

At the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain was governed by its Parliament. But it was far from fully democratic..

Only men who owned valuable property had the right to vote – a tiny fraction of the population. In Glasgow, for example, only 33 men qualified to vote.

The new urban working class endured long and hard days with squalid housing and poor pay. And with no representation in parliament, their voices were ignored.

Workers started to organise – a group of political campaigners called the Radicals began to push for all men over 21 to have the vote.

In 1819, in Manchester, a crowd of 60,000 gathered to hear leading Radical Henry Hunt talk.

The situation became chaotic when local magistrates – fearful of revolution – attempted to have Hunt and other speakers arrested. The army beat back the crowd with swords, killing 15 people. The event became known as the Peterloo Massacre

It led to ongoing unrest, riots, and a government crackdown on protest...

Many MPs realised that change was needed.

Parliament passed the First Reform Act in 1832.

It allowed more men to vote, but not the working class.

Angry people campaigned for the People's Charter, which demanded the vote for all men, the right to vote in secret so that people wouldn't be bribed or pressured and for MPs to be paid so that not just the wealthy would be able to afford to stand for election.

The Chartist Movement continued for years, presenting a number of huge petitions to Parliament – all of which were rejected.

They were years marked by riots and violent government repression, with many people afraid that without political change the country would be taken over by a violent revolution.

The 1867 Reform Act gave the vote to most skilled working men. One in three of the population now had the right to vote.

It was progress – but with all women and most poorer men still without the vote, Britain was still far from being a true democracy.