

## **Why Six Acts?**

*The Six Acts project is an online platform to crowd source ideas for fundamental improvements to how democracy is conducted. We are doing this because we believe that a) it is urgently needed and b) that continuing a tradition of radical reform is the most fitting way to honour the memory of those who fought and died at Peterloo and the legacy they left us.*

### **But Why Six?**

The shock events which took place on St Peter's Field on 16 August 1819 resonated across the country, causing widespread outrage. An already repressive, and now somewhat panic-stricken, government rushed to implement new measures to counter what it saw as the ever-present threat of sedition and rebellion posed by Reformers.

Throughout the turbulent period preceding Peterloo, the government's spies reported radical meetings, detachments drilling on the moors and rumours of arms being made and concealed. Radical newspapers and pamphlets were seen as stoking revolutionary fervour.

The government's response was to introduce legislation, in late 1819, in the form of what became known as the 'Six Acts'. These were designed to severely restrict radical activity and choke off any perceived threat to the established political and social order. In brief, the Six Acts prohibited any drilling and training in the use of arms and allowed the searching of private houses and arrest for the possession of unauthorised weapons. Public meetings of more than 50 people were forbidden unless authorised by a magistrate and music and banners were banned from any such meetings. Stamp duties were increased and extended from newspapers to other cheap periodicals commonly used to spread Radical ideas. Publications seen as either blasphemous or seditious could be confiscated and penalties for offenders were increased. Indicted Reformers were deprived of the right to delay their trial. All of these measures had a serious impact on the Reform movement.

As we prepare to commemorate and celebrate Peterloo two hundred years later, most of us would probably agree that we too are living through a period of political ferment. We have certainly achieved universal suffrage and a notionally democratic system but, according to a recent opinion poll, an alarming percentage of the population feels that the current system is not fit for purpose. It would seem entirely appropriate that, as a tribute to our predecessors and as a riposte to the repressive Six Acts imposed upon them by an uncaring government, together we will compile our own proposals for a new list of Six Acts.

This can be our contribution to achieving a more secure and representative platform from which to carry democracy forward and truly fulfil the aspirations of those who came to St Peter's Field.

### **Who we are**

The Six Acts Project is a Manchester-based initiative made up of campaigners, artists, authors, academics, journalists and democracy advocates emerging from the Peterloo Memorial Campaign. The Six Acts project rejects a party political agenda and seeks a common front to renew, strengthen and innovate our democratic practices.