

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

SIR JOHN BRUNNER, RADICAL PLUTOCRAT
1842–1919

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONFERENCE ON BRITISH STUDIES
BIOGRAPHICAL SERIES

Editor: PETER STANSKY

Consultant Editor: G. R. ELTON

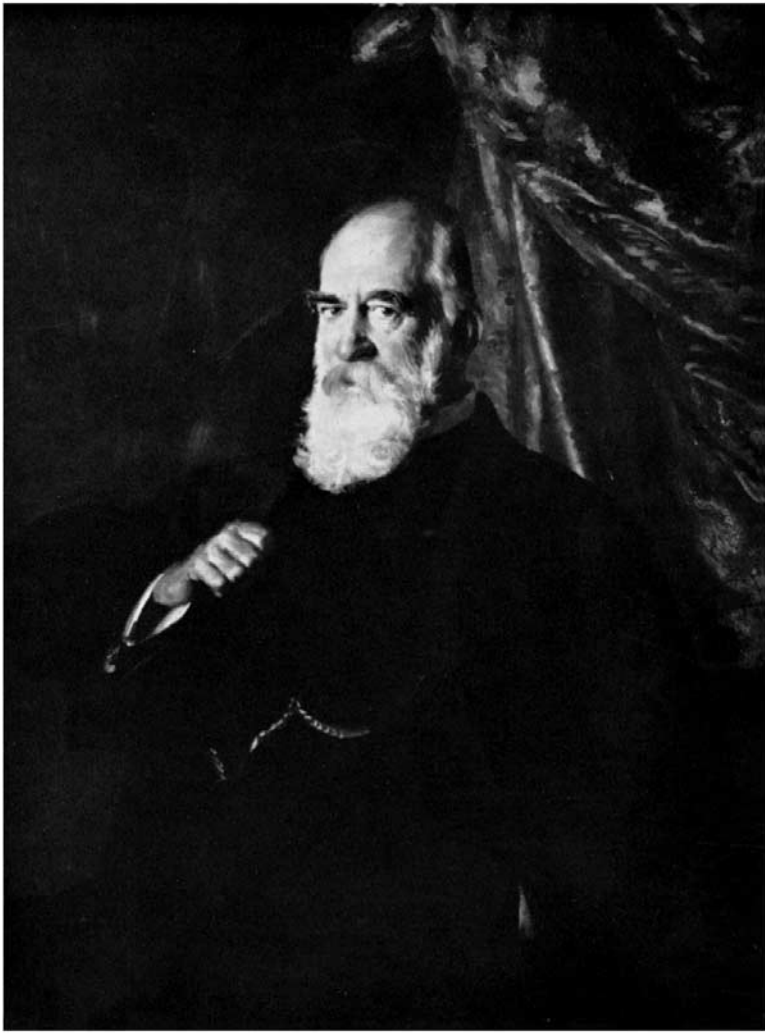
Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Sir John Brunner by Augustus John, 1906

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

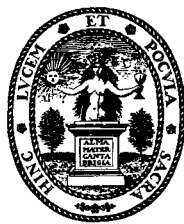
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

SIR JOHN BRUNNER
RADICAL PLUTOCRAT
1842–1919

STEPHEN E. KOSS

Barnard College, Columbia University



CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1970

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521079068

© Cambridge University Press 1970

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1970

This digitally printed version 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-07906-8 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-08564-9 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TO MY PARENTS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

List of plates	<i>page</i> viii
Preface	ix
1 A nonconformist youth	1
2 Captain of industry	23
3 A Chamberlain man	46
4 A brief and troubled Parliament	69
5 The Northwich by-election, 1887	89
6 Remember Mitchelstown	115
7 The socialist challenge	141
8 From Gladstone to Campbell-Bannerman	162
9 Reaction and revival	184
10 Peace, retrenchment and reform	211
11 Keeper of the faith	238
12 The death of a Liberal	270
Appendix 1 Letter to the Rt Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, G.C.B., M.P.	290
Appendix 2 A Letter on Liberal policy	293
Selected bibliography	296
Index	303

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PLATES

Portrait of Sir John Brunner by Augustus John	<i>frontispiece</i>
John T. Brunner in 1885	<i>facing page 50</i>
Brunner and Mond	<i>between pages 168–9</i>
Winnington Hall in pre-industrial days	168–9
Winnington Hall in the twentieth century	168–9
Cartoon of Brunner by Arthur Hacker, R.A., 1909	168–9

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

One may feel justly confident that Sir John Brunner would have been the last to mind the neglect his memory has suffered. Even at his most self-conscious, he was concerned not with posterity but with principles. Content to march behind others in the nineteenth-century army of progress, he sought neither office to increase his personal authority nor honors to immortalize his name. The popularity he enjoyed among the electors of Cheshire's Northwich division was most gratifying in that it gave him for twenty-five years a seat in Parliament, where he might strive to accomplish good. The wealth he attained as co-founder of Brunner, Mond and Company, which soon established itself as one of the world's leading producers of alkali, afforded him the means to promote the causes in which he believed. His ambition, to improve the world in which he lived before he left it to claim his reward in the next, perhaps makes him a difficult figure for the modern reader to comprehend; but it is an ambition that makes him all the more representative of the age to which he belonged and, therefore, all the more worthy of historical study.

The extent to which the concept and content of politics has changed since Brunner's day can be measured by the fact that a man regarded as the devil incarnate by many of his contemporaries should today run the risk of appearing the subject of hagiography. The propertied gentlemen upon whom he intruded in Cheshire society thought him a rude upstart, his Radical doctrines pernicious, and his chemical works a public nuisance. Those who sat across from him in the House of Commons—indeed, the more whiggish of his own colleagues—thought him too defiant of established interests, too eager to flout political conventions, and insensitive to the duties and glories of empire. In later years the more irrational of his opponents accused him of seeking private commercial gain at the expense of national prosperity and security, and there were even those who alleged that he had stealthily purchased control of the Liberal Party with a view to scrapping the British navy. Never one to suffer gladly either fools

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

or Tories—the two were not to be confused, for Tories had a method to their madness—Brunner invited the abuse that his enemies obligingly showered upon him. In the face of presumption, he was insolent; in the face of privilege or monopoly, in-temperate. That, after all, was the hallmark of the earnest Radical and the prerogative of the self-righteous. Although it might occasionally appear otherwise, he did not engage in conflict for the sake of conflict, and was never happier than when class and party differences were subordinated to moral considerations. He lived, however, at a time when partisan emotions ran high, and he responded accordingly. His constituents, many of them his employees, applauded him as much for his pugnacity as for his paternalism. Even among family and friends, he was affectionately known to practice an authoritarianism which, however benign, was as impossible to challenge as the dictionary with which he armed himself in after-dinner conversation. To be sure, his fiery temperament did not preclude a boisterous humor, nor his impatience many gentle kindnesses. That he should, however, appear in retrospect almost a saintly creature is as much a commentary upon our times as upon his own.

Brunner was among the last of a breed which by its faith, industry, and concern for justice had done much to create the texture of Victorian society. At any given moment, he could be depended upon to champion the most advanced cause, regardless of the cost to himself, his company, or his party. But his Radical politics, like his Unitarianism, lost its dynamism and much of its wider relevance with the passing decades. Reaching a climax in his prewar campaign for naval disarmament and improved Anglo-German relations, his experiences reflected increasingly the weakening of the tradition he embodied, the frustration—one might say the futility—of the independent backbencher, and, not least of all, the problems that brought his party to ruin.

There are certain lesser known historical figures—of whom Brunner, I believe, is one—who offer new perspective upon the issues and events of their lifetimes. Such biographical subjects pose special problems of research, which could not have been overcome in the present case without the cooperation of Sir

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

Felix Brunner. In addition to placing his family papers at my disposal, Sir Felix provided comments and suggestions that saved me from committing numerous errors of fact. All the while, he respected my right to exercise independent critical judgment. Although I do not presume that he will agree with all of my conclusions, I am confident that he will welcome the spirit in which they are made. I am also deeply indebted to another of Sir John's grandsons, Mr J. B. Gold, who resourcefully ferreted out information, introduced me to several of his cousins, and proved a delightful guide to his family history. Mr Hugo Brunner, a great-grandson, gave me the encouragement of his valued friendship and the benefit of his editorial experience.

Professor Robert K. Webb of Columbia University added to the immeasurable debt of gratitude I owe him by criticizing each chapter, often more than once, and by allowing me to draw freely upon the lectures on English Unitarianism that he delivered at the Victorian Studies Centre of the University of Leicester in 1967. Since my student days, I have never ceased to marvel at the vigilant eye that he brings to bear upon a manuscript. Nor have I ever ceased to appreciate the influence he has exerted upon me as a teacher and writer of history.

Mr W. J. Reader lightened my task by providing me with copies of draft chapters from his forthcoming history of Imperial Chemical Industries. With Miss Elspeth Jervie, his knowledgeable research assistant, he did his best to help me master the commercial arrangements and technical processes in which Brunner was engaged. I am grateful to both of them for reviewing the manuscript, which, I hope, proved a useful complement to their own research.

Others, too, gave generously of their assistance. Professor Peter Stansky of Stanford University, a most thoughtful editor, offered stimulating criticism that helped me to focus my ideas. Mr D. G. O. Ayerst kindly gave me a glimpse of the material from which he is fashioning his eagerly awaited history of the *Manchester Guardian*. Dr Peter Clarke of University College, London, supplied me with references from his exhaustive research into Liberal Party organization in the north-west. Mr

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-08564-9 - Sir John Brunner Radical Plutocrat, 1842-1919

Stephen E. Koss

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

Neville Stanton allowed me to consult the records of the Lancashire, Cheshire, and Northwestern Liberal Federation. Mr Wynne Jones, assistant manager of the *Chester Chronicle*, opened archives to me. Mr Geoffrey Moore, editor of the *Northwich Chronicle*, extended courtesies that made my brief visit to Northwich and Winnington a memorable one, and introduced me to Mr A. S. Irvine of the Mond Division, ICI, who has been a fund of information. Among the many librarians upon whom I relied I must make special mention of Miss D. Tindall of the Reform Club, Mr G. Awdry of the National Liberal Club, and Mr M. R. Perkin, curator of special collections at the university library, Liverpool. I have enumerated in my bibliography those institutions and individuals who gave me the privilege of access to private papers in their possession; those who permitted me to quote unpublished materials for which they own copyright have received my private thanks.

I enjoyed an interview with Mrs Hilda Ransom, who, in 1914, became the last of Sir John's private secretaries and the first woman to serve in that capacity. Although members of the family warned her to beware his temper, she retains many fond memories, which she graciously shared with me.

The Augustus John portrait, presented in 1906 to the University Club, Liverpool, by Sir John's fellow members, is reproduced by arrangement with the Club. Like so many of John's subjects, Brunner was not flattered by his likeness, which, he protested, made him appear too full in the waistcoat. But, more than any of the other portraits of him that survive, it captures the intense gaze that invariably impressed those who watched him in debate. Other plates in the book were provided by the Brunner family and by the Information Services Department of Mond Division, ICI Ltd.

Acknowledgment is also due, and gladly made, to the American Philosophical Society for assisting my research with a grant from its Penrose Fund.

Lastly, I must thank my wife, who miraculously found time from family routines to prepare the manuscript for publication, and for whom no published words of gratitude could possibly be adequate.

STEPHEN E. KOSS