Selfish and Scotch’ – The Importance of Patronage in Scottish Politics

The importance of Dundas’ control of patronage to the establishment of his political power was heavily dependent upon the idiosyncrasies of the Scottish political system of the latter eighteenth century. Plagued by the structure of ‘semi-independence,’ and a hopelessly limited and corrupt electoral franchise, the Scottish political system essentially fostered an avaricious and self-interested culture amongst the political elite. The fact that the political loyalties of these individuals were largely conditioned by the spoils they were offered, ultimately meant Dundas’ control of patronage was essential to his role as Scottish ‘manager.’

8 George Canning is thought to have coined the phrase “pillage and patronage’ to describe Dundas’ extensive networks of influence that radiated across Britain and out to the colonies, see: Boyd Hilton, A Mad, Bad Dangerous People? England 1783-1846, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 54.
9 James Howard Harris, 3rd Earl Malmesbury (ed.), Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, Containing an Account of His Missions to the Court of Madrid, to Frederick the Great, Catherine the Second, and at The Hague: And of His Special Missions to Berlin, Brunswick and the French Republic, 4 Vols., (London: Richard Bentley, 1844-1845), III, p. 568, [Entry for Wed, Sept. 27, 1797.]
Although the Union of 1707 had served to conclude the process by which the direction of Scottish affairs had been moving south since the Union of the Crowns in 1603, it did so only in a very narrow, legislative sense, and significant structural problems remained within the dynamics of Scotland's relationship with the rest of Britain.  

10 Under the terms of the Union, Scotland had been allocated just forty-five seats with which to represent itself in the House of Commons against the five-hundred-and-thirteen occupied by England and Wales.  

11 Moreover, unlike their British counterparts, Scottish peers were not guaranteed a seat in the House of Lords, with only sixteen ‘Representative Peers’ being elected to each Parliament.  

12 As such they remained a minority body in the Houses of Parliament. Due to the sheer weight of numbers, the distinctive concerns of the Scottish electorate remained largely peripheral to the broader politics of Westminster.  

What developed instead was a state of ‘semi-independence’ whereby the Scottish political nation nominally gave allegiance to the parliament in

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11 Of these, thirty places were filled by Members standing for the Scottish counties, and the remaining fifteen by those from the Royal Burghs. Twenty-seven counties each returned one Member, while the remaining six (Buteshire and Caithness; Clackmannanshire and Kinross-shire; and Cromartyshire and Nairnshire) were paired and sent a Member in rotation to alternate parliaments. Of the fifteen Burgh Members, Edinburgh itself elected one, while the other sixty-five Royal burghs were grouped into fourteen electoral districts, nine containing five burghs each, and five having four; see: R. G. Thorne, The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790-1820, 5 Vols. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), I, pp. 70-78. See also: Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 46.

12 Due to the terms of the Union there had always been some resentment as to the low rank accorded to the Scotch Peers, and they remained distinct from the British peers, who were entitled to sit in the House of Lords, see: Clyve Jones & David Lewis Jones (eds.), Peers, Politics and Power: House of Lords, 1603-1911, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), pp. xvi, 284-288; and Henry W. Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution, (Glasgow: J. Maclehose & Sons 1912), p. 12.

Westminster, yet its administration remained in the hands of the landed gentry, the Kirk, the Scottish judiciary, and ultimately men like Dundas. As Alexander Murdoch has highlighted, although real power undoubtedly rested with the English ministers, they had little desire to exercise it. Instead, Westminster generally abrogated its theoretical sovereignty, and consented to Scottish autonomy in regards the legislation and enforcement of law. As such, the Scottish political classes were in no way imbued with the mystical reverence of their English counterparts for everything that went on at Westminster. For them the Parliament held little relevance – the governance of Scotland was not, in practice, something that was done there – and consequently, they harboured very different motivations for attending than did their English colleagues.

This was further exacerbated by the exceedingly limited, and indeed corrupt Scottish electoral system. In the county seats, the lesser gentry and smaller farmers, unlike their counterparts in England, were alienated from the political process and the electoral franchise was restricted to a small number of substantial landowners. According to published accounts of *The Political State*...
of Scotland the size of the total county electorate in 1788 was only 2,662.20 By
the general election of 1790 this figure had fallen to 2,626, with only one county,
Ayrshire, having an electorate of more than two hundred, while the smallest,
Cromartyshire, had only six voters. 21 This left Scotland with a combined
electorate that was smaller than many individual boroughs in England. By the
turn of the century, while nearly one in thirty Englishmen were entitled to vote,
the comparative figure in Scotland was closer to one in six hundred.22

However, in reality, the size of the Scottish political nation was much
smaller than even the franchise numbers suggested. From 1707, and increasingly
after 1763, the larger landowners began to create nominal or ‘fictitious’ votes on
their estates in order to increase their political influence.23 The key to this
chicanery lay in a feudal relic of Scots land law, whereby it was not the mere
ownership of property that gave the right to vote, but the fact that it was held in
‘superiority’ – that is, in a state of direct vassalage to the crown – which could be
sold separately from the land it was derived from.24 By indulging in a legal
fiction, the owners of large estates could thus create personal electoral interests

holding land rated £200 Scots, see: Thorne, The House of Commons 1790-1820, I, pp. 70-71;
Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1852), I, p. 63; Society of the
Friends of the People (Great Britain), Report of the representation of Scotland, (London: printed,
by order of the Society, for D. Stuart; and sold by all the booksellers in town and country, 1793),
p. 5.
20 See: Sir Charles Elphinstone Adam (ed.), View of the Political State of Scotland in the Last
Century: A Confidential Report, (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1887). This gives personal details of
most of the 2662 voters.
21 For the size of both the total, and individual electorates in the 1790 election see: Thorne, The
22 Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism, p. 48.
23 Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, I, p. 63; Thorne, The House of Commons 1790-1820, I, pp. 71-72;
24 Friends of the People, Report of the representation of Scotland, pp. 6-7. See also: William
Ferguson, Electoral law and Procedure in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Scotland, [PhD
Despotism, p. 46; and Brown, Henry Dundas, pp. 8-9.
by separating, sub-dividing, and distributing the superiority from their land amongst their friends or dependents, all the while surrendering nothing of real value.\textsuperscript{25}

By the 1790s the effect of these so-called ‘airy freeholds’ or ‘parchment baronies’ on the Scottish electoral system was pronounced.\textsuperscript{26} In their report of 1793 the Radical ‘Society of the Friends of the People,’ calculated that in 1788 over 1,200 of the registered 2,662 county votes had been ‘fictitious’.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, nominal voters had outnumbered real voters in eighteen counties, with the worst being Banffshire, where fictitious voters had accounted for eighty-four per cent of the roll.\textsuperscript{28} While concerted campaigns against the manufacture of votes were able to curb some of the most flagrant abuses, overall they were ineffectual.\textsuperscript{29} The system remained skewed against the majority of genuine freeholders, and electoral power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of a very small, self-centred elite.

\textsuperscript{25} Thorne, \textit{The House of Commons 1790-1820}, I, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{26} Dwyer & Murdoch, \textit{Paradigms and Politics}, pp. 214-215; Brown, \textit{Henry Dundas}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{27} Friends of the People, \textit{Report of the representation of Scotland}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{28} Friends of the People, \textit{Report of the representation of Scotland}, p. 11. Banffshire only narrowly shaded a number of other counties: Inverness-shire (81%); Dunbartonshire (77%); Buteshire (75%); Sutherland (74%); Renfrewshire (72%); and Elginshire (70%)
\textsuperscript{29} On 19 April 1790 in the House of Lords, Lord Chancellor Thurlow delivered a ruling that meant that the franchise could no longer be created for purely electoral purposes, but had to rest on some genuine interest in the land from which it derived. This ruling had an immediate effect in some counties. Within a year resident proprietors’ campaigns in Inverness-shire and Aberdeenshire had respectively annulled 70 and 53 nominal votes. Similarly in Banffshire, the electoral roll was reduced from 122 in 1788 to 39 by 1794, while James Boswell exerted himself to have 106 voters expunged from the Ayrshire roll. However a renewed spate of vote manufacturing soon swelled the rolls again, as Scottish lawyers devised novel means of making the legal fiction more plausible by ensuring that claimants appeared to derive real revenue from their interests. See: Thorne, \textit{The House of Commons 1790-1820}, I, pp. 71, 73-74; Ferguson, \textit{Electoral law and Procedure}, pp. 38-9, and Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, pp. 160-161.
If the difficulties with the franchise system made the county elections unrepresentative, the situation in the Royal Burghs was equally forlorn.\(^{30}\) The fifteen burgh Members were elected by the councils of the sixty-six Royal Burghs, which were in effect closed, self-electing oligarchies.\(^{31}\) Burgh politics was thus confined to a cosy clique of about 1,250 electors, supposedly representing a combined population of just over 400,000.\(^{32}\) Unaccountable in any way to the population they were supposed to represent, many of the councillors, treated their parliamentary franchise as a marketable commodity. Bartering effectively, they could provide both a useful source of municipal revenue, and more importantly leverage fiscal rewards and patronage for themselves.\(^{33}\) Loyalty to the local Member was often dependent on the provision of these spoils, and bribery was commonplace.\(^{34}\) As an analysis of the Scottish constituencies done for the Dundas interest stated, the burgh councils could “generally be carried by any candidate not sparing his purse, and supported by the government.”\(^{35}\)

This then was the political system that Dundas was tasked with ‘managing.’ The limitations of the electoral process ensured power remained concentrated in the hands of a very small political elite.\(^{36}\) Indeed, as the electoral

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30 A Burgh refers to a Scottish borough.
31 Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, I, p. 64; Cockburn, Memorials of His Time, p. 87; Friends of the People, Report of the representation of Scotland, p. 9; Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 12.
32 Friends of the People, Report of the representation of Scotland, p. 12 gave the number of burgh voters in 1793 as 1,253; See also: Thorne, The House of Commons 1790-1820, I, p. 77.
34 Cockburn, Memorials of His Time, p. 88; Thorne, The House of Commons 1790-1820, I, pp. 77-78; and Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 12.
survey undertaken for Dundas demonstrated, the vast majority of Scottish constituencies were effectively dominated by either a solitary 'interest,' or by two or three competing factions.\(^{37}\) At one level, the effective size of the Scottish political nation already meant that patronage was an efficient method through which Dundas could assert himself. Through his eyes, constituencies in reality only amounted to a few powerful individuals and their kin. As such, the number of patronage 'bribes' needed by Dundas to ensure that the seat fell to him was actually quite small, and thus the distribution of sinecures and places appeared the most direct means by which he could establish his political power.\(^{38}\)

In order for this system to be effective however, Dundas had to tap into an already well-established, self-seeking culture. Luckily for him, he could do just

\(^{37}\) Aspinall (ed.), *English Historical Documents 1783-1832*, pp. 239-240, Document No. 170, NLS, Melville, Ms 1, ff. 206-9, 'Sketch of the Political Interest in Scotland, Nov. 1810.' The survey describes fourteen counties as being controlled by a single interest (Argyll, Ayr, Caithness, Clackmannan, Cromarty, Edinburgh, Linlithgow, Peebles, Ross, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Stirling, Sutherland, Wigtown) and two burghs (Anstruther, Stranraer); while ten counties (Aberdeen, Banff, Dumfries, Dunbarton, Forfar, Kinross, Kincardine, Nairn, Orkney, Perth) had two or three powerful factions as did nine burghs (Ayr, Banff, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Jedburgh, Perth, Selkirk). Eight counties (Berwick, Fife, Haddington, Inverness, Kincardine, Lanark, Moray and Elgin, Renfrew) and two burghs (Stirling, Tain) were home to four or five competing interests, while a further two burghs (Aberdeen, Kinghorn) were said to have no decisive interests present. The 'interest' - which represented the basic unit of British politics in the period - referred to a group of individuals working together to advance or protect their own influence, often revolving around a prominent nobleman and such friends as would follow his lead, or a group bound together by kinship, see: Brown, *Henry Dundas*, pp. 9-10. See also: Thorne, *The House of Commons 1790-1820*, I, pp. 74-76, and 512-623 for outline of the scheming and electoral contests in each seat.

\(^{38}\) It is worth noting too that historians of Scottish politics, such as Christopher Smout and Tom Devine, have argued that the resulting pursuit of patronage is further evidence that the system was hopelessly corrupt. However, even with its flawed electoral process it would be premature to dismiss the politics of the era as completely unrepresentative. The actions of the Scottish politicians also demonstrated the existence of a direct obligation on representatives to serve their electors' interests rather than act as independent political agents. To the extent that constituencies in effect were only representative of two or three families, the quests for patronage undertaken by Scottish MPs should actually be seen as a direct means of fulfilling their obligations, and representing those that elected them. See: Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830*, p. 201; Devine, 'The Failure of Radical Reform,' p. 52; William Ferguson, 'Introduction', *Parliamentary History*, 15, 1, (February 1996), p. 3; Ferguson, *Electoral law and Procedure*, pp. 26-37; Sunter, *Patronage and Politics in Scotland 1707-1832*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1986), pp. 90-91, 98, 103, 105, 111, 117, 134, 145.
that. As indicated by George Canning’s pithy remark that Dundas was “also selfish and Scotch,” the association between self-interest and Scots was already well understood in the political lexicon.39 Indeed, it was common knowledge that the Scottish politicos primarily came south of the border for the sake of the spoils they could bear home.40 In this regard, little had changed since 1707. According to the writer Daniel Defoe, the Union had been marked by the “great men posting to London for places and honours, every man full of his own merit and afraid of everyone near him: I never saw so much trick, sham, pride, jealousy, and cutting of friend’s throats as there is among the noblemen.”41

However, this dynamic was exacerbated in the 1790s by the perceived challenges to the fabric of Scottish society, and especially the political elite, emanating from the dual threats of radicalism and foreign invasion. This perceived threat conditioned a defensive and grasping outlook amongst the Scottish aristocracy and landed gentry as they desperately tried to maintain the political dominance and status that they had long enjoyed.42 Writing to Dundas in December 1791, his political ally the Duke of Buccleuch noted that this self-interested pursuit of patronage was becoming even more marked, and despaired of the increasingly venal culture. “It quite disgusts me to see the want of feeling

39 “Canning… agrees with Windham, Dundas is more active and more diligent than any other, but also selfish and Scotch.” Malmesbury (ed.), Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, III, p. 568, [Entry for Wed. Sept. 27, 1797.]
40 James Boswell certainly saw it as a matter of national self-reproach, decrying in an open letter: “Our country is at a miserable ebb, when its great and good families are totally indifferent about every public concern.” James Boswell, A Letter to the People of Scotland, p. 8. See also: Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism, pp. 40–41; Fry, The Dundas Despotism, pp. 55.
and proper, moral rectitude of conduct in many persons of this country when any office is in question.”

Having had to contend with the rumblings of the politically powerful Scot Lord Breadalbane in 1787, this was something of which Dundas was already aware. In November, Breadalbane had written to Dundas, threatening that his “attachment” to him would be “considerably diminished,” unless his “subjoined list of friends” were “immediately provided for.”

Considering Breadalbane wielded considerable influence amongst his fellow representative peers, and possessed major ‘interests’ in electorates such as Perthshire, this was no idle threat.

Patronage was thus the thread upon which the whole system turned, and Dundas’ position at its pinnacle was dependent upon his provision of the spoils.

In his position as Scottish ‘manager’ Dundas had to deal with real, not ideal human nature, and above all, with ambition. Faced with what he described as the ‘avarice of the Commons,’ he was obliged to find a way to manipulate his political cohort’s self-interest into a form that would support and sustain the government.

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43 SRO, Melville, GD 51/9/30, Duke of Buccleuch to Dundas, 10 December 1791, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 10. Ronald M. Sunter, underlines the increasing importance of patronage in determining electoral support in this period. He also emphasizes that the conferring of favours had to be done in a manner conforming to social etiquette. Properly done it represented a favor and not a bribe, or so the social convention ran. Needless to say, those involved clearly understood the underlying reality of such transactions, see: Ronald M. Sunter, Patronage and Politics in Scotland, 1707-1832, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1986), chapters one to five. See also: B Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 131.

44 Lieutenant-General John Campbell, 1st Marquess of Breadalbane FRS (1762–1834), was a Scottish soldier and served as a Representative Peer between 1784-1806. He gained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in 1795 in the service of a Regiment of Fencibles that he himself had raised.


to which he belonged. The individuals Dundas was supposed to ‘manage’ cared little for the concerns of ‘public justice’ or the responsibilities of ‘civil government.’ Instead, the Scottish MPs and Peer’s support for the government ebbed and flowed in direct correlation to the manner in which he distributed the places and pensions attendant on office. To this end, Dundas argued to Lord Grenville in 1798 that “there ought to be some such offices... which ought to be sinecures and given as rewards” by the government, rather than being “looked on for the performance of duties.”

While undertaking his ‘managerial’ role for the government, Dundas was also furthering his own interests. Indeed, when Dundas defended the need for a Scottish ‘manager’ to James Boswell, arguing that, “it was better for Scotland.... [but] better for individuals not,” he would appear to have been engaged in another of his semantic confusions. It did improve the situation for individuals, and in particular for Henry Dundas. While Dundas recognised that political loyalties were ultimately fashioned on a quid pro quo basis, he was also aware that the politics of the period were largely driven by the caprice of the personal

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47 Grant-Macpherson Papers, 447, Aug. 1, 1790, cited in Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 131. While Dundas refers specifically to the Commons here, the provision of government patronage was also critical to Dundas’ chances of successfully returning his nominees for the sixteen Scottish representative places in the House of Lords. This link was made explicit in 1787 when Dundas informed Buccleuch that a peer who failed to support government nominees could not expect to receive any future patronage. SRO, Buccleuch, GD 224/30/10, Dundas to Buccleuch, 22 Nov. 1787, cited in Jones & Jones (eds.), Peers, Politics and Power, p. 290.

48 For instance, see: SRO, Melville. GD 51/9/30, Duke of Buccleuch to Dundas, 10 December 1791, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 10.


50 Dundas told James Boswell, “it was better for the Scotland to have a Minister... better for individuals not. For when all could scramble, they would have a chance [to] get more for themselves and their friends... Whereas an agent for government must distribute to the best purpose. He has a trust.” See: I. S. Lustig & Frederick Albert Pottle (eds.), Boswell: the Applause of the Jury, 1782-1785, (London: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 145.
relationships between the ruling elite. In a letter to Lady Dalhousie in 1795, he himself had acknowledged this, arguing that patronage was the hinge that connected “all those ties and obligation” by which individuals in politics related to one another.\textsuperscript{51} As he himself was well aware, his employment of patronage amongst the Scottish political classes did not translate into parliamentary support for the government per se, but into support for himself.

The workings of the system under Dundas are underscored by the tale of Lord Seaforth.\textsuperscript{52} Initially a Whig and admirer of Charles James Fox, Seaforth had defected to Dundas and the Tory ministry in 1793 with the outbreak of the War with Revolutionary France.\textsuperscript{53} To achieve this end, Dundas had funnelled patronage in Seaforth’s direction and allowed him to raise the 78\textsuperscript{th} Regiment of Foot or the ‘Seaforth Highlanders.’\textsuperscript{54} Seaforth evidently appreciated this manoeuvre, as it not only consolidated his local influence, but also went a long way towards propping up his battered finances.\textsuperscript{55} Further sops to Seaforth’s

\textsuperscript{51} SRO, GD 51/1/198/2/7, Henry Dundas to Lady Dalhousie [1795?], cited in Judith Lewis, \textit{Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class and Politics in Late Georgian Britain}, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 65.

\textsuperscript{52} Lord Seaforth, Baron Francis Humberston Mackenzie of Kintail


\textsuperscript{54} Finlay McKichan, ‘Lord Seaforth and Highland Estate Management in the First Phase of Clearance (1783-1815)’, \textit{Scottish Historical Review}, 86 1, 221, (April 2007), p. 54.

\textsuperscript{55} As J.E. Cookson has highlighted, raising regiments was attractive to highland proprietors like Seaforth because it provided local influence and control as a counter to dwindling clan loyalties, see J.E. Cookson, ‘The The Napoleonic Wars, Military Scotland and Tory Highlandism in the Early Nineteenth Century’, \textit{Scottish Historical Review}, 78, (1999), p. 71. However, Seaforth also had strong commercial motives. He received bounties and equipment allowances paid by the Government for the raising of a regiment. His commissions in 1793 and 1794 to raise two line battalions were seen by his advisers as a financial coup, to the extent that his “military success” dissolved “all necessity of parting with the Lewis” [a proposed sale of his lands]. Subsequently his regiments provided him with a regular income in off-reckonings (to maintain the regiment) and for his own salary. He was Lt. Colonel Commandant of his line regiment, the 78th, from 1793 to 1796. He then became a colonel in 1796, a major-general in 1802 and a lieutenant-general in 1808, which meant that he received the half pay of his rank even when he was not serving. See:
ambition were also duly provided by Dundas. He arranged political deals that rewarded Seaforth with a peerage in 1797, and then appointed him Governor of Barbados in 1800.\textsuperscript{56} In return Seaforth became one of Dundas’ dependable cohort of Scottish members, providing crucial electoral support in Ross-shire.\textsuperscript{57}

However it remained a personal alliance. As Seaforth stated, he felt “bound by every tie of common gratitude to do [his] utmost to support the interest and wishes of Mr. Dundas.”\textsuperscript{58} Yet he made it very clear that this ‘confidence’ lay only with Dundas, who he trusted would “see things in the proper light,” and not the “English minsters,” with whom he found things “difficult to explain.”\textsuperscript{59} As such, Dundas’ interactions with Seaforth reinforce that by distributing patronage to Scots, he was amassing political power in his own hands.

It is thus difficult to see Dundas’ distribution of patronage as part of any grand scheme to advance Scottish interests, or indeed ‘complete’ the Union of 1707. As Henry Cockburn noted, given “the miserable condition of [Scotland’s] political institutions and habits... there was no way of managing except by


\textsuperscript{58} NAS, GD4/119/5-6, Seaforth to K. Mackenzie of Cromarty, 3 May 1796, cited in McKichan, ‘Lord Seaforth and Highland Estate Management,’ p. 57.

By rewarding Scots with the spoils attendant on office, Dundas was essentially doing what he had to in order to manipulate the venality of the Scottish political elite to serve his own political interest. His primary ambition remained the continued development and strengthening of his own political following. This fact was not lost on his contemporaries. William Fullerton, one of the relatively rare Scottish MPs hostile to Dundas, warned in 1802 that Dundas had set himself up as a virtual kingmaker, establishing an "imperium in imperio... ready to be used for the demolition or the support of ministers." The accuracy of this prediction was proved in 1804. Coming south "with his pocket full of proxies, and a friendly attendance in the commons" Dundas began manoeuvres to undermine and depose the Prime Minister, Henry Addington. Unable to control the Commons, Addington consequently resigned in 1804, thus allowing Dundas and his great ally William Pitt to return to power.

"Burgundy and Blasphemy" – The Importance of Being Personable

Given the way it was, any competent 'manager' could have exploited the Scottish political system and the venality and authoritarianism of those who ran it. Dundas was able to do this on an unprecedented scale. The basis of the

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60 Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, I, p. 66.
61 As Henry Cockburn said of him "his official favours... [were] confined to his own innumerable and insatiable partisans," Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, I, pp. 65-66.
63 Lord Archibald Hamilton, Thoughts on the Formation of the Late and Present Administrations, (London: Longman & Rees, 1804), p. 57. While it may seem odd that Dundas could carry so much clout given the small number of Scotch seats in Parliament, his contribution was evidently seen as having played an extremely important role. Certainly Addington and his allies never forgave what they saw as his treachery. Lord Leven pronounced: "the nomination at the Gen. Election so to speak, of so many members was left entirely to Mr [Dundas] to whom most of them are so much devoted, who seems with his family to forget what minister created him a peer & who yielded to him a patronage, which now acts forcibly with him, against his patron." DCRO, Sidmouth, 152M, C1802, OZ 133, Lord Leven to Mrs Goodenough [Addington's sister-in-law] 16 June 1804, cited in Brown, Henry Dundas, p. 458.
64 [Anon], The Album of Streatham, or Ministerial Amusements, p. 62.
extraordinary control he wielded lay in the fact that he was a major British politician, commanding much larger resources of patronage then his predecessors had ever managed.65 His status at the top of the British political system, and the vast networks of patronage at his disposal, owed a lot to his convivial and sociable ‘manner,’ which allowed him to manipulate his private life and personal relationships in pursuit of his political ambitions.

By all accounts, Henry Dundas was an eminently likable fellow. Good-humoured and open, he was remembered by most as an “agreeable companion.”66 Even his political opponents could not fault the charm of the man. Indeed, the Whig Henry Cockburn seemed infatuated when he described Dundas glowingly as “handsome, gentlemanlike, frank, cheerful, and social... a favourite with most men, and with all women.”67 Another Whig opponent, Henry Brougham, noted his personal integrity and loyalty, describing him as a “steady and determined friend, who only stood the faster by those that wanted him the more.”68 Evidently he was “too much a man of the world not to live well with his opponents when they would let him.”69 In the late-Georgian era, social graces

65 Thorne, The House of Commons 1790-1820, I, p. 79.
67 Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, I, p. 65. Cockburn certainly knew him better than most, as his father, Archibald Cockburn was a long-time friend and drinking companion of Dundas'. Indeed, in their early lives Dundas and Cockburn were very much the rakish duo, Dundas marrying Elizabeth Rannie in 1765 when she was just fifteen, and Cockburn her sister, three years later. See, for instance: Cockburn, Memorials of His Time, pp. 14-15; and Leah Leneman, Alienated Affections: the Scottish experience of divorce and separation, 1684-1830, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 48.
were an important part of a politician' armoury, and Dundas' possession of them in abundance formed an important part of his political appeal.\textsuperscript{70} At one level however, his social life also reflected the chaos of the political world he inhabited, and indeed his insatiable ambitions. He was notorious for living hedonistically, and well beyond his financial capabilities. As one obituary wrote, he “tasted deeply of all the gratifications of luxury and dissipation,” and his house was maintained as a “resort of the \textit{bon vivant}” in which “Bacchanalian orgies” were frequent occurrences.\textsuperscript{71} Clearly, he felt that he was entitled to a life of excess. Even in an age far from abstemious, his proclivity for drink was legendary.\textsuperscript{72} “That damnd [sic] fellow Dundass [sic]” moaned the Lord Chancellor Edward Thurlow, after one near fatal drinking bout, “[he] was born upon a rock and can drink up the ocean.”\textsuperscript{73} Amid the uncertainty of the late-Georgian era and a culture that prized alcohol consumption as a masculine and sociable custom, his hard-drinking persona allowed him to cut a strong and ‘manly figure’ amongst his contemporaries, especially in his native Scotland.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{70} Brown, \textit{Henry Dundas}, p. 3
\textsuperscript{71} [Anon], \textit{Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines}, p. 422; See also: Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{73} EUL, Laing Mss, Div. II. 419/, J. Logan to Rev Dr Alexander Carlyle, 12 April 1786, cited in Brown, \textit{Henry Dundas}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{74} See: Lord Holland, \textit{Memoirs of the Whig party during my time}, 2 Vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852-4), I, p. 241, who describes him as possessing an “unblushing countenance and manly figure. For more on the Georgian drinking culture in Britain and Scotland more specifically, see: Roy Porter, ‘The Drinking Man’s Disease: The ”Pre-History” of Alcoholism in Georgian Britain,’ \textit{British Journal of Addiction}, 80, (1985), pp. 384-386; and Corey E. Andrews, “Drinking and Thinking: Club Life and Convivial Sociability in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh”, \textit{Social History of Alcohol and Drugs}, 22, 1, (Fall 2007), pp. 67-68. This appeal was only reinforced (in Scotland anyway) by tales of an intoxicated Dundas breaking out in “invective against the English. He said he would move for a repeal of the Union; that any ten Scots could beat any ten English; and if there was any competition, he was, and would avow himself, a Scot,” See: Matheson, \textit{Life of Henry Dundas}, 49-50.
The lack of limitations and regulations Dundas exploited in his political dealings ultimately translated into his private life. A sense of recklessness accompanied him, and at times he even appeared to feel he was above the law. After the eventual outbreak of war in February 1793, Dundas and Pitt had gone out celebrating, and the two stumbled into the Commons the following morning, still noticeably under the influence. This led to the memorable lines in an opposition newspaper: “I cannot see the speaker, Hal, can you? What! Cannot see the Speaker, I see two!”75 In another example, the same pair were riding home to Wimbledon across a star-lit Surrey, having dined exceptionally well. Coming upon a tollgate in a state of “high glee and inebriety” they had decided to rush through without paying. The indignant toll-keeper, mistaking them for highwaymen, fired his blunderbuss at them as they galloped away guffawing into the night.76

Dundas’ relationships with women were similarly reflective of the single-mindedness with which he pursued his political ambitions. He was as a rampant womanizer, and well known for his gallantries.77 No stranger to getting what he wanted, his roving eye contributed to the breakdown of his first marriage in

1778. Equally, he was also not above manipulating his relationships with women towards the concerns of his self-interest. Rumour suggested that the motivation behind his first marriage had been his wife’s dowry, which included Melville Castle and a sum of more than £10,000. Equally, his search for a second wife was marked by the pursuit of politically connected Scottish ladies. One of these women, Lady Frances Douglas, “saw pretty plainly that it appeared... a scheme founded on ambition,” and considered it an “audacious” one at that. Further underscoring that Dundas was prepared to manipulate both his private and political lives in pursuit of each other, in his courtships he twice made use of government patronage in attempting to win over these women’s hearts. Ultimately, in what was known to be a ‘political marriage’ he wedded Lady Jane Hope in 1793, thereby sealing a political union with the powerful family of the Earl of Hopetoun.

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78 His “devotion to the fair sex” was seen to have played a role in his wife deciding to run off with a certain Captain Faukener, and indeed, Dundas' generosity towards her after the divorce, may indicate he too recognized his role in the proceedings. See: [Anon], Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines, p. 422; and Leneman, Alienated Affections, pp. 48-52. To one woman he pursued during his marriage, Dundas wrote: “John McGowan and I... are warmly engaged in a dispute which of all the beauties of nature have the most irresistible force upon the mind of a man. He says a flowering shrub, I say a beautiful face with a lively imagination and a glib tongue to tell what the imagination conceives – I hope... you will give me the advantage of silencing Mr McGowan’s flowering shrub,” Ord & Macdonald papers, NLS, MS 14841, ff. 56-7, cited in Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 48.

79 Some rumors argued the sum was more like £100,000 but it was probably much smaller than that, see: [Anon], Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines, p. 422; Leneman, Alienated Affections, p. 48; and Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 48.


83 The Hopetouns were a powerful political connection based around Jane's younger brother the Earl, who also had three brothers, two cousins, and two sons-in-law sitting in Parliament. Equally it was of no surprise that after that period “that family have appeared pretty conspicuous in the lists of placemen.” See: [Anon], Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines, p. 426; and Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 157.
Evidently then Dundas was prepared to make use of his private life in order to pursue political power. In this regard the most influential products of Dundas’ convivial ‘manner’ were the close relationships he forged with those at the top of the political tree. It is no surprise that his political dominance in the 1790s coincided with the fact that he had at last begun to get on well with King George III.\(^84\) The King admired Dundas’ ‘solid sense’ and their correspondence reveals a growing rapport.\(^85\) On occasion the King was even known to enjoy Dundas’ famous hospitality with its attendant ‘burgundy and blasphemy,’ visiting his country manor, Cannizaro House on Wimbledon Common, when reviewing troops nearby.\(^86\) This intimacy was no doubt aided by the sympathetic guidance Dundas offered through the royal family’s numerous misdemeanours, in particular the pecuniary embarrassments of the Dukes of Clarence and York.\(^87\)

This was obviously a pragmatic decision on the part of Dundas, and one that furthered his political ambitions. Through his intimacy with the King, Dundas

\(^{84}\) Early in Dundas’ career King George III had taken a dislike to Dundas, writing: “The more I think of the conduct of [Dundas], the more I am incensed against him. More favours have been heaped on the shoulders of that man than ever were bestowed on any Scotch lawyer, and he seems studiously to embrace an opportunity to create difficulty,” see: James Alexander Lovat-Fraser, *Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1916), p. 5. However by the 1790s Dundas had effectively become the King’s ‘go-to’ man in politics. See, for instance: Arthur Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III*, 5 vols, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962-70), I, pp. 604-605, [No. 770, Letters From Henry Dundas to the King, with a reply]; and Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 158.

\(^{85}\) See, for instance: Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III*, II, p. 26-7, [No. 864 The King to Henry Dundas, Windsor, 7 April 1793, 10.50 p.m]; and p. 457-458, [No. 1366, Letter from Henry Dundas to the King, and a reply].

\(^{86}\) Dundas’ manor at Wimbledon was a common social venue for the inner cabinet, visiting dignitaries, eminent thinkers such as Adam Smith, and even on occasion the Royal Family. See: Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 107; [Anon], *The Album of Streatham, or Ministerial Amusements*, p. 62; and Anne Carey Morris, (ed.), *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris, Minister of the United States to France; Member of the Constitutional Convention*, 2 Vols., (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1888), II, Chapter XXXIV, Entry for April 30.

was advancing his ability to distribute the royal patronage, for as the King himself stated, he never liked “throwing favours on enemies” though he did “love rewarding steady friends.”

However, the most important achievement of Dundas’ sociability was his relationship with the Prime Minister, William Pitt. Dundas’ disposition towards hard work and hard drinking endeared him to Pitt and allowing him to strike up a solid, and indeed important friendship. Indeed, according to James Bland-Burges, an undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Dundas owed his position at the pinnacle of Georgian politics ‘solely’ to his affinity with Pitt. Bland-Burges was not far wrong. While Dundas’ prominence was also a result of his iron grip on Scotland, the additional spheres of patronage that set him apart from any previous ‘manager’ of Scotland – that is the colonial and military connections resulting from his positions as Home Secretary, and Secretary for War and the Colonies – were by and large the result of the esteem in which Pitt held him. Equally Pitt’s complete confidence in Dundas meant he was content to delegate

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88 Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III*, II, p. 613-614, [Henry Dundas to the King, and the reply]. The Marquess Cornwallis, and even the King’s son, the Duke of York certainly recognised Dundas’ influence with the George III, both writing to Dundas in an effort to get the King to acquiesce to their patronage requests, see: Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III*, pp. 177-178, [Letters from Henry Dundas to the King], and p. 204, [No. 1061, The Duke of York to Henry Dundas].


90 Hague, *William Pitt the Younger*, pp. 182-183 makes it clear that Dundas’ effective control of the East India Company’s Board of Control was largely due to Pitt’s decision to leave such matters to him by not attending and letting Dundas preside in his place. Similar was true in regards Dundas’ control of, and those places and sinecures he had at his disposal in his offices as Home Secretary, and Secretary for War and the Colonies. See: Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, pp. 158, 187-188, 194-195; Brown, *Henry Dundas*, p. 27; and Brown, ‘The Government of Scotland,’ pp. 267, 270-273.
the entire running of Scotland to his drinking-companion.\textsuperscript{91} Dundas was therefore free to distribute the pensions and places available in the Scottish institutions and administration to his followers, using it to reward and condition political support.\textsuperscript{92} Evidently he was again making full use of his personal life in order to pursue his political ambitions.

Yet Dundas' interest in Pitt may well have been even more Machiavellian than that. In their respective biographies of Pitt and Dundas, William Hague and Michael Fry have viewed the dynamic between the two as that of a leader and his faithful sidekick - “Pitt could supply the oratory, intellect and integrity, while Dundas could bring cunning, solid votes and the art of a political fixer.”\textsuperscript{93} However, upon closer inspection there is an argument to be made that Dundas was in fact playing puppet-master and pulling the strings of his young protégé. Certainly the age gap between the two is suggestive. When Pitt first became Prime Minister in 1783 he was only twenty-four. Dundas was a mature forty-one, and had been a significant figure in Scottish politics for almost ten years, making it hard to see why he would suddenly devote himself to a more inexperienced

\textsuperscript{91}This was most clearly shown when, nominally having surrendered control in 1794 to his successor as Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland, Dundas' connexion with Pitt nonetheless ensured his mastery of Scottish patronage continued, with the Duke of Portland telling one applicant in 1796 that "you and I did not become labourers in this vineyard till a late hour," NUL, Portland Mss, PwV 110, pp. 96-7, Portland to the Earl of Dumfries, 28 March 1796, cited in Brown, 'The Government of Scotland,' pp. 268-269. See also: Brown, \textit{Henry Dundas}, pp. 26, 275; Thorne, \textit{The House of Commons 1790-1820}, II, p. 565.

\textsuperscript{92}For instance, at the top of the Scottish revenue system was the Court of Exchequer. Between, 1784 and 1806 eight men served as Barons of the Exchequer. Only one, Sir John Dalrymple, was not a friend or political ally of Dundas, see: Brown, \textit{Henry Dundas}, pp. 24-25, 32-33, 277-278; Brown, 'The Government of Scotland,' pp. 270-273; and Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, pp. 130-137, 176-185. See also: Roger L. Emerson, \textit{Professors, Patronage and Politics: The Aberdeen Universities in the Eighteenth Century}, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1992), pp. 3-7, 80-103; and Roger L. Emerson, \textit{Academic Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities}, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 4-11, 178-201, 491-507, 536-541.

\textsuperscript{93}Hague, \textit{William Pitt the Younger}, p. 115; Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 158.
man who was seventeen years his junior. Yet perhaps Dundas, aware that in the wake of the Wilksite Scottophobia of the 1770s the highest office could never be his, had seen a more subtle way to achieve power. He was certainly very forward about publically expressing his admiration for Pitt, praising his maiden speech in the Commons and declaring that he would only engage in politics again “at the instigation of Mr Pitt.” Similarly, Pitt’s character lent itself to such a ploy. Regarded as cold and aloof, he had few personal friends and knew even fewer women, with Dundas once promising “a place of £500 a year” to anyone who could prove that Pitt had ever “touched a woman.” Dundas exploited this void, establishing himself as Pitt’s one intimate friend and allowing him to live under his roof at Wimbledon when Parliament was in session. In effect this placed Dundas at the centre of power, and “transacting the business of the state” became something that was undertaken over claret or port in the Cannizaro House dining room, or upon Dundas and Pitt’s “morning rides” and “even’g walks” at Wimbledon. As the political gossip of the time noted, Dundas was said to have “custody” of Pitt, being able to “take possession of the Minister” and “conduct him as he pleases.”

95 Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 92.
It is clear that Dundas’ convivial and sociable manner played an important role in establishing his political dominance. His social graces and personal charm fostered good impressions of him amongst the politics classes, furthering his personal appeal and making him a sought after ally. However, his personal life was also reflective of the chaotic political world in which he operated. For Dundas there was no distinct boundary between his public and private life, and he had no qualms in using the perquisites of one to further his ambitions in the other. Evidently he was not above single-mindedly pursuing his political interests through the avenues of his private life. To this end he made full use of his personable nature to forge strong relationships with members of the political elite. Ultimately, it was these relationships that set him apart from any previous Scottish ‘manager,’ for they gave him access to unparalleled levels of patronage with which he could pursue his own self-interest.

While Dundas was ultimately pursuing his own desires, it is important to note that these were not generally financial in nature. Although the Scottish system he presided over would seemingly substantiate even the most damning critiques of ‘Old Corruption,’ it is also apparent that he was not one of the “partisans of peculation” singled out by the Radical press.¹⁰¹ For Dundas, politics was about power not personal enrichment, and he did not display the vulgar avarice and cupidity for which the Radical press denounced his colleagues. Certainly, he was never rich. Indeed, the testimonies of his contemporaries

indicated that he never paid much attention to his finances, and Henry Mackenzie, a friend from his old stomping grounds in Edinburgh, described Dundas as “the worst manager of money matters I ever knew.”

In fact, Dundas’ cluelessness in relation to his personal finances reached almost farcical proportions. Upon his resignation in 1801, King George III had urged him to accept a £1,500 increase in the salary of the Privy Seal of Scotland, a sinecure already worth £3,000 per annum. In addition, Dundas had been offered an annuity of £2,000 from the East India Company in gratitude for his long service on the Board of Control. However, in one of the absurd financial miscalculations he was prone to make, Dundas declined both offers of additional remuneration. He argued that his current income would “be adequate... to the moderate scale of expense... of retirement I have long planned for.” Yet, within months, the depressed state of his chequebook had forced him to renege and accept the Company’s generosity after all – though to preserve the ‘modesty’ of his original refusal, it was instead conferred upon his second wife. Similarly in 1804, beset by the expenses incumbent upon his return to office, Dundas was forced to write to the King, begging for the £1,500 increase to the Privy Seal

102 Thompson (ed.), The anecdotes and egotisms of Henry Mackenzie, p. 144. Mackenzie also recounted tales of Dundas having completely forgotten the existence of his own personal accounts totalling £12,000, which were to be used for refurbishing his house. See also: Lord Henry Brougham, Historical Sketches of Statesmen who Flourished in the Time of George III, (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1839), p. 233, who states “That Lord Melville was a careless man, and wholly indifferent to money, his whole life had shown”; and [Anon]. Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines, Vol. 6, (Philadelphia: John F. Watson, 1811), p. 422, which describes Dundas as a “man in whom the love or care of money, was never a predominate passion.”

103 Dundas recounted these offers in a 1804 letter to the King, see Aspinall (ed.), The Later Correspondence of George III, IV, p. 215, [Viscount Melville to the King, Wimbledon, 19 July, 1804].

104 Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 239.

105 SRO, GD 51/3/107, cited in Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 239.

stipend, and asking that it be backdated to the date of the original proposal. Though the King did acquiesce to these requests, Dundas continued to manage his finances badly. By the time of his death his debts had blown out to an astronomical £65,000. Underscoring his carelessness, he appeared unaware of the parlous state of his personal economy, writing that “no demand against him [would] exist six months after his death.” Quite what he meant must have been a mystery to his son, for whom his father’s debts remained a long-term and crippling financial burden.

While Dundas evidently did not seek to personally profit from his patronage as he could have done, he was not entirely aloof from the culture of cronyism, corruption and nepotism that swirled about him. Indeed, some offers were just too hard to refuse. In 1790, seeking a higher office in the West Indies, William Armstrong of Basseterre, St Kitts sent him a gift of a turtle, which he hoped had “arrived in good condition.” Less frivolously, Dundas did also devolve substantial salaries from his public positions. However, as he himself claimed, these were largely dissipated by the expenses of office, and in light of his bank-balance, he appears to have been telling the truth. Undoubtedly,

108 Aspinall (ed.), The Later Correspondence of George III, IV, p. 215, [The King’s reply to Viscount Melville, Kew, 20 July, 7.20 a.m.].
109 Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 313.
110 SRO, GD 235/10/10/3, cited in Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 313
111 Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 313.
112 NLS, MS 6524, (166) Melville Papers, Letter from William Armstrong to Henry Dundas, 13 January, 1790, cited in Douglas J. Hamilton, Patronage and profit: Scottish Networks in the British West Indies, c. 1763-1807, unpublished PhD dissertation, (University of Aberdeen, 1999). Unfortunately for Armstrong, he ultimately did not get the position, which in reality, given the slow speed that letters travelled at, was probably decided well before Dundas even realised it was vacant. Either that, or Dundas profoundly disliked the turtle!
113 Indeed, the salaried position of the President of the Board of Control for the East India Company was created specifically for him, and he also was responsible for doubling the salary of
Dundas also did his best to provide for his kin. This was not lost on his contemporaries, and when the scandal of his impeachment broke, Charlotte Grenville, eldest sister of Lord Grenville noted, “the income of public money enjoyed by Lord Melville himself, his sons, sons-in-law, & nephews (not including a single Dundas Cousin) amounts to £54,000 pr. ann.”114 However, in the political climate of the era, people would have been more shocked if Dundas had not provided for his family and friends.115 The fact he ultimately remained poor is evidence that he saw his own self-interest in terms of something more than financial enrichment. Given his power, and the opportunities that existed in the political chaos of the time, had avarice been his motivation, it is hard to believe he would not have had greater success.

A ‘Scottish Hero’?

Ultimately then, in light of the manner in which Henry Dundas made use of government patronage and manipulated his personal relationships in pursuit of his political ambitions, it is hard to see him being primarily motivated by anything other than his own self-interest. While the 1790-1802 period when Dundas was at the peak of his power may have seen the ‘completion’ of the Union of 1707, such exalted schemes did not figure in his calculations. Dundas did certainly promote Scots in his employment of patronage. However this

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115 Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 130.
should not be seen retrospectively as proof of a concerted effort to advance his country’s interests. While he naturally distributed the patronage divulged from Scotland’s bureaucracy and institutions amongst his Scottish followers, this hardly furthered the progress of the Union. Due to the system of ‘semi-independence’ most of these positions were already part of a Scottish administration that was distinct from Westminster. Instead what Dundas did achieve was the growth of his supporter base in Scotland.

It is a similar story regarding Dundas’ employment of ‘British’ patronage. While a number of Scots were made British peers during this era, Dundas’ ensured these favours were distributed in such a way as to build his personal following.116 This is demonstrated in the example of Lord Seaforth discussed above, and further clear indication is provided by Dundas’ dealings with the truculent James Duff, 2nd Earl of Fife in Banffshire in 1793.117 In a frosty note Dundas made the link between the Fife’s recent peerage and himself very plain, noting the lack of allegiance Fife was now displaying to him and hinting at his ingratitude.118 Dundas’ distribution of East and West Indian patronage followed a similar pattern, being largely conditioned by the political rewards it would bring him.119 In obtaining the Governorship of Madras for Sir Archibald Campbell, MP for the Stirling Burghs, Dundas was rewarding a loyal follower and

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reinforcing his control of that constituency.\textsuperscript{120} Similarly by spiritng Ninian Home off to Grenada as Governor in 1792, Dundas was able to placate conflicts that were developing in Berwickshire.\textsuperscript{121} While such placements created a more ‘British’ Empire, it is thus hard to see that goal as being Dundas’ motivation for acting as he did.\textsuperscript{122} Finally, as already demonstrated with Lord Seaforth, the substantial expansion of the armed forces after 1793 also allowed Dundas to make use of military commissions for political purposes. \textsuperscript{123} Funnelling recruitment requests to the Duke of Gordon and Sir James Grant of Grant provided an avenue through which to stabilize his precarious electoral interests in the north-east of Scotland, and it was striking how other military patronage went to hostile Highland magnates in a clear attempt to lull into neutrality those that were still outwith Dundas’ control.\textsuperscript{124} Again it is evident that Dundas was using the patronage at his disposal as a lubricant for his own distinctive, self-interested political agenda.

Consequently, although Dundas may have played a role in advancing Scottish interests, it is dangerous to retrospectively equate the ultimate outcomes of his actions with the motivations behind them. While Dundas’ actions


\textsuperscript{123} Fry, \textit{The Dundas Despotism}, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{124} Andrew Mackillop, ‘More Fruitful than the Soil’: Army, Empire and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815, (Tuckwell Press, East Linton: 2000), p. 54
may have eventually helped to forge a ‘partnership’ between Scotland and England, their primary intention was to gather political power in his hands. Therefore, considering the manner in which he employed government patronage, and the way in which he manipulated his personal relationships in pursuit of his political ambitions, it is clear that Dundas’ primary motivation was to fulfil his own desire for power. He was single-mindedly pursuing his own self-interest. The interests of Scotland were only ever an afterthought.
Chapter 3: ‘Wha Wants Me?’

Henry Dundas and the Critical Depiction of Self-Interest

This final chapter explores the critiques of self-interest that existed contemporaneously to the career of Henry Dundas. In doing so it seeks to complicate and add nuance to historical understandings of the ways in which the self-serving ambitions of politicians were perceived and comprehended by British society. As this chapter argues, the historiography of the late-Georgian
political system of ‘Old Corruption’ has been heavily reliant upon the criticisms advanced by members of the Radical press such as William Cobbett. However, the focus on the push for Radical political reform has overshadowed the fact that it was only one of a number of competing critiques of self-interest that prevailed at that time. This chapter demonstrates that the language of self-interest could also be a focal point for conservative social commentaries. As such, while Henry Dundas was the subject of a number of political images and caricatures by those such as James Gillray, these prints present a far more complex and varied understanding of political self-interest than has usually been recognised.

In many ways, Henry Dundas represents an ideal character through which to explore the sites of contestation within British attitudes towards political self-interest. As John Dwyer and Alexander Murdoch have highlighted, Dundas was himself connected to the critiques of political corruption and the threat of ‘new money’ that developed among the landed gentry of Scotland between 1770-1784.1 These commentaries, espoused by periodicals such as the *Mirror* (1779-1780) and its successor the *Lounger* (1785-1786), were socially conservative in nature, and aimed at safeguarding the traditional hegemony of the Scottish landed classes from the changes beginning to take place in Scotland’s social and political structure.2 Furthermore, Dundas’ career also coincided with what has been described as the ‘Golden Age’ of English graphic satire, which lasted from

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2 The *Mirror* (1779-1780), and its successor the *Lounger* (1785-1786), were two periodicals published out of Edinburgh.
Consequently, given Dundas’ prominence in British politics, he was one the most caricatured politicians of the late-Georgian period. Although Gordon Pentland has stated that within this "mushrooming visual culture," Dundas was invariably represented by allusions to his Scottish heritage, it could also be argued that the depictions of Dundas were equally influenced by contemporaneous perceptions of his self-serving venality and greedy ambition. As such, Dundas’ experiences as both a participant and subject in contemporary critiques render him a useful figure through which to uncover the nuances within British attitudes towards individual self-interest.

However, as Pentland has demonstrated, using political prints in order to explore the values and attitudes of society raises some important methodological considerations regarding how such prints can be ‘read’ and what they are in fact capable of telling us. The first of these is the question of their market and audience, for although there is a tendency to draw connections between the ‘visual’ and the ‘popular,’ recent studies have found no hard evidence to support

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4 Gordon Pentland, ""'We Speak for the Ready': Images of Scots in Political Prints, 1707-1832,' *Scottish Historical Review*, 90, 1, (April 2011), p. 84. Nicholas K. Robinson has Dundas as 10th on his list of persons most caricatured between 1778-1797 (114 prints). However if the Royal Family are removed from the list (George III – 441 prints; George, Prince of Wales – 294; and Queen Charlotte – 118), Dundas is thus the 7th most caricatured politician of the era, only behind Charles James Fox, William Pitt, Lord North, Edmund Burke, Richard Brinsely Sheridan, and Lord Thurlow. See: Nicholas K. Robinson, *Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 194.

5 Pentland, "'We Speak for the Ready', p. 67, 84.

6 This chapter is indebted to the methodological approach for 'reading' political prints outlined by Gordon Pentland in: Pentland, "'We Speak for the Ready', pp. 67-68.
such associations. Indeed, as Pentland has highlighted, the location of the specialised print-shops, the price of the works themselves, and the ways in which they were employed, in fact suggest that prints in the late-Georgian era catered for a viewership that was largely confined to the upper and middle classes. Rather than addressing the broader political nation that existed outside the walls of Westminster, prints were essentially a metropolitan medium, aimed at, and largely restricted to, the members of the British political elite that congregated in London. Thus, as both Eirwen C. Nicholson and Pentland have noted, print publications and sales mirrored the schedule of Parliamentary sittings, for the very good reason that they were ultimately driven by the presence in the capital of the ‘political insiders’ who represented the printmakers’ target audience.

Thus, as Pentland has argued, political prints need to be interpreted, not as visual reflections of ‘popular’ sentiment, but as a representation of the concerns of the British political elite. As such, it is unwise to view the graphic satire of the late eighteenth-century as a direct cultural manifestation of the Radical reform movement. Although frequently critical of the government and the established order, as Vic Gatrell has noted, it does not necessarily follow that printmakers were “characteristically subversive.” This is not to say that artists such as Gillray did not draw upon and make use of the rhetoric and culture of complaint of the Radical critique of ‘Old Corruption.’ However, overall,

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10 Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, pp. 68, 84-85
11 Gatrell, City of Laughter, pp. 144-145.
printmakers remained wedded to their target market – i.e. those same political classes that William Cobbett and his fellow Radicals were so intent on destroying. Consequently, their portrayals of the self-interest of individuals such as Henry Dundas were more nuanced and complex than has generally been accepted, for they often reflected the attitudes of Dundas’ political contemporaries more so than they did those of the broader population.

However, as the methodological approach put forward by Pentland also makes clear, although political prints were primarily a production of the metropolitan political elite, they can also be seen to indirectly speak for a much broader section of society. They were generally artistic hybrids, and heavily self-referential, liberally making use of, and indeed extending, the references and motifs used in earlier and contemporaneous works. In addition, political prints also combined allusions to a wide range of tropes and symbols drawn from both ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ culture. As Pentland’s approach demonstrates, the complexity of these prints’ composition therefore necessitates investigating them as an “eclectic multi-referential form of pictorial and textual dialogue,” which was being conducted between a variety of cultural and social subsets in Georgian Britain. As such, although ostensibly produced for a minority political elite, prints, when read alongside other sources, can also provide insight into the

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12 Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, pp. 84-85.
13 Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, p. 68.
14 Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, p. 68.
15 Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, p. 68.
“unspoken attitudes, fears or understandings of those silent majorities about whom contemporary books, pamphlets or newspapers tell us little.”

In light of this framework, this chapter begins by exploring Dundas’ role in the critiques of self-interest emanating from the ranks of the Scottish landed classes during the 1770s and 1780s. As Dwyer and Murdoch have argued, these commentaries coalesced around a linguistic paradigm that focused upon a perceived threat of social and national ‘corruption’ resulting from the impact of ‘luxury’ and ‘new arrivals.’ By demonstrating the manner in which these critiques expressed themselves, this chapter seeks to highlight the parallels between these earlier, socially conservative criticisms, and those contained in the political prints of Henry Dundas during the 1790s and early 1800s. In doing so, this chapter demonstrates that the criticisms of self-interest amongst Dundas and his political contemporaries were more diverse than the historiographical predominance of the Radical critique would suggest. Instead they represented sites of contestation, in which the concerns and anxieties of the political elite competed with popular calls for reform.

The discourse of complaint against political corruption that developed amongst the Scottish landed classes in the 1770s and 1780s had its roots in changes taking place in Scotland at the time. As historians of Scotland such as Tom Devine and Christopher Harvie have demonstrated, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century the country’s economic and social structures

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17 Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, p. 12, quote cited in Pentland, 'We Speak for the Ready', p. 68.
18 Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 244.
underwent rapid transformation. The sheer speed and scale of economic modernisation, fuelled to a significant extent by Scotland’s increasing involvement in the empire, created discontinuities, as an older, more traditional Scotland started to be left behind by the dynamic new world of booming towns and cities, manufacturing industry and agricultural capitalism. As Dwyer & Murdoch have described, these changes had a profound effect within Scottish society as the traditional hegemony of the landed classes was increasingly threatened by the emergence of a *nouveau* political elite whose power rested on fortunes of colonial and mercantile origins. The infusion of wealthy Glasgow tobacco merchants, government contractors, and rich ‘nabobs’ returned from the Indies, made their presence felt in the counties and district burghs by investing in land and buying up the large estates. Given the electoral system described in chapter two, the purchasing of large tracts of land allowed this wealthy *nouveau* class to expand their political influence through the manufacture of fictitious votes and the creation of so-called ‘parchment baronies’.

Understandably, these developments caused considerable tensions and anxieties amongst the landed gentry who saw their traditional control of society

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being gradually eroded and usurped. These worries were evident even as early as 1766. In March of that year George Middleton, a small landowner from Aberdeenshire, complained to the Earl of Liverpool that “the interest of the landed gentry is too low” and that power was increasingly resting on the “shoulders of Moneymongers [and] Nabobs.” As Dwyer and Murdoch have demonstrated, these fears stimulated a response among the social and literary elite, manifesting themselves as an increasingly strident condemnation of the rising monied interest. From the 1770s onwards, this criticism played an increasingly important part in the social writings of the literati and in the county debates and correspondence of the landowning classes. Importantly the critique also made the connection between the social changes that were occurring and self-interest. It argued that not only were these developments corrupting the status of the traditional elite, but they were also placing far too much power into the hands of a dubious and ambitious set of ‘non-resident proprietors’ and ‘nouveau riches,’ who would ultimately “sacrifice their country to self-interest.”

Henry Dundas’ connection to this critique came through his indirect involvement in two Edinburgh periodicals, the Mirror and its successor the Lounger. In his earlier career as a convivial coming-man about the Edinburgh scene, Dundas’ good humour and personable nature had made him a focal point

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27 This involvement has been mapped by Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, pp. 220-222.
for social intercourse. Indeed, he was considered so ‘clubbable’ that a club formed around him. Known as the ‘Feast of Tabernacles’, it was composed of “lawyers and literary men, whose bond in union was their friendship with Mr. Dundas.” This may however have been a slight overstatement. While Dundas left to pursue his political career in London in 1774, the ‘Feast’ continued until 1779, before changing its name to the ‘Mirror Club.’

As Dwyer and Murdoch have noted, although it is therefore hard to maintain that Dundas was the sine qua non of the ‘Feast of Tabernacles’, he nonetheless remained important to its agenda. Although he had removed to London, the connection between himself and the ‘Mirror Club’ in fact became even more tangible. Virtually every member of the club benefitted from Dundas’ distribution of patronage. Indeed, the first appointments he made under Pitt in 1784 were the promotion of three of his old clubmen from the ‘Feast’ – Robert Blair, Alexander Abercrombie, and William Craig – to become the three deputies to the Lord Advocate. However, the pick of the spoils went to Dundas’ childhood friend Henry Mackenzie, who had taken over responsibility for the running of the club with Dundas elsewhere engaged. For Mackenzie, Dundas

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29 Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 221; and Fry, The Dundas Despotism, 57.
30 Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 221.
31 Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 221; and Fry, The Dundas Despotism, p. 49.
32 Henry Mackenzie, The Works of Henry Mackenzie, esq, 8 Vols., (Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne and Co., 1808), VII, pp. 114-115, cited in Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 221. Furthermore, with additional help from Dundas, Craig and Abercrombie were later appointed as Senators of the College of Justice, while Blair went on to become Lord President of the Court of Session.
33 Fry, The Dundas Despotism, 57.
eventually obtained the lucrative position of Comptroller of Taxes for Scotland in addition to finding places in the East India Company for three of his sons.\textsuperscript{34} However this connection was also not one-sided. The ‘Mirror Club’ members were all staunch supporters of Dundas’ regime.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, as Dwyer & Murdoch have noted, Mackenzie even acted as Dundas’ go-between for making political alliances with the Scottish gentry, and wrote numerous political pamphlets in defence of Dundas’ political interests.\textsuperscript{36} The ‘Mirror Club’ thus also provides an early example of the way in which Dundas used his control of patronage in order to build networks of personal and political alliances.

However, as well as being an arena to which Dundas could funnel patronage, as Dwyer & Murdoch have highlighted, the ‘Mirror Club’s’ publications, the \textit{Mirror} and the \textit{Lounger}, also did much to shape the language of the landed gentry’s critique of self-interest and corruption. Under the guidance of Henry Mackenzie, these periodicals advanced a socially conservative platform, which railed against the perceived avarice and self-seeking nature of the rising class of \textit{nouveau riches}.\textsuperscript{37} To do so the \textit{Mirror} and the \textit{Lounger} employed two key paradigms. Firstly, the corruption of traditional ‘manners’ and values by the

\textsuperscript{34} Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 222.
\textsuperscript{35} Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{36} As Dwyer & Murdoch have noted, these included \textit{The Parliament of 1784}, a somewhat unconvincing apology for some of the more dubious measures of Pitt’s government, the most striking part of which was the eulogy of “the laudable practice of the gentleman who presides at the Board of Control for India,” see: Mackenzie, \textit{The Works of Henry Mackenzie}, esq, VII, pp. 209-210; cited in Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 222. A letter of Mackenzie’s to Sir James Grant of Grant shows the sort of informal arrangements that Dundas made through Mackenzie, with Grant being told that Dundas intends to find seats for him and his son, and advises Grant not to make any other political arrangements, see: EUL, Laing MSS. ii, fo. 525, cited in Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 221.
selfish and extravagant pursuit of indulgence and luxury. And secondly, the threat posed by interlopers into the traditional fabric of society.\textsuperscript{38}

The primary mode of discourse of the essays in the \textit{Mirror} and the \textit{Lounger} was the paradigm of rustic virtue being corrupted by the self-indulgent, self-interested pursuit of wealth.\textsuperscript{39} As Dwyer & Murdoch have shown, they were obsessed with the negative impacts of Scots succumbing to the temptations of ‘luxury’ and ‘corruption,’ and were highly critical of the ‘nabobs’ and ‘contractors’ who they believed were responsible for the increasing prevalence of avarice and unseemly ambition in Scottish society.\textsuperscript{40} In the \textit{Lounger} in 1786, Mackenzie lamented “the dissipated inclinations of the rich and luxurious people” that were being produced by this increasing self-interestedness.\textsuperscript{41} Importantly, this self-serving culture was seen to emanate from external sources, in this case both the dubious class of people that were usurping the hegemony of the traditional elite, and also the insidious influence of the lifestyle associated with the English metropolitan centre.\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Lounger} played host to a series of satirical essays written about the ‘Mushroom’ family, who had sprung up overnight as a result of Indian plunder.\textsuperscript{43} It depicted them not only as interlopers in the natural social order, but as bearing with them ‘manners’ that were

\textsuperscript{38} See: Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{39} Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{40} Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, pp. 222-223.
\textsuperscript{41} [Anon], \textit{The Lounger: A Periodical Paper: Published at Edinburgh in the Years 1785-1786}, 3 Vols., (Dublin: Printed for Messrs Colles, Burnet, & Moncrieffe, 1787), II, pp. 179, (The Lounger, No. 54 Saturday, Feb 11. 1786.)
\textsuperscript{43} See: [Anon], \textit{The Lounger}, II, pp. 1-9 (The Lounger, No. 36 Saturday, Oct 8. 1785), 200-208(The Lounger, No. 56 Saturday, Feb 25. 1786), 253-263 (The Lounger, No. 62 Saturday, Apr. 8. 1786); [Anon], \textit{The Lounger}, III, pp. 275-285 (The Lounger, No. 98 Saturday, Dec. 16. 1786).
positively destructive to its fabric. As well as castigating these ‘new arrivals’ the *Mirror* and the *Lounger* also apportioned blame towards England, playing upon the trope of London as a den of ‘corruption’, ‘extravagance’ and ‘vice,’ in which unwary Scots were seduced by the “false refinement” and “indulgences” that marked the immoral “man of taste.” In doing so, they were reflecting the growing sentiments among the Scottish political classes that denounced what they saw as an increase in lust for power and riches amongst English politicians. As the distinguished Scottish judge and historian David Dalrymple complained at the time, “one would imagine... that those whose birth and rank in life entitles them to aspire to posts of honour and pre-eminence in the state, should be above all sordid considerations of gain.”

In essence then, Dundas was indirectly involved with a Scottish critique of self-interest, that sought to defend the traditional hegemony of the Scottish landed classes from the changes beginning to take place in Scotland’s social and political structure. To do so, these commentaries made use of images of self-indulgent dissipation and a form of xenophobia that apportioned blame to interlopers in society. While his connection to the ‘Mirror Club’ and its writings was indirect, Dundas nonetheless did co-opt this language to a certain extent, and certainly made use of it in his struggle for supremacy with Sir Laurence

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Dundas, one of these wealthy *nouveaux*, in the city of Edinburgh in 1776-1781.\(^{49}\) As Dwyer and Murdoch have demonstrated, his use of the same linguistic paradigm was also crucial to his attempts to unify the Scottish landed classes, whether large or small, and in doing so ensure their continued dominance of Scottish society during a time of rapid social change.\(^{50}\)

Furthermore, the manner in which the critique coalesced around tropes of social extravagance and decadence, and the threat posed by ‘new arrivals’ and outsiders, may suggest parallels between these earlier socially conservative criticisms, and those contained in the political prints of Henry Dundas during the 1790s and early 1800s. The repetition of similar themes by satirists such Gillray in their portrayals of Dundas’ self-interestedness, indicate the possibility that these prints present a far more complex and varied understanding of political self-interest than has usually been recognised. Despite seeming to reflect the accusations of cupidity and avarice of the Radical critique, these critiques were in fact sites of contestation, in which the more conservative concerns and anxieties of the British political elite competed with the popular calls for political reform.

As Pentland has highlighted, the height of Henry Dundas’ career coincided with the ‘golden age’ of graphic satire and his prominence in British and Imperial politics, ensured that he captured the imaginations of the British printmakers.\(^{51}\)


\(^{50}\) Dwyer & Murdoch, ‘Paradigms and Politics’, p. 211.

\(^{51}\) Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, pp. 84-85.
Importantly, the resultant political prints invariably portrayed Dundas in reference to what they perceived to be his power hungry and financially ambitious nature. This meant that he became an important component of the iconography of political self-interest that developed in the late-Georgian period. An example of this can be seen in a print by James Gillray, entitled *Opening of the budget – or – John Bull giving his breeches to save his bacon*, which was published in 1796. The print was ostensibly a criticism of the heavy tax burden and 'voluntary contributions' that the continued alarm of a French invasion was allowing the government to impart on the British people. However it also significantly displayed the tartan-wearing figure of Dundas greedily grubbing for

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52 See: Figure 3.
money and helping himself to the national purse. Highlighting the self-referential and repetitious nature of the genre, this followed an almost identical depiction of Dundas included in work of Gillray’s published in the previous year, which dealt with the Prince of Wales’ debt crisis. Again Dundas was shown to be avaricious, scrabbling for the spillage as William Pitt ground the figure of John Bull (representing the British people) into guineas with which the pay off the Prince’s debts.


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54 See: Figure 4.

As has been argued in the first two chapters of this thesis, these accusations of embezzlement levelled at Dundas are slightly misleading. While the saga of his impeachment in 1806 certainly demonstrated that he was not above misappropriating Treasury funds for his own purposes, the insinuations that Dundas was motivated by personal greed are certainly inaccurate, or at least over simplistic. Dundas’ self-interest primarily lay in his pursuit of power, and indeed this was an aspect that was also highlighted in the iconography of the period. Again Gillray provided the pictorial depiction of Dundas’ ambition with his *Dun-Shaw* published in 1788.\(^56\) Here Dundas is shown as a be-tartened colossus or ‘bashaw’ of the Indies, straddling the ocean with one foot firmly planted on the roof of East India Company headquarters in Leadenhall Street, and the other in the province of Bengal. Making obvious allusions to his control of Indian patronage, and further building on the despotic connotations carried by ‘Oriental rulers’ and Scotland’s Jacobite heritage, his lust for power was further underscored by his Icarus like attempts to catch hold of the clearly perturbed sun and moon.\(^57\)

These prints, especially those that portrayed Dundas’ financial improbity, obviously had connections with the Radical commentaries of those such as William Cobbett, who pilloried the late-Georgian political system for being plagued by endemic corruption and embezzlement.\(^58\) However, the manner in

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\(^{56}\) See: Figure 5.
which they depicted Dundas would also seem to suggest that there was another dynamic involved, and one which has some parallels to the socially conservative critiques of the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*. This suggests that these political prints were in fact sites of competition between differing criticisms of self-interest, and thus more complicated than has usually been understood.

The first, and most obvious link to the language used by the *Mirror* and the *Lounger* is the trope of the ‘outsider’ or ‘interloper.’ As Gordon Pentland has noted, for Dundas, nestled in the metropolitan heart of England, this “was almost invariably represented through his Scottishness.”⁵⁹ Printmakers certainly made efforts to highlight his Scottish heritage, either by cladding him in Highland Tartens, or in the quintessential blue Scots bonnet.⁶⁰ In Dundas’ case, the fact that he notoriously spoke with a broad Scottish accent and owed much of his power to his abilities to ‘manage’ Scotland for the government interest makes such typecasting at least understandable.⁶¹ However in doing so, printmakers were also embedding the connection between the Scottish ‘outsider’ and the political corruption they were intent on deploring. This connection was made explicit in *The Board of Controul, or The Blessings of a Scottish Dictator*, which showed a group of grotesque, grasping Scottish placemen seeking posts and positions from Dundas. The message was clear: by virtue of his Scottishness alone, Dundas was instantly and indisputably both undemocratic and corrupt – an integral part of the system by which Scots were supposedly corrupting British

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*their chartered rights and practical wrongs*, (London: W. Strange, 1831); and John Wade, *The Black Book; or, Corruption Unmasked!*, (London, 1820).

⁵⁹ Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, p. 84.

⁶⁰ See: Figure 2. See also: Pentland, ‘We Speak for the Ready’, p. 69, 86.

politics with their sordid, stereotypical self-interestedness. By underscoring the link between self-serving ambitions and nationality, the English print makers were thus also reflecting the linguistic paradigms that had been used by the socially conservative critiques amongst the Scottish landed classes in the two decades prior.

Further emphasizing the parallels between the Scottish and English critiques of self-interest was the similar use of self-indulgence and luxury amongst the printmakers in London. As has been described in chapter two, Dundas’ bonhomie and love of life’s little pleasures, especially those involving alcohol, was well-known, and his alleged exploits while intoxicated had provided

62 Pentland, 'We Speak for the Ready', p. 89.
opposition newspapers with much ammunition over the course of his career.63 This characteristic was also taken up and made use of in the political prints of the era, as in Gillray’s *Hanging, Drowning*, published in 1795, which was one of a number of prints that alluded to the love of the bottle of Dundas and the Prime Minister William Pitt.64 As such, in their condemnation of vice and extravagance, the commentaries are again reflective of the earlier language employed in Scotland, further emphasizing the need to view the political prints of the era as

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64 See: Figure 7. Wright & Evans, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Caricatures of James Gillray*, p. 70.
contested sites of meaning, in which at least a strand of a more social conservative critique of self-interest was competing with the more Radical calls for political reform.

As such, although the historiography of late-Georgian politics has been heavily reliant upon the Radical critique of ‘Old Corruption,’ exploring the career of Henry Dundas underscores the fact that it was only one of a number of competing languages of reform. As the critiques of avarice and unchecked political ambition emanating from the Scottish landed gentry during the 1770s and 1780s indicate, the language of self-interest could also be a focal point for conservative social commentaries. These critical discourses coalesced around a linguistic paradigm that pilloried self-indulgent dissipation, and advanced a xenophobic fear of ‘corruption’ at the hands of ‘outsiders’ and ‘interlopers’ coming into society. Consequently, the use of similar tropes in critiques of self-interest in political and satirical prints in London in the 1790s suggests parallels between the two discourses. As Gordon Pentland’s methodology has highlighted, political prints were primarily commercial in nature, and the audience they were aimed at was largely confined to the upper and middle classes. As such, despite their content, it is unwise to assume that the images produced by printmakers such as James Gillray were simply reflective of the Radical critique. Instead they should ultimately be seen as sites of contestation, in which the concerns and anxieties of the political elite competed with popular calls for reform.

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Conclusion: ‘A Petulant Forwardness’¹

In 1797, sitting in his government offices at Somerset Place overlooking the Thames River, Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville described the era of the 1790-1802 Revolutionary Wars with France as one in which “few [were] disposed to consider anything but their own accommodation and self-interest.”² As this thesis has shown, in this regard, Dundas was very much a man of his time, and his career underscores the importance of individual self-interest in British public life at the end of the eighteenth century.

The political landscape of the late-Georgian era was extremely fluid and inherently chaotic place. Politicians such as Dundas operated unencumbered by checks and regulations, and the powers that they exercised were seemingly limited only by their own ambitions. In this unstructured and tumultuous climate, politics became primarily about individuals. As the intrigue and manoeuvring that surrounded Dundas’ 1806 impeachment demonstrated, in this system ideals and principles were ultimately overridden by the concerns of individual self-interest and the caprice resulting from the personal loyalties and animosities that connected and divided the political elite.

The haphazard and disorderly nature of the politics of the era would appear to give credence to the way in which they have been primarily defined in terms of the epithet of ‘Old Corruption,’ which depicted the political system as a

² Charles Ross (ed.), Correspondence of Charles, first Marquis Cornwallis, 3 Vols., (London: John Murray, 1859), II, p. 321, [Right Ho. Henry Dundas to the Marquid Cornwallis (Private), Somerset Place, Jan 20, 1797].
vast morass of iniquitous embezzlement. However, while the unregulated political culture undoubtedly meant that Dundas and his political colleagues were faced with a wealth of opportunities for personal enrichment, they were not all the “partisans of peculation” that the Radical press made them out to be.\(^3\) As Dundas’ career demonstrates, self-interest was not necessarily focused on the pursuit of sinecures and financial windfalls. Instead, for Dundas and politicians like him, the pursuit of their individual ambitions involved amassing and maintaining political power by any and every means at their disposal.

In light of this framework, it is also apparent that the portrayal of Dundas as the man who personified the triumph of the Union of 1707 needs contextualising.\(^4\) While Dundas’ era may have seen the ‘completion’ of the Union, it is dangerous to retrospectively equate the ultimate outcomes of Dundas’ actions with the motivations that inspired them. Ultimately the distinctive structure of the Scottish political system in this period meant that political power was dependent upon the provision of places and sinecures. In bestowing patronage upon the members of the Scottish political classes who formed his power base, Dundas was therefore not advancing Scottish interests, but his own. As demonstrated by the manner in which he employed government patronage, and manipulated his personal relationships, the pursuit of political power always remained the primary focus of Dundas’ life.

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Ultimately then, Henry Dundas was emblematic of a pervasive culture of avarice and self-aggrandisement that wielded considerable influence in determining the nature and character of public life in late-Georgian Britain. While this thesis has focused on the career of Dundas, it is important to remember that he was not alone in placing the concerns of his self-interest above all else in this period. Indeed, upon closer examination, nothing underscores this fact more than the letter of the Marchioness of Stafford to King George III that began this thesis. When the Marchioness accused Dundas of having “no view in life but his own interest,” she was also indicting a number of other people. Arraigned alongside Dundas were his cabal of ‘Scotch Lords’, and the Marchioness singled out Lord Elgin in particular. She derided him as a “Maligrida” for his duplicity, and was scathing in her condemnation of him describing him as a man who “is despicable and never to be trusted.” These criticisms, though perhaps premature, were ultimately not undeserved. After 1790 Elgin traded on his newly won position as a Scottish representative peer in order to secure the patronage of Dundas, thereby forging a political and

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6 Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin and 11th Earl of Kincardine (1766-1841), Scottish Representative Peer (1790-1807) and British diplomat.
7 The Marchioness further condemned Elgin as as “a man [who] can break his word and who can act so unworthy, so shuffling a part is despicable and never to be trusted,” see: Aspinall, The Later Correspondence of George III, Vol. I, pp. 492-3 (Document No. 619, the Marchioness of Stafford to the King, Whitehall, 13 Aug. 1790). The term ‘Maligrida’ was a contemporary term of abuse associated with Father Gabriel Malagrida, an Italian Jesuit priest, notoriously executed in September 1761 by the Portuguese Inquisition for “feigning revelations and false prophecies, for committing lewd actions, and for following heretical opinions” as well as having had an unhealthy fixation with Saint Anne’s uterus. By 1790 ‘Maligrida’ had become part of the British political lexicon, chiefly through its association with Lord Shelburne (Prime Minister 4 July 1782 – 2 April 1783) whose reputation for insincerity and duplicity had obtained him the nickname, and led King George III to describe him as the ‘Jesuit of Berkely Square’, see: Edmund Burke (ed.), The Annual Register, Or a View of the History, Politicks and Literature of the year, (Dodsley, 1762), p. 171; and James Alexander Lovat-Fraser, Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1916), p. 9.
diplomatic career. Emphasizing his gratuitous self-seeking nature, the most tangible achievement of Elgin’s career was the ‘rescue’ of the ‘Elgin Marbles’ from the Parthenon between 1801-1812, which he then transported back to Britain in order to decorate his country manor.\(^8\)

Similarly, those doing the accusing were no less self-serving. Described by Horace Walpole as being “of the most interested and intriguing turn,” and a woman whose “life was a series of jobs and solicitations,” the Marchioness was certainly no stranger to the endemic self-interest she was deploring in Dundas.\(^9\) She herself owed much of her station in life to the webs of patronage manipulated by Dundas’ predecessor the Earl of Bute, who had been able to appoint her to the household of Princess Augusta, as well as provide her with three separate pensions.\(^10\) Indeed, her penchant for jobbery is apparent in her complaints about Dundas. Her letter to the King framed her involvement in a concerted campaign to obtain an English peerage for her brother, John Stewart, 7th Earl of Galloway.\(^11\) Already privileged with a sinecure position as Lord of the Bedchamber in the royal household, Galloway was evidently of the same ambitious and grasping nature as his sister. Described by James Boswell as “a

\(^10\) Elaine Chalus & Fiona Montgomery, ‘Women and Politics’ in Hannah Barker & Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Women’s history: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 252; and Walpole, *The last journals of Horace Walpole*, I, p. 223. John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, KG, PC (25 May 1713 – 10 March 1792) was a Scottish nobleman and Prime Minister of Great Britain (1762-1763). A member of the politically powerful Argyll Clan, Bute’s political power also relied upon his influence over his pupil King George III.
little man... [with] a petulant forwardness that cannot fail to disgust people of sense and delicacy," his avarice was also the subject of two hostile poems by Robert Burns.\textsuperscript{12} Even Dundas, who as we have seen was no stranger to self-interest, despaired of Galloway’ shameless greed, warning the Prime Minister Henry Addington in 1801, that his “intriguing trickiness” knew no bounds.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, as the Marchioness’ letter reveals, Dundas ultimately represented the norm, and not the exception, in the self-seeking climate that existed during the 1790-1802 Revolutionary Wars with France. However, as Dundas’ career demonstrates, despite the wealth of opportunities for personal enrichment, the self-interest of the leading public figures of the era was not always bound up in the pursuit of wealth and fortune. Instead, for politicians like Dundas, their primary ambitions remained focused on amassing political power by any and every means at their disposal. In the fluid and chaotic landscape of the late-Georgian era, the self-interested concerns of individuals like Henry Dundas, ultimately became the thread upon which the whole British political system turned.

\textsuperscript{12} Pottle (ed.), \textit{Boswell's London Journal}, p. 69; Robert Burns, \textit{Epigrams against the Earl of Galloway}, (1793) and \textit{Ballad on Mr. Heron's Election No. 3 (John Bushby's Lamentation)}, (1795).
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