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The ‘Republican’ Publican: ‘Honest’ Sam House, Visual Culture, and the General Election of 1784*

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Despite his ‘highest situation’ in life being that of a publican, Samuel House was the most frequently depicted member of the lower orders during the 1784 Westminster election and was directly credited in at least 33 different caricatures. To warrant such attention and depiction implies that House played a significant role as Fox’s primary bridge to the plebeian Westminster vote; a demographic that was essential for Fox’s victory. In spite of his positive electoral role in the Foxite campaign, House was effectively weaponised in hostile caricature as a discrediting plebeian anti-Foxite caricature symbol, emphasising the vulnerabilities of the mingling of aristocratic-plebeian sociability. Yet, in spite of his significance, and consistent inclusion in contemporary caricature, pamphlets and songs, House has remained largely unexplored by historians. Only John Brewer has produced a dedicated work on House, though the likes of H.T. Dickinson, Herbert Atherton, Diana Donald, Marc Baer, George Rudé, Harriet Guest and E.P. Thompson have studied the role and impact of the mob and plebeian electoral contribution. Based on new work on the Foxites and visual culture and using contemporary biographical sources, poll books, parliamentary registers and contemporary newspapers this article will redress this imbalance and attempt to establish House’s significance as a plebeian electoral campaigner for Fox, and as a discrediting symbol of plebeian drunkenness, sociability, and electoral corruption deployed by hostile caricaturists to disgrace his patron. So effective was the anti-Fox campaign, bolstered by the activities of caricaturists, that Fox was prevented from taking his Westminster seat for ten months – from May 1784 until March 1785 – during a Pittite enforced scrutiny.

Keywords: canvassing; caricature; culture; election; electoral; plebeian; publican; visual; Westminster; 1784

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contracted of swearing.\(^1\) The above passage, taken from Henry Wilson’s *Wonderful Characters*, is one of only a scant few surviving descriptions of the publican, Sam House.\(^2\) As one of the most caricatured Foxites of the 1784 Westminster election campaign, Fox and the duchess of Devonshire aside, House has been neglected by historians, despite his inclusion in more than 30 anti-Fox election prints, and his pre-eminence in his own constituency of Westminster as an active plebeian Foxite canvasser.\(^3\) The first section of this article will therefore focus on reconstructing a more complete profile of House through contemporary visual and material culture, newspapers, biographical accounts and property records; with the aim of concentrating on the neglected publican not as a derogatory caricature symbol, but, as an active political actor, a plebeian Foxite canvasser, and a Foxite associate who ‘was honoured with the company of many of the Whig aristocracy’.\(^4\)

To this end, and to better understand House’s potential political impact, his previously underinvestigated personal character and reputation will first be explored. House’s political affiliations and his relationship with the electorate in both Westminster and beyond, prior to his support for Fox, will also be of particular interest in establishing House’s electoral significance and his effectiveness as a plebeian canvasser. Identifying House’s canvassing activities and techniques should reveal whether the publican was truly an effective Foxite foot soldier and a successful bridge between plebeian and aristocratic sociability, worthy of pictorial nullification; or, whether his slovenly appearance and plebeian character simply rendered him too good a discrediting symbol – particularly among the political classes – to ignore. Once a more complete profile of House has been established through a study of his personal character, reputation and electoral effectiveness then House’s role as a discrediting anti-Foxite caricature symbol will comprise the final section of this article.

In this latter regard, broadly, there were two primary modes in which House was utilised in anti-Foxite caricature. The first mode utilised the publican’s embodiment of plebeian


\(^2\) An article published in the *General Advertiser* after House’s death added: ‘nor was he ever found in bed (except when ill) after four o’clock in the morning’, see *General Advertiser*, 28 Apr. 1785, p. 3.


Westminster, representing the unruly mob and the lowest orders of society – which Fox was dependent upon for his Westminster victories; depicting the plebeian House was a simple but effective means of dragging the lower orders into an anti-Foxite caricature scene. Second, House’s personal negative and impolite attributes, an extension of his profession and social standing, were used to tar the Foxite electoral campaign; alcohol, violence, uncouth behaviour and electoral corruption were particularly represented through the inclusion of House in anti-Foxite caricature. Beyond dragging the actions and campaigning of Fox into disrepute, House was specifically weaponised to discredit and nullify the campaigning of Fox’s other great electoral asset – the duchess of Devonshire; scenes of improper intimacy between the pair served as a negative commentary on the duchess’s sexuality and cast a dark shadow over the morality and legality of her own canvassing. House’s unconventional and slovenly appearance would have been all the more pictorially shocking when drawn in the presence of the beautiful and high-born duchess. In addition to how the publican was embodied in visual culture during the 1784 general election therefore, the effects this negative portrayal may have had on Fox’s electoral success and the ensuing parliamentary scrutiny will receive particular attention.

2. ‘Honest’ Sam House: The ‘Patriotic Publican’

Even more valuable than Wilson’s catalogue of Wonderful Characters, and perhaps the single best source on the life of Sam House remains the anonymous and non-dated The Life and Political Opinions of the Late Sam House. Both the aforementioned documents share a substantial amount of passages and accounts; it is likely that Wilson’s catalogue drew upon the latter which was published sometime after House’s death on 23 April 1785. Clearly both documents are reliant upon contemporary accounts, descriptions and retrospective memories which have their flaws and must be treated critically, yet, given the dearth of sources pertaining to House, and despite the unlisted author and publication date of the latter document, both provide an unparalleled account of House’s history, lifestyle, appearance and political affiliations. Born in his father’s Westminster tavern, House had a minimal education and was apprenticed – though unhappily – to the House-cooper, Mr Peavy in Bembridge Street, St Giles. Though House had no formal education he ‘possessed a good natural understanding, and frequently formed very just conceptions of men and things’.

6Anon., Life of House, 16.
7Anon., Life of House, 16: House’s will was ‘proven’ in ‘Saint James, Middlesex’ on 3 May 1785; see ‘Wills Proved at Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 3 May 1785’, London Lives, available at https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=wills_1780_1789_2531683_443844 (accessed 2 Mar. 2022). House’s death was not initially believed as he had been previously wrongly recorded as dying during the Westminster election (1784): see Morning Post, 14 Mar. 1785, p. 6. House was incorrectly reported to have ‘cut his throat through despair’ at a set of poll results which put Fox in last place: see Morning Post, 21 Apr. 1784, p. 3; see TNA, PROB 11/1129/149: ‘Will of Samuel House, Victualler of Saint James Westminster, Middlesex.’
8For the political biases of 18th-century newspapers, see Arthur Aspinall, Politics and the Press 1780–1850 (1949), chs 3, 10, 11, 12.
By the 1750s, at the age of around 25 years, House had made sufficient money to lease his first public house situated at Number 9, Wardour Street. Originally named, or located in an area known as the Gravel Pitts, at some point during the general election of 1780 House changed the name of the tavern to the Intrepid Fox in support of his favoured candidate; the establishment was also referred to as the Cap of Liberty. One of the earliest references to the Gravel Pitts tavern appears in a newspaper report of 1774 in which House’s tavern was ‘broke open and robbed’ of items including the publican’s signature silk stockings, silver shoe buckles and waistcoat buttons.

The popularity of House’s tavern was established in around 1751, when he undertook his infamous Westminster Bridge wager, which made him a local celebrity and a subject of female attention. The said wager involved House, in a state of undress, throwing himself into the river Thames from the balustrades of the central arch of Westminster Bridge. To witness such a feat, a considerable crowd gathered, one account reported upwards of 1,000 onlookers, as notice of the event had been given in advance. Upon successfully completing the jump and swimming to shore, House ‘now considered himself of some consequence, though in the humble station of a publican’. In light of his newly acquired state of ‘consequence’ House deemed that ‘it was not fit that he should be alone’ and subsequently married his maid servant, with whom he later had a son. As a result of her alcohol addiction, House’s first wife died, but not content with living alone, House invited his son’s wet nurse to become his housekeeper. They, in turn had a daughter, who House sent to a boarding school. Clearly, House had sufficient sums to keep a tavern, support his family, supply the supporters of Fox and send his daughter to boarding school. With regard to House’s income, and in addition to his tavern earnings, House had also entered into the lucrative market of bird dealing, in which he is claimed to have made £100 per year. To
get an idea of House’s wealth, according to a contemporary account recorded in Stokes’s *Devonshire House Circle*, House expended £15,000 on the general election of 1784. Of the £15,000, the majority was spent by House on ale and provisions to reward Fox-voters; despite his position as a lower-order publican and the aristocratic and wealthier status of his patron, Fox, House did all of this entirely at his own expense without accepting any Foxite reimbursement.

House’s electioneering tactics provide a useful insight into his character, and the degree to which House valued returning Fox as MP for his constituency of Westminster. After hearing of House’s canvassing during the 1780 Westminster election, Fox allegedly enquired as to whether he could repay House’s efforts by supporting the publican or his family. Not wanting any reward House allegedly replied that he was ‘as rich as any of them; and as for his son he must do as his father had done before him (work for a living)’. Similarly, at a general meeting of Foxites held at the Shakespeare Tavern in 1784, an agreement was made to reimburse House by sending ‘a quantity of beer and spirits’ to ‘supply what he had given away’; House’s response was: ‘Gentlemen, mind your business, and leave me do as I like’, ‘you may be d—d’. As a plebeian Foxite donor, as well as a devout canvasser, House was seemingly unmatched in his pro-Fox exertions; that Fox sought to compensate House retrospectively in 1780 implies that the publican canvassed independently for Fox during that election. However, one contemporary account records another House, Sam’s brother Harry, as the greatest plebeian Foxite donor, having spent £25,000 on the 1784 general election. This is one of the few references to Harry House, and he and Sam were described as ‘the great spirit merchants of the day’. Harry House is also referenced alongside Fox, as the chairman of a ‘Westminster Meeting in the Crown & Anchor Tavern’ in 1789, in


19 *The Percy Anecdotes, Original and Select [Dedicated] to the Right Honourable Earl Fitzwilliam*, ed. Sholto and Reuben Percy (1822), 167. For a contrasting depiction of House profiting from Fox’s greatest campaign donors, the prince of Wales, and the duchess of Devonshire, see Anon., *Supplies for the Year 1784*, pub. H. Macphail (17 Apr. 1784), BM Satires 6538, MN: 1868,0808.5255. House’s recorded expenditure could be an exaggeration; to give some context to electoral spending, Cannon records the government’s total expenditure at the 1784 general election at £31,848, while the general election of 1780 cost the government £62,000. This, of course, only accounts for the government’s official spending, more was likely spent indirectly: see John Cannon, *The Fox-North Coalition, Crisis of the Constitution, 1782–4* (Cambridge, 1969), 208–9. In Westminster, the government is reported to have spent £9,000 campaigning against Fox: see *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, ed. Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke (3 vols, 1964) [hereafter cited as *HPC, 1754–90*], i, 335–7. Meanwhile, during his Westminster by-election campaign of Nov. 1806, the Foxite, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, is reported to have spent £13,000; see Marc Baer, *The Ruin of a Public Man: The Rise and Fall of Richard Brinsley Sheridan as Political Reformer*, in *Sheridan Studies*, ed. James Morwood, and. David Crane (Cambridge, 1995), 165.


21 Anon., *Life of House*, 27; *Percy Anecdotes*, ed. Sholto and Percy, 167. Despite his refusal to accept financial reimbursement, a later poem in the *Morning Post* implied that House laboured on behalf of Fox in an attempt to one day secure himself a ‘place’; the place in question would likely have been on a local government, committee, or organisational role in Westminster: see *Morning Post*, 11 May 1785, p. 4.

22 That is to say that House was likely not initially offered monetary reward for his canvassing services.


which Harry was specifically thanked for his ‘great attention; and for his fair, upright, and candid conduct’ as chair.\(^{25}\) Given the dearth of surviving information on Harry compared with that on Sam, it is difficult to recreate a complete account of his life. As the pair were both in the spirit trade and clearly held similar political views given their expenditure, it is possible that the House brothers and their activities merged into one in 1784, and that contemporary accounts and depictions in caricature were represented in the amalgamated figure of Sam House. As Harry was not afforded with contemporary portraits or descriptions of his appearance it is near impossible to identify whether Harry appears alongside Sam in caricature.

Establishing a likeness of House, however, is not difficult for the historian; aside from contemporary descriptions, House was awarded with a surprising number of dedicated caricature portraits, including Thomas Rowlandson’s *Sr. Samuel House* (Illustration 1), Charles Knight’s *Sir Samuel House*, Robert Cooper’s *Sam House: The Patriotic Publican* (Illustration 2), and the anonymous *The Celebrated Sam House*.\(^{26}\) While the four portraits differ in style, each captures the essence of House’s notorious physical appearance, which, according to contemporary accounts, ‘offered itself as an easy butt for the caricaturist’.\(^{27}\) House’s appearance is described identically in the two biographical accounts:

> His person was not tall, but of the middling size, he was well made, stout, and active. His head was quite bald … without hat or wig, if he wore a hat, which was seldom, it had a very broad brim … he had not a coat to his back, for he was not seen wearing a coat near thirty years – a black waistcoat, with sleeves, was its substitute; he was always clean in his linen, which was of the best kind, but never buttoned his shirt at the collar:


\(^{25}\) Harry was clearly politically active alongside Fox following Sam’s death in 1785, the aforementioned meeting related to the king’s mental illness and the ensuing ‘Regency Crisis’ of 1789: *Morning Post*, 16 Feb. 1789, p. 3. Harry is first recorded as the chairman of the ‘Westminster Committee of Association’ meeting at the King’s Arms Tavern in 1784: see Felix Farley’s *Bristol Journal*, 10 July 1784, p. 4; Harry was also active in Fox’s 1796 Westminster campaign, officially seconding Fox’s nomination as candidate: see *True Briton*, 28 May 1796, p. 2; Henry Stooks Smith, *The Register of Parliamentary Contested Elections: Containing the Uncontested Elections since 1830* (2nd edn, 1842), 166. Harry was referred to as ‘The Father of Westminster’, in *Star and Evening Advertiser*, 25 Nov. 1795, p. 8; Parker’s *General Advertiser*, 5 July 1783, p. 3.


\(^{27}\) Stokes, *Devonshire House Circle*, 202.
his breeches were of the same sort of colour of the waistcoat, and open at the knees; silk stockings of the best sort, either white or mottled, decorated his legs, which were deemed handsome by the ladies; but he frequently went without stockings, and either with or without, wore a neat pair of black slippers.\footnote{28}

All four portrait depictions are true to the above passage; House’s trademark open-kneed breeches, waistcoat, bald head, and allusions to his profession as a publican, namely the inclusion of a tankard of ale, or a punchbowl, are all visible. The publication dates of the anonymous The Celebrated Sam House and Cooper’s Sam House: The Patriotic Publican (Illustration 2) are estimated by the British Museum as being between 1781–4, and 1784–1821 respectively, and Rowlandson’s Sr. Samuel House (Illustration 1), and Knight’s Sir Samuel House are dated 1780 and 1781 respectively; Knight’s portrait is by far the most humanising, depicting House not solely as a bald, stout, plebeian, but rather as a relaxed, unconventionally dressed, yet respectable publican. These early 1780s publication dates are significant for two reasons. First, they are evidence that House was already in the public consciousness before the major election campaigning of 1784; that he was the subject of multiple ‘portraits’ is testament to this notion.\footnote{29} While House’s bridge jump may have warranted illustration and ‘rendered him a popular character’, only one of the portraits make a reference to this feat.\footnote{30} Thus, to have been in the public consciousness prior to 1784, House very likely had an earlier political career whereby his publican status was synonymous with political canvassing or activism. Indeed, the inscription of ‘Fox for ever’ on the punchbowl in Sir Samuel House is evidence of House’s politics pre-1784. Even in the earliest print of 1780, that being Rowlandson’s [Samuel House], there are clear political affiliations attached to House, as evidenced by the barrel’s inscription of ‘No Pope’, an anti-Catholic statement purposefully circulated during the Gordon Riots.\footnote{31} This was the first publication of Rowlandson’s print on 1 September 1780. However, following parliament’s dissolution on that same day, canvassing for the 1780 general election began and Rowlandson’s print was edited and the ‘No Pope’ inscription was erased and replaced with ‘Fox for Ever Huzza’.\footnote{32} The edited print was retitled Sr. Samuel House and published on 18 September 1780.\footnote{33} Clearly,
House had wider associations with patriotism and tenuous links to the Gordon Riots and the Protestant Association movement before he became almost solely attached to Fox; this can be considered his ‘patriotic publican’ era.34 The drinking of ale, as argued by Clare Brant, and thus by association, the selling of ale, could be considered ‘patriotic’.35


Although almost all surviving prints attest to House’s support of Fox, the publican cut his political teeth prior to the 1780 general election. Before the cries of ‘Fox for Ever Huzza!’ were attached to House, he supported another prominent politician in the constituency of Middlesex, John Wilkes. Formerly an MP for Aylesbury, Wilkes fled abroad in 1764 upon accusations of libel and blasphemy relating to his weekly political publication, the *North Briton*; he returned in 1768 and stood for the urban constituency of Middlesex at the 1768 general election. Standing without the support of government or landed interests, Wilkes was expected to lose, and yet he beat the ministerial candidates with 1,292

36 Wilkes was reliant on the ‘little freeholders’ of Middlesex for his victory, those lower-order tradesmen including: ‘cheese-mongers, upholsterers, grocers, booksellers, weavers, ironmongers, undertakers, apothecaries, plumbers,
votes to their 827, and 807.37 The support of the labouring and artisanal classes, of which House can be considered a member, and a canvasser, was a crucial factor in Wilkes’s victory. According to House’s biography it was in 1763 at the age of around 37 years, that House ‘sold his beer at three-pence a pot, in honour of Wilkes, the then champion of freedom; and at his own expense [estimated at £500] gave entertainments to his neighbours, and others, who he thought were friends to the same cause’.38 The timings of House’s canvassing for Wilkes in 1763, however, may be premature; Wilkes was MP for Aylesbury from 1757 to 1763.39 It is more likely that House canvassed for Wilkes in the geographically closer county of Middlesex during the general election of 1768.40 The year 1763 was, however, the year of Wilkes’s arrest and subsequent release resulting from his parliamentary privilege, which inspired the ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ movement, a phrase first heard at Westminster Hall in May 1763.41 House was very likely a supporter of this anti-government movement.32

The precise nature of the House-Wilkes relationship is hard to define; unlike that of House and Fox there are few surviving sources depicting or recording the pair together; the pair’s relationship is alluded to in a contemporary newspaper article, in which they are included alongside one another as ghosts in a satirical funeral for the Whig Party.43 Yet, based on surviving evidence and the work of Brewer, some assumptions can be made. House’s introduction to Wilkes and radical politics was likely facilitated through the mock elections at Garret in the 1760s.44 The Garret mock elections were burlesque and celebratory in nature and were usually accompanied by excessive alcohol consumption; they centred on the ceremonial election of a lower-order representative to the role of ‘Mayor of Garret’.45 Candidates for this role were not only required to hail from the lower orders, but also had to be eccentric of dress, personality, and of features with a large appetite for alcohol.46

36 (continued) drapers, watchmakers, turners, cashiers, and carpenters’. This voting demographic was less susceptible to intimidation than other tenants of Middlesex: see HPC, 1754–90, i, 331–5.


38 Anon., Life of House, 15–16.

39 Wonderful Characters, ed. Wilson, iii, 193.

40 See Thomas, John Wilkes: A Friend to Liberty, chs 4, 5, 6.


42 For an account of House hosting Wilkes in his tavern, see Anon., ‘A Particular Friend to this Work Seeing the Sketch of Sam. House Given in No. 19, has Sent Us the Following Full and Particular Account of the Life and Political Opinions of the Late Sam. House, the Patriotic Publican, of Wardour Street, Soho’, New Wonderful Magazine, xii, 13 (1794), 402.


44 Garret elections were held in conjunction with general elections and major by-elections. Garret elections were held in 1761, 1768, and crucially in 1763, the year of House’s apparent support for Wilkes: see Brewer, ‘Theater and Counter-Theater’, 7; The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities, in Connection with the Calendar, Including Anecdote, Biography, & History, Curiosities of Literature and Oddities of Human Life and Characters. Vol. I, ed. Robert Chambers (1863), 662.

45 The mayor was voted for by lower-order voters, and the role was not official; the mayor was an unofficial spokesman of the lower orders. Garret – a small hamlet between Tooting and Wandsworth located in modern day south London, formerly in the County of Surrey – was commonly also referred to as ‘Garrett’, ‘Garrat’ and ‘Garratt’: see Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore, ed. Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud (Oxford, 2000), 140–1.


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Counted among the most famous and distinctive Garret mayors were Sir Jeffrey Dunstan, the knock-kneed dwarf and wig-seller (Illustration 3) and Henry Dinsdale, the eccentric muffin seller (Illustration 4). While House would similarly have met such a brief, and despite some secondary sources recording House as an elected mayor, there is no direct evidence that he ever stood as a candidate in Garret.


48 For the unfounded assumption that House was elected mayor, see Stephen Farrell, ‘The Mock Election at Garrat, 1768: From Carnival to Sedition’, *The History of Parliament Online: British Political, Social, & Local History*, © 2022 The Author(s). Parliamentary History published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd. on behalf of Parliamentary History Yearbook Trust.
That is not to say that House did not participate in the Garret elections, however. By the late 1760s the Garret elections had evolved beyond mere pageantry and celebration, though the role of mayor held no official power, the elections themselves – which were increasingly reported in the newspapers – provided lower-order members with a platform

49 House and his Wardour Street tavern are referenced in a print of 1780 depicting ‘Sir Toby Thatch Candidate for Garret’; ‘Sam House’ and the address of his tavern are inscribed onto a foaming tankard of ale which sits waiting upon a table for an already intoxicated Thatch: see Charles Knight, Sir Toby Thatch, candidate for garret, pub. Anon. (12 July 1781), BM Satires 5877, MN: J.1.139.

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to voice their opinions and criticise the established system of government and elections.\textsuperscript{50} Given the exposure offered by the Garret elections, they soon became the focus of radical and reformist politicians, who saw in Garret the opportunity to attack government and electoral corruption and gain popular support; at the helm of this radical takeover of Garret was John Wilkes.\textsuperscript{51} Wilkeite involvement in the elections included: the writing of ‘patriotic’ candidate speeches ‘for the purpose of instructing the people in the corruptions that attend elections to the legislature’, in addition to publishing pamphlets which not only publicised the contests of Garret elections but drew parallels with contemporary political events.\textsuperscript{52} Wilkes, despite winning the Middlesex seat in 1768, had been repeatedly denied the right to sit in the Commons; the Garret election of 1768 took place at the height of this agitation and provided a platform for pro-Wilkes campaigning. Lloyd’s Evening Post reported an incident during the 1768 Garret election, in which a cavalcade of Garret electors and candidates amassed outside of the king’s bench prison – where Wilkes was temporarily imprisoned – to offer their support.\textsuperscript{53}

A drawing of a similar Garret scene by Valentine Green depicts an unmistakable House as a crowd member alongside the mayor, Jeffrey Dunstan.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, this author has identified House in another more violent crowd scene alongside Wilkes himself, taking place at a Brentford hustings during a Middlesex by-election of 1768.\textsuperscript{55} The Brentford Election depicts a scene of mob violence enacted by the supporters of the Middlesex ministerial candidate, Sir William Beauchamp Procter, against the supporters of Wilkes. In the scene, House stands uncharacteristically dormant at the back of the crowd while Wilkes stands to the right; his finger touches his nose, perhaps implying that he revels in the victory of his ally, John Glynn, over the ministerialist, or, that he revels in the violence or the inevitable fallout against the ministry in the press.\textsuperscript{56} Though relatively scarce, there is evidence supporting House’s presence and contribution in the Garret elections of the 1760s, likely brought about by his publican status, his standing in his own constituency, and his physical oddities.\textsuperscript{57} Not only was Garret likely the context in which House was introduced to Wilkes therefore, but much of the patriotic and anti-government language espoused by

\textsuperscript{50}For contemporary newspaper reporting of the Garret elections, see St. James’s Chronicle, 9 June 1768, p. 3; London Evening Post, 23 July 1763, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{52}Brewer, ‘Theater and Counter-Theater’, 20; For such a pamphlet, see Anon., A Description of the Mock Elections at Garat, on the Seventh of this Month, Wherein is given some Historical Account of its first rise, the curious Cavalcades of the different candidates, the speeches they made at the Hustings, the whimsical oath of Qualification, and an authentic Copy of their several droll Printed Addresses (1768).
\textsuperscript{53}Brewer, ‘Theater and Counter-Theater’, 20–1; Lloyd’s Evening Post, 8 June 1768.
\textsuperscript{54}Green’s original drawing is published in The Book of Days, ed. Chambers, 662. A different version and description is published in William Hone, The Every-Day Book: Or the Guide To the Year: Relating the Popular Amusements, Sports, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs, and Events, Incident to the Three Hundred and Sixty-five Days, In Past and Present Times; Being A Series of Five Thousand Anecdotes and Facts. Volume II (1859), 851–5.
\textsuperscript{55}Given House’s noted involvement in Garret in 1768, his support of Wilkes, and his distinct completely bald appearance, the depicted figure is very likely to be House, though his torso and legs and presumably his trademark breeches are obscured in the print.
\textsuperscript{56}Anon., The Brentford Election, pub. Anon. (1768), BM Satires 4223, MN: Y,4,574; HPC, 1754–90, i, 331–5; House is depicted again in the same scene as Wilkes in a 1784 Brentford print; see William Dent, The Brentford Race for the Middlesex Septennial Plate, pub. J. Brown (22 Apr. 1784), BM Satires 6550, MN: 1868,0808.5261.
\textsuperscript{57}See Green’s drawing and Chambers’s description in The Book of Days, ed. Chambers, 662, 664; and House’s presence in Anon., The Brentford Election.
House later in Westminster is visible during the Garret elections of the 1760s. House was clearly drawn to politicians who modelled themselves as champions of the people; he once famously stated when asked his trade: ‘I am a publican, and a republican.’

Though not necessarily a candidate for Garret mayor, House seemingly took many aspects of its radical and patriotic politics and campaigning back to Westminster and utilised his Garret experiences while campaigning for Fox in the 1780s. One such electioneering tactic employed by House evident in 1768, was offering free or reduced priced drinks to the public for support of his favoured candidate. Such tactics clearly did not change and were employed by the publican in the canvassing for Fox in both the 1780 and 1784 general election campaigns. However, while House’s Wilkes-supporting tactics were similar to those used in support of Fox, the longevity of House’s pro-Wilkes affiliation was far shorter. Sensing Wilkes was not the ‘champion of freedom’ he had purported to be, House commented that ‘Jack Wilkes squinted the wrong way’ and shortly removed his support.

In terms of his political sentiments post-Wilkes, House was: ‘uniform in support of the rights of the people, [and] in opposition to the influence of the Crown’. It follows therefore that during the 1780 Westminster election, House chose to support Fox over the government-supported, Lord Lincoln. While House ‘exerted every nerve in favour of [Fox]’ with his established tactics, he also ferried electors to Hustings; an unsurprising addition given House’s prior attachment to the hackney coach industry. Beyond offering and supplying alcohol, ferrying voters, and canvassing for Fox, there is evidence that House was also relatively politically active in campaigning for political reform; he was a reported member of ‘The Quintuple Alliance’ established by the duke of Richmond in 1782. The alliance’s sole purpose was: ‘to promote annual parliaments and universal suffrage’ by uniting, and attempting to win every seat in the relatively populous five boroughs of London.

Examples of such language include: ‘to the worthy electors’, ‘having the honour of serving’, ‘I detest the Ministry, and all that there sort of people; d—n my eyes! And wishes to Mercia’: see The Book of Days, ed. Chambers, 659, 664; Brewer, ‘Theater and Counter-Theater’, 21; Lloyd’s Evening Post, 25 July 1781, p. 4.

Wonderful Characters, ed. Wilson, iii, 193.

Offering free or reduced-price alcohol was a proven electoral tactic; the duke of Bedford is recorded to have spent £4,900 on ‘tavern entertainments’ for his brother-in-law’s campaign during the 1749 Westminster election, whereas only £500 was spent during the court party’s unopposed campaign of 1762: see Brant, ‘Armchair Politicians’, 280; Nicholas Rogers, Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt (Oxford, 1989), 190. William Hogarth depicted such a scene of Whig election bribery and drunkenness in An Election Entertainment Plate I, Four Prints of an Election (1755), BM Number: Cc,2.182. Jeffrey Dunstan also sold porter at ‘three pence a pot’ and bread at ‘four pence a quarter loaf’ during his own Garret campaigning in 1781: see Hone, The Every-Day Book. Volume II, 836.


Anon., Life of House, 16.


Anon., Life of House, 21; Pindar, Remarkable Biography, 34; Transporting electors to Hustings was an important electioneering tactic: see W.A. Speck, ‘Elections and Electioneering in Early Eighteenth-Century England’, ODNB.

Charles Lennox, 3rd duke of Richmond. The ‘Alliance’ included Fox, Wilkes and William Pitt: see ‘The Quintuple Alliance’, London Courant, 20 Feb. 1782, p. 1; Anon., The Westminster Review. August–December, 1843. Vol. XL: 1843 (1843), 480. House’s membership is referenced in a poem and is therefore dubious. There is no reference to House’s inclusion beyond the London Courant, therefore his inclusion in the alliance is difficult to verify, though the other reported members are recorded elsewhere as verified alliance members. It is also very likely that House would have played some role in the alliance’s activities in Westminster in 1782: see Anon., The Westminster Review. August–December, 1843, pp. 479–80. House could be referenced in the ‘&c &c’.

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Surrey, Middlesex, Southwark, and crucially, Westminster, and thus pressing the second Rockingham administration into supporting parliamentary reform. The first Westminster election held following the alliance’s formation was in 1784, therefore House’s campaigning during that election could have formed part of the alliance’s concerted ‘quintuple’ efforts. That House potentially played a part in this alliance and their planning prior to the 1784 election attests further to House’s potential electoral significance not only in Westminster, but more broadly as a plebeian political contributor in the wider Association Movement of the early 1780s.

Returning to House’s publican status, not only did House’s profession grant him the freedom to reward potential Fox-voters, but the tavern also acted as a community hub, an arena of gathering, sociability and politics that House could control. Within the tavern the publican was the master of ceremonies, the provider and denier of sustenance; one must assume that the publican exerted a degree of authority over his patrons. House’s standing and influence within his tavern was very likely enhanced by his standing and multiple roles within his local community, as the Public Advertiser recorded in 1785: ‘Mr. House was Member of almost every Society or Club of note, Free-Masons, Druids, Forresters, Bucks, &c’. An article in The Atlas newspaper certainly supported this notion of influence, stating: ‘Samuel House, who, although a publican, possessed so much influence, and was so preserving in his exertions, that he was more than once the principal cause of returning Fox to Westminster.’ Peter Clark further supports this notion and attests to the growing ‘respectability’ and ‘enhanced social standing’ of publicans by the late 18th century. Clark also notes the responsibility of the publican to entertain, serve, and discipline his customers as the ‘master’ of his premises or the metaphorical ‘captain of the ship’. The political sentiments of House’s customers determined how they were treated by the publican. Whereas House never turned down an opportunity to toast to Fox’s health with a fellow Fox-voter, he was known to refuse service to Pittite supporters at the expense of ‘unpaid reckoning and sometimes the loss of more valued customers’; he once exclaimed: ‘Be off you dirty Pittites: pay your reckoning and go about your business.’

Despite his potentially inhospitable service and ‘slovenly’ appearance, House was known and well regarded by the ‘mobility’ of Westminster and his tavern was ‘much frequented’

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68 The Intrepid Fox tavern is recorded as the venue for the Constitutional Whigs’ Grand Lodge, thus attesting to the political and extra-parliamentary function of House’s tavern; see Morning Herald, 25 Aug. 1784, p. 1.
69 See Public Advertiser, 4 May 1785, p. 2. Both Sam and Harry House are recorded as having dined with the ‘Highbernian Society’ at the King’s Head tavern, in which both men, and the Intrepid Fox, were celebrated in separate toasts, see Parker’s General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer, 5 July 1783, p. 3.
70 Atlas, 7 Sept. 1861, p. 7.
72 Clark, The English Alehouse, 286–7. An election can be considered a form of entertainment and sociability, thus House’s role and standing within the tavern could very well have spilled out onto the streets of Westminster during such a large and communal occasion.
with many coming ‘merely for the purpose of witnessing his humour’.74 Aside from the sustenance of food and ale, House also allegedly provided his customers with political sustenance, taking in ‘two or three newspapers’.75 It is highly likely that those newspapers were politically aligned with House’s own Whig sympathies, but the provision of newspapers for the lower orders during this period suggests a greater understanding of current and political affairs among Fox’s plebeian supporters than might first be assumed.76 House was alleged to have determined which class of customer was worthy of taking in the newspapers; if indeed the reader in question was deemed ‘indigent’ and better ‘employed in attention of his own business’ then House would retort: ‘ “D—n your eyes, what have you to do with newspapers: you had much better go home and go to work, politics won’t fill your belly”. ’77

3. Westminster: ‘A Pocket of Vulgarity’ & the 1784 General Election78

That House felt sufficiently empowered to police the activities of his ‘indigent’ clientele is testament to the class-variation and cross-societal population of Westminster. It was perhaps also a product of 18th-century ‘politeness’ and social ‘polishing’.79 As a contemporary concept ‘politeness’ was deliberately vague, and while the middling orders would mirror the politeness and mannerisms of their own superiors in Paul Langford’s ‘Spectator Mode’, so, too, would they mirror their ‘snobbery’; an effect that was mimicked further down the social scale among the lower orders.80 The specific improvements and ‘levelling up’ of London’s ‘mob’ during the 1780s were noted by contemporaries; the American artist, Benjamin West, recorded that the former need of young gentlemen to practise boxing as a means of defence against the mob was no longer required by the early 19th century.81 Despite the growing influences of commercialisation often forcing the proprietor to be overly welcoming and polite, House seemingly felt entitled to police the actions of his social inferiors and give in to his ‘snobbery’ as evidenced by his refusal of newspapers to his more ‘indigent’ customers.82 Notwithstanding accounts of social improvement, those lower-order inhabitants of London such as House were renowned for their ability to break the ‘class barrier of eighteenth-century civility’ by ‘betraying the commercial interest of [their] country’ with their impolite manners.83 Of all the London boroughs, Westminster was considered a prominent ‘pocket of vulgarity’, which boasted a large and varied population.84

74 Pindar, Remarkable Biography, 24–6.
75 Anon., Life of House, 38.
76 Aspinall, Politics and the Press, pp. v, 66–7; ‘Samuel House’ is recorded as a Whig of 1790 – despite his death in 1785 – in the likely satirical ‘comparative sketch of Whigs’: see Public Advertiser, 28 Oct. 1790, p. 4.
77 Pindar, Remarkable Biography, 30.
80 Langford, ‘Politeness’, 315.
84 Langford, ‘Politeness’, 323.

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As George Hanger observed after visiting Westminster during the 1784 election, for a candidate or canvasser to make any electoral gains he had to be prepared to ‘help a porter with his load, shake hands with a fish woman, pull his hat off to an oyster wench, kiss a ballad-singer, and be familiar with a beggar’. Undeniably, there are difficulties in assessing past societies and electorates in terms of class and occupation, and Westminster is no exception. Yet, the numerous works of Corfield, Green and Harvey, have gone some way in classifying the Westminster electorate in terms of occupation and social status, utilising many of Charles Booth’s original 1886 classifications. A degree of generalisation remains unavoidable when considering a large data pool, such as the 12,000 strong electorate of Westminster. There is also the danger of projecting modern ‘rankings’ or biases onto contemporary occupations. However, while occupational generalisation has its problems, especially in the context of politeness, it is still possible to broadly differentiate social classes or orders from one another; ‘bankers’, for example, would be situated higher on the rungs of the social ladder than labourers. This article, in its references to plebeian Westminster, the lower orders, and the ‘mobility’, refers to those electors who were able to pay the poor rates and thus were awarded the vote, but remained on the lower rungs of the Westminster social ladder; they included the likes of traders, shopkeepers, merchants, craftsmen, artisans, agricultural and building workers, and transport workers. This socio-economic grouping of the Westminster population has been classified by Corfield, Green and Harvey as the ‘4th Quartile’, the lowest earning of four distinguishable quartiles based upon poll book and rate book records. Of this ‘4th Quartile’, 48.3% of its eligible voters polled for Fox in the 1784 election, though he came second to Lord Hood overall. Considering that the 1784 Westminster vote was split between three candidates – Fox, Lord Hood and Sir Cecil Wray – with two votes awarded per elector, winning 48.3% of this quartile’s total vote was a substantial victory.

Arguably, a key element of Fox’s plebeian-electoral success was the consistent respect that he awarded his social inferiors, continuously referring to them as ‘worthy and independent electors’; holding Westminster was not only a political desire but ‘the first pride

85George Hanger, The Life, Adventures, and Opinions of Col. George Hanger, Written by Himself (1801), 198. George Hanger, 4th Baron Coleraine, was an army officer, politician and acquaintance of the prince of Wales, infamous for his gambling, womanising and socialising. He organised ‘bludgeon men’ for the Whigs at the 1787 Westminster election.


88Westminster Historical Database, ed. Harvey, Green and Corfield, 74–5.

89Westminster Historical Database, ed. Harvey, Green and Corfield, 74–5.

90See ‘Table 6: Voters by Occupational Group, 1784, 1790 and 1802’, in Harvey, Green and Corfield, ‘Westminster Man’, 175.


92See ‘Table 7’, in Harvey, Green and Corfield, ‘Westminster Man’, 176.
of [Fox’s] life.’

Of course, Fox’s praising of the lower orders could have been an example of hyperbole and yet another means of ‘treating’ his electors with false praise and respect; a common 18th-century electioneering tactic. Perhaps, too, Fox’s respect towards his lower-order voters explains his willingness to canvass alongside and socialise with House, the embodiment of plebeian Westminster. Conversely, Fox could have kept House by his side as a public relations tool to support, if not legitimise, his apparent admiration of the lower-order Westminster inhabitants. It is important to note, however, that Fox enjoyed such electoral success in Westminster, sitting there from 1780 until his death in 1806, not solely due to his plebeian support, but rather his ability to win votes ‘from a notably wide socio-economic range of supporters’. Above the plebeian group on the Westminster social ladder, were the ‘professional’ sectors and ‘high status rentiers’, which included the ‘socially diverse urban gentleman, in addition to titled commoners such as baronets, lords and knights’; during the 1784 Westminster election Fox won 44.8% of the ‘rentier’ sector. This cross-societal voting population, and Westminster’s ‘scot and lot’ electoral system therefore rendered it a populous and relatively uncorrupted constituency.

Electors aside, Westminster was Fox’s home constituency, the home of parliament, and in the case of the 1784 general election, it was the battleground of the national campaign between Fox and William Pitt. Having recently been ousted from office alongside his coalition partner, Lord North, regaining the seat of Westminster was vitally important for Fox’s maintaining of his ‘man of the people’ and ‘grand commoner’ credentials, and for his ability to offer any credible opposition to Pitt and George III.

Gaining the Westminster plebeian vote was therefore essential for Fox and it is in this context that House’s significance, as a bridge between the worlds of aristocratic and plebeian sociability, and as a conduit for Foxite-plebeian electoral treating, can be understood. The
majority of hostile House prints were published during the election contest and prior to the scrutiny – suggesting that hostile caricaturists deemed it necessary to attack the publican and counteract his electoral efforts. However, there is difficulty in assessing the actual effect House had on the Westminster contest of 1784. It is unlikely that House’s canvassing and suborning techniques had an effect on his social superiors; the impact of House’s ‘slovenly’ appearance and coarse manners on such people has already been noted. Yet, among his peers in society, and those below, House was a well-known community figure and businessman, and not only did he exert a degree of authority, but he had the tools of alcoholic persuasion at hand.

Whether House was rallying Westminster inhabitants who already intended to vote for Fox is another point of contention. It is my view that House’s electioneering techniques, of supplying beef and ale and of physically transporting voters to hustings, would have made ‘plumping’ – using their two available votes exclusively for Fox – more likely and a more appealing and well-rewarded prospect. Such tactics would also surely have encouraged and rewarded the illegal practice of multiple individual voting. House was likely most significant therefore among his own quartile and those below, which, along with the upper quartiles would have been greatly bolstered by the efforts of the duchess of Devonshire. House could also be viewed as a valuable proxy for any prosecution or accusations of fraud, though he undoubtedly canvassed on Fox’s behalf he was not officially affiliated with Fox or his electoral campaigning. Any accusations against Fox’s treating of electors could therefore be absorbed by, and redirected to, House.

House’s personal electioneering tactics would have formed only a proportion of the wider Foxite campaign however, and the use of bribery and treating electors was a long-established, and increasingly criticised, component of 18th-century electoral culture. Bribery, in a relatively poor scot and lot borough such as Westminster would likely have increased the electors’ susceptibility to corruption. Because of this increased susceptibility, and indeed the public awareness and suspicion of this susceptibility among...
the lower orders, votes and credentials from this quartile of electors – even those votes cast legitimately – would have been more open to suspicion and official scrutiny.107 The effect of bribery on the lower orders of Westminster, or as they were labelled, ‘those poor unfortunate men who are liable to be seduced’, is attested to in a contemporary newspaper advertisement taken out by Fox’s Westminster rivals, Lord Hood and Cecil Wray. The advertisement warns ‘that everyone who accepts money to vote is liable to a penalty of £500’, and that ‘everyone who takes a false oath on the poll is liable to be transported for seven years’. Beyond the threats against blatant bribery, the advertisement also warns against – and therefore conveys a contemporary awareness of – more subtle forms of bribery or treating: ‘[The Committee will prosecute] everyone who receives or gives a bribe, or promise; or even lays a wager; or gives more for anything under pretence of purchase than it is really worth.’108

Despite the stark warnings published however, treating electors, specifically with alcohol, was a custom of such elections in the late 18th century and a form of ritualised entertainment and as such it was treated relatively tolerantly.109 Frank O’Gorman categorises the primary modes of 18th-century electoral bribery, beginning with the outright monetary purchase of votes through ‘financial or other means’.110 The duchess of Devonshire was depicted purchasing votes through ‘other means’, primarily through the exaggerated physical transportation of labourers, and the use of her sexuality in William Dent’s The Force of Friendship (Illustration 5).111 After the scene’s child asks where the duchess is taking her father, the mother explains: ‘She’s taking him to the Ladies Committee Room to examine if he’s properly qualified for polling’; the underlying insinuation being that the duchess – ‘the man trap’ – will ‘fully’ examine the weavers. The second mode of electoral treating incorporated the more normative and approved displays of electoral generosity, such as treating electors with goods, for example alcohol, in return for votes. More subtle still was the third method of rewarding favourable voting by covering any costs incurred by voters, from transportation to loss of earnings from their usual employment.112 The treating of electors was not limited to the course of elections, successful candidates could award loyal voters after the election had taken place; Fox held five such dinners after his 1784 victory, each attended by around 700–1,000 individuals.113

Beyond suborning the electorate, a 1784 pamphlet written by House defending Fox’s India Bills and delineating Pitt’s ‘true character’ expands House’s electioneering impact beyond mere bribery to active political argument – one has to assume that House would

107 See O’Gorman, ‘The Unreformed Electorate’, 44.
108 See ‘Westminster Election’, Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, 21 Apr. 1784, p. 1. As the advertisement was taken out by the ‘Committee for conducting the Election for Lord Hood and Cecil Wray’ its intention was likely to cast doubt over Fox’s electioneering tactics and set up the context for a later scrutiny of the polls.
113 Dickinson, Politics of the People, 47–8; Donald R. McAdams, ‘Electioneering Techniques in Populous Constituencies, 1784–1796’, Studies in Burke and His Times, xiv, 1 (1972), 43.

have argued in such a manner on the streets of Westminster and in his tavern.114 House’s trademark passion for Fox and his politics, which perhaps borders on being aggressive, is certainly visible in the publican’s writing: ‘have ye then, o Britons, such a mean idea of your own virtue … are ye so degenerated, as to prefer a pitiful bribe to Godlike liberty’, ‘do not your hairs stand erect at the perusal of the late Old Bailey trial?’ 115 The line of argument in House’s pamphlet also suggests that House was actively attempting to persuade his readers to vote for Fox rather than Pitt’s representatives – suggesting that the publican was also reaching out to non-Fox-voters or the Westminster electorate at large.116

The first section of this article has sought to establish a ‘reality’ of Sam House through studying his personal character, his politics, influence, activities and locality; and it is clear that House was far more than merely a humble publican and that his omission from the history books is unjustified. Understanding House’s background is key to understanding his significance as a Foxite political figure. On the one hand House was an actual individual, a recognisable Westminster businessman who was deeply rooted in his community,


116 The tone of House’s pamphlet is cautionary against Pitt and starkly pro-Fox; the readers are addressed as ‘Britons’: see House, *A Letter to the Electors*, 1–21.
who had strong and established political views that he unashamedly disseminated in his locality.\(^\text{117}\) Moreover, House had the financial, material and personal means by which to exercise his political views in Westminster.\(^\text{118}\) His tavern offered him an arena of sociability through which to express and share his views, to hold political meetings such as those of the ‘Constitutional Whigs’, and his status as the publican master of ceremonies allowed him to exclude those who did not agree with his politics.\(^\text{119}\) His access to alcohol and his relative financial stability also allowed him to treat Foxite electors with discounted ale and bread.\(^\text{120}\) In terms of House’s appearance and characteristics, he was unashamedly slovenly and prone to swearing, yet in a ‘pocket of vulgarity’ such as Westminster these were positive and familiar attributes and rendered House the perfect bridge between his own orders of society, and Fox, who belonged ultimately to the political class and the aristocracy. House therefore acted as a crucial Foxite-plebeian electoral canvasser, translator, ambassador and organiser, not only for Fox in the 1780s but likely also for Wilkes in the 1760s.

On the other hand, however, aside from being an actual and physical electoral presence, House was a transitional political type; he was political but not polite, his presence in the political realm was often juxtaposed by his ‘foreign’, impolite, and unpolished appearance and behaviour.\(^\text{121}\) One could view House as an embodiment of lower-order or non-elite political contribution. It is perhaps for this reason that House’s politics and electoral tactics are well situated in the context of the mock Garret elections of the 1760s; like Fox, Wilkes understood and ascribed value to lower-order votes in populous constituencies such as Middlesex and Westminster as a means of countering the successes of the established ministerial candidates.\(^\text{122}\) The mock Garret elections – the purpose of which was to appoint a lower-order mayor with no real powers or influence – reflects a plebeian political awakening on plebeian terms.\(^\text{123}\) Through these largely carnivalesque mock elections, the lower orders could indirectly engage with, and influence, the parliamentary elections taking place in their constituencies.\(^\text{124}\) For their efforts and relative political accomplishments however, plebeian political figures such as Jeffery Dunstan and Sam House, were ridiculed in contemporary caricature and the press because they possessed political competences and electoral skills that were viewed as politically threatening and socially destabilising.\(^\text{125}\) Through his political contributions in Westminster, House brought plebeian political contribution out of the enclosed mock sphere of the Garret elections and into the sphere of electoral politics; the likes of House were therefore now forcing their own lower-order characteristics, customs, and sociability upon – or into the consciousness of – the political

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\(^\text{118}\) Anon., *Life of House*, 12.
\(^\text{121}\) As established House’s appearance was known to elicit shock and laughter to those outside of his own social order; see ‘London’, *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 25 Oct. 1780, p. 3. House’s swearing was also recorded to offend members of the political classes; see Anon., *Life of House*, 32.
\(^\text{124}\) Such as the Middlesex election of 1768, and the Westminster elections of 1780 and 1784.
\(^\text{125}\) See Anon., *Jeffry × Dunstan*, BMN:J,4,314.
Callum D. Smith

classes.\textsuperscript{126} It is in this context that House’s depiction and weaponisation in hostile anti-
Foxite caricature can be understood.

4. Weaponising Sam House

The frequency of the attacks on House by hostile caricaturists, likely in the employ of the
government or its agents, is testament to the publican’s electoral significance.\textsuperscript{127} However,
the aim of caricature was not to simply denigrate House and damage his own reputation,
but rather to associate House’s stereotypical plebeian and drunken attributes with Fox’s
campaign, thus damaging its credibility by association. This notion of associating well-
known plebeians with prominent politicians was well established; as Brewer notes in the
context of the mock Garret elections, the always plebeian and usually grotesque ‘mayor of
Garret’ was conflated with politicians and ‘used both to deride the nation’s leaders and to
scorn reformist aspirations’.\textsuperscript{128} A key aim of caricature therefore was to portray Fox in the
midst of plebeian sociability to convey how similarly uncouth and excessive Fox’s ‘private’
aristocratic sins were with those of the lowest rungs of society.\textsuperscript{129} As the radical \textit{Black Dwarf}
newspaper put it: ‘The rabble in high life and the rabble in low life differ only in dress. Their
intellects are quite on par, and they are equally mischievous when they take the lead.’\textsuperscript{130}
Broadly, there were two primary modes in which House was utilised in visual culture. The
first being as an identifiable symbol of Fox’s plebeian supporters, a device used consistently
to mark Fox’s Westminster electors, crowds, and associates in caricature as members of the
lowest rungs of society. Second, House’s attributes and characteristics, including excessive
drinking and swearing, were used to drag the actions and campaigning of the Foxites into
the realm of impolite public sin.

Aside from Fox, House was specifically utilised as a means of dragging the actions and
the campaigning of the duchess of Devonshire into disrepute. It was only in the context of
elections that these two contrasting, though similarly restricted, individuals were granted
the freedom to contribute politically and be recognised for their efforts; in normal times the
duchess’s gender and the publican’s social order would have excluded their participation.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{126}See Donald, \textit{Age of Caricature}, ch. 4; Rudé, ‘The London “Mob”’, 1–18; Guest, ‘Speech and Noise at the
\textsuperscript{127}For evidence of government sponsored caricaturists, see Grego, \textit{Rowlandson the Caricaturist}, i, 111; Callum
University undergraduate dissertation, 2017, pp. 40, 50, 64.
\textsuperscript{128}Brewer, ‘Theater and Counter-Theater’, 19.
\textsuperscript{129}John Brewer argues that contemporary theatre and comic opera fulfilled a similar function in the context of the
mock Garret elections in the 1760s; in this instance comic plays such as John Gay’s \textit{Beggar’s Opera} and Samuel
Foote’s \textit{The Mayor of Garret} drew an ‘analogy between high and low life’, and while Gay compared the vices of
the ‘lower sort of people and the rich’, Foote ‘compared their follies’: see Brewer, ‘Theater and Counter-Theater’,
13–19; John Gay, \textit{The Beggar’s Opera: A Comic Opera in Three Acts} (1728); Samuel Foote, \textit{The Mayor of Garret: A
Comedy. In Two Acts} (Dublin, 1764).
\textsuperscript{130}The Folly of the Middle Classes, in Supporting the Present System’, \textit{The Black Dwarf}, 12 Feb. 1817, in \textit{The
Satire in Eighteenth-Century London} (2007), 140; Dror Wahram, \textit{Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation
of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840} (Cambridge, 1995), 207.
\textsuperscript{131}See Rauser, ‘The Butcher-Kissing Duchess’, 23–46; Lana, ‘Women and Foxite Strategy’, 56; Elaine Chalus,
\textit{Elite Women in English Political Life}, c. 1754–90 (Oxford, 2005); Elaine Chalus, ‘Kisses for Votes: The Kiss and
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Yearbook Trust.
It figures therefore that caricaturists – likely sponsored by the Pittite camp – seized upon the political competences of both House and the duchess and attacked the pair in tandem as an effective means of nullifying the social and political threat posed by the duo to the established political order. Just as House was attacked and depicted in isolation, however, so, too, was the duchess – who suffered a barrage of hostile caricature assaults for her alleged sexualised treating of Westminster butchers – prints depicting House and the duchess together intimately therefore were rarer and must be considered as a component of the wider Pittite campaign.132 Another crucial extension of the second mode of anti-House caricature attack centred on House’s access to alcohol and his depicted treating of Westminster electors as an encourager of electoral fraud and corruption.133 The attacks against the legitimacy of Fox’s voters can be considered a key source of the ensuing Westminster scrutiny, which initially prevented Fox from taking his Westminster seat.134

5. House: The Archetypal Plebeian Symbol

The aim of the first mode of House depictions was to consistently remind Fox’s social and political equals, and, indeed, the ‘professional’ gentlemen of Westminster, upon whom Fox was also reliant, of the class of voter that held Fox aloft as the ‘man of the people’, the humble cobbler, maidservants and butchers. Once again, the concept of ‘politeness’ is significant, for the aristocratic Fox to be depicted as socialising with plebeian Westminster in their lower-order establishments consuming their inferior food and ale may have challenged his perceived social status. Examples of caricatures with House included as the archetypal plebeian supporter can be seen in the William Wells published The Aerostatick Stage Balloon, Thomas Rowlandson’s Sir Cecil Wray in the Pillory (Illustration 7), and the anonymous Mr Fox Addressing His Friends From the King’s Arms Tavern.135 Depicted in various rungs of an immobile air balloon, a reference to the balloon craze of the period, the


133 House’s alcoholic treating of electors can be viewed as a mirror of the duchess’s sexualised treating of electors; both were alleged to have used their greatest ‘assets’ to secure votes.

134 As established the practice of ‘treating’ electors, though largely accepted, was illegal. Thus, if Fox’s voters were considered to have been bribed or treated then their votes would be illegitimate. Caricature, as will be assessed, consistently implied that Fox, House and the duchess ‘treated’ their electors.

135 Anon., The Aerostatick Stage Balloon, pub. William Wells (23 Dec. 1783), BM Satires 6284, MN: 1868,0808.5067; (Illustration 7) Thomas Rowlandson, Sir Cecil Wray in the Pillory, pub. Hannah Humphrey (7 May 1784), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittlesey Collection, The Elisha Whittlesey Fund, 1959, Accession Number: 59.533.1765. For other caricatures in which House is the archetypal plebeian crowd member, see Anon., Frontispiece, Mr Fox Addressing His Friends From the King’s Arms Tavern, pub. Anon., Periodical (14 Feb. 1784), BM Satires 6423, MN: J.2,103; Anon., The Babes in the Wood or Coalition Rondeau, pub. Hannah Humphrey (28 June 1784), BM Satires 6628, MN: J.4,78; Anon., Proteus ye 2nd in Several Among his Many Publick Characters, pub. B. Pownall (9 Oct. 1783), BM Satires 6265, MN: 1868,0808.5042; Anon., The Rival Quacks, pub. B. Walwyn (2 Feb. 1784), BM Satires 6398, MN: 1868,0808.5126; Samuel Collings, Carlo Khan’s Triumphal Entry

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first print broadly orders Fox’s supporters by their social status. While the top rung has been reserved for the disgraced Lady Grace Elliot and her female companions of equally ‘damaged reputations’, his aristocratic associates, Fox occupies the middle rung along with his former failed-coalition allies, Lord North, the duke of Portland and Edmund Burke, his political associates. Contrasting representations of the devil and Pope Pious VI have been included to further discredit Fox.

Most relevant to this investigation is the third balloon rung, which accommodates Fox’s plebeian associates, including House and the other notorious lower-order symbols, Jeffrey Dunstan, the mayor of Garret; and the London quacks, Dr Gustavus Katterfelto and Dr James Graham who is accompanied by his assistant Vestina ‘the Goddess of health’. On this rung of lower-order symbols, House takes central place directly below Fox. Although House’s inclusion alone could be considered a significant testament to his pictorial power as Westminster’s most identifiable plebeian Fox supporter, the make-up of the balloon passengers implies that Wells’s print is criticising Fox’s associates and supporters. The print’s title, specifically ‘Aerostatick’, suggests that Fox’s political ascendency is grounded, and he resultantly cannot reach the heights of political power carrying its current passengers, a dead weight, on board. Though the balloon passengers are ordered in rungs, they collectively contribute to Fox’s failure to launch. Wells’s print was published on 23 December 1783, before the commencement of the general election on 24 March 1784. Likely in testament to his efforts in the 1780 Westminster election, caricaturists saw in House an effective discrediting symbol of the lower orders.

No artwork better epitomises the lower-order nature of House’s locale, clientele, and his publican status, than The Humours of St. Giles by Johann Heinrich Ramberg (Illustration 6). One of the only prints to depict House within his Intrepid Fox tavern, he is


137 The three women of ‘damaged reputation’ include: Lady Seymour Dorothy Worsley, who lost a case of ‘criminal conversation’ brought about by her husband; Mary Robinson, the poet, actress and ‘sexualised celebrity’; and the Scottish courtisan, writer and alleged French spy, Grace Elliott: M. Dorothy George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum. Vol. V (1935), BM Satires: 6284, MN: 1868,0808.5067. For a depiction of Fox and Pitt as the archetypal quack doctors see Anon., The Rival Quacks, pub. B. Walwyn (2 Feb. 1784), BM Satires 6398, MN: 1868,0808.5126.


captured hunched over, smoking a pipe, and in the process of serving a glass of gin to a female customer. Significantly, this is one of the only prints in which House is depicted as the publican master of ceremonies, he is the figure of authority within the scene. Outside the tavern, a cross section of lower-order Westminster is visible; a bare-breasted woman – likely a prostitute – sits inebriated on the floor while a well-dressed gentleman attempts to touch her. In turn the gentleman is pick-pocketed by a young street urchin, behind whom stands a stout butcher selling his meats. To convey the full range of House’s clientele, a clergyman also queues, patiently awaiting his drink. Further in the background, and to additionally signify the impoliteness and vulgarity of House’s home, a young child urinates in the street, and two men encircle each other with raised fists. The signpost of House’s tavern, decorated with a fox, is visible and is also adorned with a small carved figure likely signifying Bacchus the Greco–Roman god of wine and festivity.141 Interestingly, Ramberg’s print was not published until 1788, after House’s death, while not directly relevant to the election of 1784, *The Humours of St. Giles* serves to portray contemporary perceptions of House’s tavern that would likely have existed in 1784.142

141 The carved figure also likely signified that the establishment could serve wine and spirits.
142 There was a Westminster by-election held in 1788, and the House signifier was likely resurrected to discredit Fox’s campaign.
This discrediting plebeian line of attack was utilised throughout the 1784 Westminster contest, most notably in *Sir Cecil Wray in the Pillory* (Illustration 7), and *Mr Fox Addressing His Friends*. Rowlandson’s print places House directly behind Fox, his head tilted back as he leads the crowd’s cries against Wray. The placement of House, directly beneath Fox’s flag inscribed ‘The Rights of the Commons’ is important, and it speaks to House’s significance as an identifiable signifier of the mob and Fox’s lower-order support base.143 Rowlandson’s House is not overly caricatured and is relatively sympathetic. As its title suggests, *Mr Fox Addressing His Friends*, which was utilised as a frontispiece, depicts Fox addressing a crowd of his plebeian Westminster supporters. Identifiable among the crowd of ‘distinctive occupational types’ including a rat-catcher, a lamplighter, a butcher, and a chimney sweep, are House and Dunstan.144 In visual culture, House and Dunstan, ‘because of their bizarre physical appearance’, as Brewer argues in the context of the mock Garret elections, ‘made a true caricature of the plebs possible’.145 Depicting House alongside Dunstan – arguably the most grotesque and identifiable symbol of the Garret elections – serves to drag House’s

143 Sir Cecil Wray was Fox’s Pittite 1784 Westminster election rival.


Westminster activities into the carnivalesque and mock sphere of Garret and thus belittles House’s actual Westminster electioneering. While the scene’s title is descriptive of the illustrated scene, one word in particular, that being ‘Friends’, defines the assumed sociable plebeian-Foxite relationship that dominated the second mode of anti-House and anti-Fox attack.

6. House: An Encourager of Impoliteness and Sinful Excess

The second mode of anti-House caricature assaults weaponised House’s impolite plebeian attributes, namely alcoholism, swearing and cheating, to drag the Foxite campaign into the realm of impolite sin. The Celebrated Sam House can be considered the best illustration of the publican as the archetypal impolite and drunken figure that was utilised by caricaturists in this second mode of attack. Its title likely ironic – the print presents an image of a swaying House who has perhaps taken one too many gulps from his overflowing tankard. One could also read the image as a depiction of House’s potential for violence; rather than swaying, House could be seen as preparing to launch an attack, with one heel poised off the ground in preparation. The open and pointing hand gesture could also be viewed as an attempt to beckon an individual into conflict. Marc Baer certainly views the print in such terms, claiming that the work conveys House’s ‘threatening image through consciously unfashionable dress and demeanour’.

There are accounts that attest to House’s ability to retaliate with aggression if challenged or attacked, yet he was not recorded as the instigator of violence. A specific incident involving Sir Cecil Wray’s sailor-supporters in 1784 is included in his anonymous biography. Canvassing at a hustings in Covent Garden, House entered Hood and Wray’s corner, which inspired one of the ‘banditti’ to make a ‘blow with a bludgeon at Sam’s bald head’. Having dodged the assault, House, rather than fleeing the scene, challenged the men and exclaimed: ‘let the best of you turn out, and I’ll fight him’. Yet, to ascribe threat to House’s demeanour and appearance in the print is perhaps a step too far. House’s appearance was certainly distinctive; to audiences outside of his locality, and indeed, outside of his social order, his appearance could have been deemed ‘threatening’ from its sheer deviation from the acceptable norms of appearance. There is one recorded incident – admittedly a source of retrospective memory – of House wandering beyond his own locality to a part of London where he was not known; his unusual appearance and dress...
elicited ‘tricks and insults’ from some of the locals, which led House to retreat and declare ‘that it was d—d hard a man could not dress as he pleased for the benefit of his health, without being treated like a madman’.150

Beyond his appearance, House’s proclivity for swearing, one of Dana Rabin’s listed drink-induced sins, could also have been deemed threatening and impolite by his contemporaries; Wilson writes that House ‘had so habituated himself to that disgraceful practice, that he could not express himself otherwise: it was the only language he said he understood’.151 Swearing and the use of ‘slang’ language may not have been an uncommon practice among the lower orders and House’s patrons; so extensive was the range and volume of taboo lexis that Francis Grose published the first edition of his Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue in 1785 to provide its readers with contemporary translations and descriptions of the most used vulgarities.152 The political classes, however, could be considered more averse to the practice.153 During an alleged meeting of Foxites at the Shakespeare Tavern in 1784, House was called over to the duke of Rutland’s table by Major Stanhope, who enquired as to whether House could converse without swearing? House’s response was thus, ‘B—st your eyes, would you have a man speak in any other language but what he is a master of?’154 As a result, House was denied an audience with the duke. House clearly had aspects to his personality that lent themselves to the medium of caricature. The anonymous The Celebrated Sam House was likely designed to demean House and therefore discredit his political activities and his chosen political representative, Fox. In terms of House’s depicted relationship with alcohol, his foaming tankard and swaying stance suggest he is inebriated, however, by all accounts he was not a heavy drinker and had reason to detest the over-consumption of alcohol.155 House’s wife seemingly suffered from alcoholism, and although ‘he was a votary to the jolly god [of wine] Bacchus, he would not suffer his Cara Sposa to be a worshipper’.156 Though House himself may not have been an avid consumer of alcohol, he was, as already established, an avid provider of ale in support of Fox.

Alcohol and drunkenness, given House’s occupation, were of particular interest to hostile satirists. Aside from caricature, mock ballads, playbills and songs described House’s alcohol supply; one such verse declared: ‘Call at my house (my name is House), and you shall be

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151 Wonderful Characters, ed. Wilson, iii, 191–2; Langford, ‘Politeness’, 326. House’s swearing in the presence of establishment politicians especially emphasises his ‘transitional’ status as political but not polite; as Lawrence Klein argues, ‘vulgarity’ was one ‘antonym of politeness’: see Klein, ‘Politeness for Plebs’, 365. For Rabin, see n. 159.
152 Francis Grose, A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1785). Swearing, specifically the use of ‘Damn’, is visible in prints depicting Wilkes’s 1760s electoral campaigns; see Anon., The Brentford Election.
153 Aristocratic swearing is satirised in Frances Burney, Evelina, Or, the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance Into the World, In Two Volumes (1779). Polite and sensible language is central to Evelina’s development in the novel, yet the impolite attributes of the noble Lord Merton, namely swearing, drinking and gambling are effectively used to distinguish him from other polite characters and to cast him as the villain of the piece: see Kja Isaacson, ‘Polite Language and Female Social Agency in Frances Burney’s Evelina’, Lumen, xxxi (2012), 73–89.
154 Charles Manners, 4th duke of Rutland was a supporter of William Pitt the Younger: Anon., Life of House, 32.
155 The nuances of House’s relationship with alcohol had no place in visual culture; as a lower order publican it served caricaturists to depict him regularly with a tankard in hand, and as an avid consumer of his own product.
welcome to drink of the Ale which I have refined and of the punch that I have mingled.'

‘Drunkenness and gambling’, according to George Trevelyan, were among the worst faults of society ‘when Fox was its leader’. Trevelyan’s work also epitomises the degree of insulation that was awarded to the aristocracy to pursue their vices without public scrutiny or oversight in the 18th century; intoxication in particular was a ‘private vice’, ‘rather a moral than a political evil’ as Henry Fielding put it. For the remainder of non-aristocratic 18th-century society, however, and as Dana Rabin’s work explores, utilising a range of contemporary moral and puritanical pamphlets, drunkenness could be perceived as ‘a sin which turns a man wholly to sin’; through excessive drinking one initiated a ‘chain of sin’, which included swearing, disrespecting the sabbath, lost productivity, violence, theft, and even murder. Plebeian drunkenness in particular was perceived as an encourager of ‘political mischiefs’, which in turn contributed to the breaking down of familial, societal and gender structures. Excessive drinking and swearing could also be considered impolite pursuits and not examples of effective improvements in social behaviours.

What the Westminster election of 1784 did, by virtue of Fox’s reliance upon the lower-order vote and the ensuing Foxite-plebeian sociability, was to drag the once ‘private’ aristocratic vices of the Foxites into the realm of ‘political sin’, public scrutiny and impolite behaviour. In visual culture, Sam House, an easily recognisable symbol of the lower orders of Westminster, and a publican on top of that, was the perfect anti-Fox conduit for hostile caricaturists. House’s alcohol provision was used in caricature to associate the Foxites with excess and plebeian sociability, and to exaggerate the effects of alcohol on the actions and polling ethics of his lower-order voters, which dually criticised Foxite canvassing and electioneering as an encourager of electoral fraud.

In terms of Foxite excess and drunkenness, the best pictorial examples are Isaac Cruickshank’s *Hell in an Uproar* (Illustration 8), the George Humphrey published, *Returning From Brooks’s*, and the A. Aitken published *The Tipling Dutchess Returning From Canvassing*. In Cruickshank’s print – which was published in 1790 yet still features House and references a Westminster election – House has been transformed into a barrel of his trademark ale, the container’s tap is open and positioned to give the impression of his urination. Alongside House, and similarly engulfed in the...
flames of hell are other signifiers of Foxite excess including EO tables, die, playing cards and punch bowls. House’s provision of ale and thus his encouragement of drunkenness, was clearly deemed by Cruickshank to be among the Foxites’ worst vices. Meanwhile, in Humphrey’s print, the prince of Wales has over-imbibed; as the caricature’s title describes, he and Fox have just returned from Brooks’s club. For Fox and the prince to be intoxicated within their isolated sociable hub, or travelling in such a state from it, was not a diversion from aristocratic ‘private sin’; what drags the actions of the aristocrat and the royal into the realm of ‘public sin’ is House’s presence, and depicted intimacy with the prince of Wales. Such an example of intimacy – House carries the drunken prince – would be highly unlikely, yet caricature served to pictorially implant such an image of artificial plebeian–Foxite sociability into the consciousness of its audience.

In the same mould, although going a step further, Aitken’s The Tipling Dutchess once again places House in the presence of intoxicated aristocratic Foxites. The mantle of intoxication in this instance has been passed to the duchess, who is being assisted by Fox and a figure perhaps intended to be her husband, the duke of Devonshire. Leading the pack of Foxites, in the guise of a link-boy is House, both literally, and metaphorically down the road of intoxication and sin. Dialogue is utilised in Aitken’s print to convey the duchess’s descent into plebeian sin and impoliteness; vulgar language, a noted sin and example of impolite behaviour, is visible in both the duchess’s and her unnamed supporter’s dialogue.

[Duchess]: ‘My eyes & limbs I shall spew on the Duke tonight’; [Unnamed supporter]: ‘make hast Sam her Grace is taking short in the poop’. Improper sexual relations provide a further layer of disgrace to the scene and adds an additional link to their ‘chain of sin’; the duchess’s bare-breasted portrayal, in the presence of Fox and the lowly House is completely improper. The duchess’s femininity and sexuality were specifically and consistently used in relation to the lower orders to discredit her Westminster campaigning efforts, and she and House were more than once depicted in a scene of inappropriate intimacy. In testament to the power and effect of such satires, the duchess, along with the other ‘Women of Westminster’, all but stopped publicly campaigning thereafter, operating instead within their own elite circles. The duchess of Devonshire was commonly depicted in the guise of a prostitute in caricature, this portrayal not only offered a commentary on the duchess’s...
alleged sexual treating of voters, but as Noelle Gallagher argues, the link between prostitution and disease or infection, more subtly presented the duchess as being politically and morally contaminated. By association therefore, the duchess’s depicted ‘physiological and moral decay’ infected Fox’s own credibility and that of his campaign.

Rowlandson’s *Lords of the Bedchamber* (Illustration 9) is often referenced as one of the most intimate depictions of Fox and House’s relationship. Placed in the privacy of the

Illustration 8: Isaac Cruikshank, *Hell in an Uproar or an Express from the Committee*, pub. S.W. Fores (c.1790), Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, Accession Number: B1981.25.1234, sheet 22.5cm × 39.7cm.


172 The notion of disease or infection was also used to attack the ‘bribery, pandering, and other dubious campaign practices’ associated with Fox’s campaign: see Noelle Gallagher, *Itch, Clap, Pox: Venereal Disease in the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven, CT, 2019), 77–81. For the use of venereal disease in caricatures depicting Fox and the duchess, and for the notion of Fox’s campaign being ‘infected’ both morally and politically, see Isaac Cruikshank, *Carlo Kan*, pub. Anon. (1784), BM Satires 6497, MN: 1868,0808.5349; Anon., *The Devonshire method to restore a lost member*, pub. J. Langham (14 Apr. 1784), BM Satires 6530, MN: 1868,0808.5247.

173 Renata Lanahas also argued that the duchess’s portrayal as a prostitute rendered her a ‘nonentity’ and merely a puppet of her male employer, in this case Fox: see Lana, ‘Women and Foxite Strategy’, 54–5. For the duchess as a prostitute type, and as a willing puppet of Fox, see William Dent, *Nil desperandum, or the hands of comfort*, pub. Anon. (c. Apr. 1784), BM Satires 6494, MN: 1868,0808.5364; Anon., *The Covent Garden deluge*, pub. Rambler’s Magazine (1 June 1784), BM Satires 6611, MN: 1868,0808.5283.

duchess of Devonshire's private bedchambers – a wholly unsuitable setting for the trio to share – Fox physically pets a doting House, emphasising their generous master and willing-servant dynamic. For House to be present in the private chambers is an effective juxtaposition of the publican and the duchess’s opposing social orders and would have been completely improper. However, the lesser-known *The Election Tate à Tate*, published by Hannah Humphrey, depicts one of the most intimate House-duchess encounters. In this instance it is the duchess who invades the lower-order setting of the publican. Not only are the pair situated in Covent Garden, the heart of plebeian Westminster – and a theatrical hub and epicentre of prostitution – but the duchess joins House in a tankard of his trademark lower-order ale. Unlike the majority of other House-duchess prints, the pair in this instance are depicted alone in a moment of private sociability. Yet, while the scene may seem innocent there is a sexual undertone to the print. Whereas House sits under a flag emblazoned with ‘Fox and Liberty’, the duchess shows her support by wearing a ‘Fox’ rosette. It is the duchess’s bow, placed within her cleavage, that drags the scene into the realm of public sin; the direction of House’s gaze and his smirking face delineate his

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175 Anon., *The Election Tate à Tate*, pub. Hannah Humphrey (1 Apr. 1784), BM Satires 6487, MN: 1868,0808.5218.

sociable and sexual motivations. From prints such as The Election Tate à Tate one would therefore assume that House and the duchess, much like House and Fox, shared a relatively convivial and intimate relationship, even though this depicted intimacy was very likely an invention of satirists.

Despite the pictorial familiarity of the pair, and accusations in contemporary literature that the duo were to accompany one another to a celebration held at Devonshire House; and as recorded in a ‘found’ Pittite letter, that the pair were going to ‘elope’ with one another, there is reason to believe that they never actually met in person. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest – admittedly from House’s own biography – that the publican went to extreme lengths to avoid canvassing alongside the duchess so that the hostile press would have no ammunition relating to their alleged attachment. According to House’s biography: ‘though his canvassing duty led him to various perambulations through different parts of Westminster, he cautiously avoided going to the part of the city where he thought her Grace might be engaged in the same business’. When the duchess’s carriage inadvertently met House on Wardour Street, he is said to have deliberately misrecognised her to avoid any scandalous reports; although, House’s biography does offer a contradiction, recording House as saying: ‘God bless her Grace, I know her well, and she knows me too.’ Of course, the pair could have been aware of each other without having met or fostered a personal relationship; their visual representations in caricature would have ensured this.

7. House and Electoral Corruption

Aside from pictorially promoting Foxite excess, drunkenness, and improper sexuality, House’s provision of ale was also depicted as an encourager of illegitimate Foxite voting in visual culture – a significant precursor of the later scrutiny. The Foxite camp were accused of bribery, encouraging multiple single-voting, and of importing illegitimate labourers from outside the constituency boundaries to poll for Fox; ‘Spitalfields weavers’ were recorded as...
accounting for the majority of Fox’s ‘bad votes’ in a Morning Post article of 1784. 184 ‘Bribery and perjury’, wrote Hanger, ‘walk hand in hand; for men, who had no pretensions to vote, were as plenty to be found in the Garden as turnips, who at a moderate rate, were induced to poll’. 185 In caricature, House, and his role as the provider of alcohol, were depicted as key encouragers of this form of electoral fraud, and thus tarnished the legitimacy of Fox’s campaign. Rowlandson’s Wit’s Last Stake (Illustration 10) – similar in tone to Ramberg’s The Humours of St. Giles (Illustration 6) – is set in bustling lower-order Peter Street, the location of House’s Intrepid Fox tavern, and presents Fox, the duchess, and House in the process of using their chosen methods of electioneering to secure plebeian votes. 186 The


185 Hanger, Life, Adventures, and Opinions, 197–8; Perceptions of voter eligibility were relatively fluid in Westminster and could vary among officials; some allowed all freeholders to vote, while others permitted only freeholders with a property rated at £10 per year to poll: see Baer, Radical Westminster, 17.

186 (Illustration 10) Thomas Rowlandson, Wit’s Last Stake or The Cobling Voters and Abject Canvassers, pub. Anon. (22 Apr. 1784), The Metropolitan Museum, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1959,
duchess uses her femininity, sexuality and wealth to gain the votes of a cobbler, presenting a bribe for an imagined shoe fitting with her bare leg in full view; Fox meanwhile has sunk to his knees as the ‘grand commoner’. 187 Most significant, however, is House’s role, he forces a tankard of ale down the throat of an already inebriated voter, suggesting that this is not the man’s first visit to the trio; the lengthy queue of voters awaiting the same treatment from House implies that this was a popular and understood Foxite treating strategy. 188 A contemporary, and likely satirical description of House’s dwelling bolsters the theory that free or reduced-price alcohol was the primary motivation for lower-order electors to visit the Intrepid Fox and to express support for House’s patron: ‘the damsels surround his bar; yea, the virgins of the Gravel-pits drink their gin with weeping eyes; and sympathise with the Patriot [House], for the sake of another quaterm’. 189

Encouraging the consumption of alcohol to bolster Foxite-plebeian relations also worked in reverse, with the lower orders pushing their own class of spirits and ales on the Foxites; to successfully solicit Westminster votes, Hanger recorded that in the evening a canvasser had ‘to drink a pail-full of all sorts of liquors in going the rounds’. 190 The duchess of Devonshire took it upon herself to integrate with a group of dining Westminster tradesmen by partaking in a toast of ‘Irish Whiskey Punch’; the result of her attempts and perhaps her consumption was the notorious incident in which she solicited kisses in return for votes. 191 Though it is easy to assume that the weight of power the aristocratic Foxites held over the likes of House was dominant, during an election, especially in the relatively free borough of Westminster, the balance of power could briefly shift, with the lower orders exerting a temporary degree of authority over their superiors. 192

In caricature, therefore, House was utilised consistently by hostile caricaturists to associate Fox and his Westminster campaign with stereotypical plebeian attributes, be it excessive consumption, impolite and sinful behaviour, or illegitimate electioneering tactics. House embodied all these attributes, he was large, uncouth, and unconventionally dressed and could easily be portrayed as violent and intimidating, as was the case in The Celebrated Sam House; he provided and sold alcohol and thus he was easily tethered to excessive alcohol consumption, and to his distinctly lower-order clientele who took advantage of his generosity and reduced-price drinks. Caricaturists saw in House an easily recognisable symbol of the lower orders that held certain characteristics and mannerisms that were easily exaggerated and manipulated in prints; as the contemporary Thomas Hastings noted: ‘it is not

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186 (continued) Accession Number: 59.533.62; also held in the British Museum: see BM Satires 6548, MN: 1868,0808.5260; Soho, ed. Clinch, 137–8; Pindar, Remarkable Biography, 24.


188 The canvassing of the Foxite trio is criticised in the print’s subtitle, they are described as ‘abject canvassers’, see (Illustration 10) Wit’s Last Stake or The Cobbling Voters and Abject Canvassers.

189 Hastings, Wars of Westminster, 24.

190 Hanger, Life, Adventures, and Opinions, 198.

191 Stokes, Devonshire House Circle, 203–4; the duchess’s exchange of kisses in return for votes can be considered yet another form of Foxite electoral treating of the lower orders; see Anon., The London Quarterly Review, Volume CI: January–April, 1857 (New York, 1857), 29.

192 Rauser, ‘The Butcher-Kissing Duchess, 29–30; for Fox kissing the backsides of his plebeian electors, see Anon., A New Way To Secure A Majority; or No Dirty Work Comes Amiss, pub. William Wells (3 May 1784), BM Satires 6572, MN: 1868,0808.5288; William Dent, Advice to the Electors of Westminster, or the Case as it is, pub. James Aitken (26 June 1790), BM Satires 7655, MN: 1868,0808.5945.

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needful to describe the portrait of Sir Sam, since it may be seen in most of the Print-shops in Westminster, in company with the emphatical figure of his fast friend Mr. Fox'. 193 One of the only prints to have deviated from the archetypal image of House, with its exaggerated and dwarven characterisation of the publican, was published by George Humphrey, Returning From Brooks's. 194

Beyond his pictorial association with impolite and sinful characteristics, House embodied the theme of lower-order political engagement and contribution – which had its roots in the mock Garret elections – that a mere publican was so active in Westminster and recognised by politicians such as Fox was likely considered threatening to the established political order. House’s transitional role, and his continued assaults in caricature, speak not only of the Pittites’ desire to remove Fox from his Westminster seat, but also of wider contemporary responses to non-elite political participation in the context of the growing Association Movement of the 1770s and 1780s following the American Wars of Independence, and the threat of lower order violence from the likes of the ‘King Mob’ witnessed during the Gordon Riots of 1780. 195 For Langford, the Westminster election of 1784 did not represent a move away from violence and towards a more polite and disciplined approach to politics; the threat of radicalism and lower-order political contribution and indeed disorder, still cast a threatening shadow over the likes of House by 1784. 196

Clearly, the continued association of House with Fox, in reality, and in caricature, had differing effects on the lower orders and the political classes. In terms of securing the votes of lower-order Westminster, House’s canvassing, provision of free alcohol, and his ferrying of voters to hustings seemingly had a positive and real impact for Fox, who won 49.1% and 51.2% of the total votes of ‘dealers’ and ‘manufacturers’ respectively. 197 At the close of the 30-day poll on 17 May 1784, Fox was successful in beating Wray and taking Westminster’s second seat with 6,126 votes to the latter’s 5,895; Hood was the ultimate victor, winning with 6,588 votes. 198 For the political classes, however, the continued pictorial assault against Fox, in which he was continually depicted as socialising with his social inferiors, partaking in plebeian excess, and an encourager of electoral fraud, resulted in an official scrutiny that would keep Fox from his Westminster seat for ten months; as a discrediting caricature symbol House had perhaps been effective. 199 The attitude of the political classes towards House, and thus towards Fox by association, is best epitomised by the previously recorded attempted meeting between House and the duke of Rutland, whereby Major Stanhope,

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193 Hastings, Wars of Westminster, 6.
194 Given the unorthodoxy of Humphrey’s depiction of House it is very likely that the publican’s physical characteristics were deliberately conflated with those of the ‘knock-kneed dwarf’, Jeffrey Dunstan.
197 See ‘Table.6, Voters by Occupational Group’, in Harvey, Green and Corfield, ‘Westminster Man’, 175.
198 HPC, 1754–90, i, 337.
199 For House’s support for Fox post scrutiny, see Anon., The Mumping Fox or Reynard Turn’d Beggar, pub. E. Rich (22 June 1784), BM Satires 6624, MN: 1868,0808.5348; Anon., A New Way To Deside The Scrutany, pub. Edward Shirlock (14 June 1784), BM Satires 6619, MN: 1868,0808.5344.

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upon hearing House’s swearing, and likely viewing his appearance, denied House even the opportunity of approaching the duke’s table.\(^{200}\) As one anti-Foxite newspaper put it: ‘when titled persons deign to become associates with the lowest publicans, to copy their manners, and meanly solicit their favours, the sarcasms and indecencies to which they expose themselves cannot be too plainly held out as the just rewards of an affected humility and specious condescension.’\(^{201}\)

There are, of course, other factors in anti-Foxite caricature to take into account which formed part of the broader propaganda war. Fox’s infamous India Bills and their humiliating defeat in the Lords plagued him throughout his career, while Fox’s own aristocratic and private vices, primarily gambling, have been argued by Phyllis Deutsch as also contributing to Fox’s negative caricature image.\(^{202}\) ‘What was new in the 1780s’ according to Deutsch, ‘was the growing perception of the link between personal vices and one’s suitability to govern.’\(^{203}\) The year 1784 was not only caricature’s ‘\textit{annus mirabilis},’ but it also marked a turning point, with a new set of political values – that no longer tolerated ‘libertine profligacy’ – coming to the fore; as Amelia Rauser argues: ‘public and private virtue were increasingly seen to reinforce one another.’\(^{204}\) A focused investigation into House, however, has proved that Fox’s ‘private’ aristocratic sins were not mutually exclusive from those of plebeian Westminster; picturing Fox alongside House and plebeian Westminster served primarily to convey how uncouth, excessive, and similar to the lowest rungs of society, the vices of the aristocratic Foxites truly were.

This article has attempted to shed light on the understudied Sam House through the lens of visual culture and the 1784 general election. Whereas tentative steps were made by Brewer in the late 1970s to investigate House in the context of the mock Garret elections, alongside the ‘mayor’, Jeffrey Dunstan, this is the first article to concentrate exclusively on House and to provide a more complete biography of Samuel House, ‘republican publican’, the archetypal plebeian, and the derogatory caricature symbol. Though House and the duchess’s relationship may have been an invention of satirists, there is indeed cause to believe that Fox and House did share a form of friendship beyond the basic candidate-canvaser relationship and in spite of their contrasting social orders. As recorded in House’s biography, upon the publican’s death on 23 April 1785, which was possibly a result of pneumonia caused by his ‘light-dress’ that served him ‘summer and winter’, Fox, having been informed of House’s deteriorating condition by Sir John Elliot, went ‘immediately’ to see House and ‘sat by his bedside a considerable time’.\(^{205}\) Yet, even with House on the precipice of death, caricature continued to attack the publican, his relationship with Fox, and his role as the all-important supplier of ale.\(^{206}\) The anonymous, \textit{The HOUSE of Feasting is Become a HOUSE of Mourning!!!!} sees the publican dead, laid on a cask in his tavern’s cellar, with a weeping Fox at his side, who once again has dropped to his knees as in \textit{The Wit’s Last Stake} (Illustration 10) likely lamenting the loss of the most important source of his plebeian

\(^{200}\) Anon., \textit{Life of House}, 32.


\(^{203}\) Deutsch, ‘Moral Trespass’, 639.


\(^{206}\) Although, one could read the image as commentary on the pair’s friendship during House’s final moments.
So significant was House as an identifiable caricature symbol that upon his death a wax impression of his face was taken to preserve his likeness. As a contemporary verse put it:

Sam’s Goodness is known all over the town,
Tho’an oddity, still he is clever;
It’s for his honest heart, where dress has no part,
Fox will thank Sam, and love him for ever,
Fox will thank Sam, and love him for ever.


208 *The Annual Register, for the Years 1784–1785* (1787), 231.

209 Anon. *The Wit of the Day, or The Humours of Westminster* (1784), 146–7; For less sympathetic poems following House’s death, see *Morning Post*, 11 May 1785, p. 4; *Public Advertiser*, 4 May 1785, 2.