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978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

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The Creevey Papers

Thomas Creevey (1768–1838) was a Whig politician, diarist and letter-writer, whose papers provide an important source for the history of the early nineteenth century. Although a relatively poor man, he was adept at making friends with important people, and received hospitality and financial help from them. His letters are full of gossip, often indiscreet, giving a vivid picture of the society and politics of the day. They offer an interesting comparison with the papers of his contemporaries, J.W. Croker, who as a Tory was in power for most of the period in question, and Charles Greville (both available in this series). Living in Brussels at the time of Waterloo, Creevey is perhaps best remembered for his description of life there during Napoleon's 'Hundred Days'. This two-volume work edited by Sir Herbert Maxwell (1845–1937) was first published in 1903. Volume 1 covers the Napoleonic Wars and the Regency.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Creevey Papers

*A Selection from the
Correspondence and Diaries
of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.*

VOLUME 1

EDITED BY HERBERT MAXWELL



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CREEVEY PAPERS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and
Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Thomas Creevey.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and
Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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A SELECTION FROM THE CORRES-
PONDENCE & DIARIES OF THE LATE
THOMAS CREEVEY, M.P.

BORN 1768—DIED 1838

EDITED BY
THE RIGHT HON. SIR HERBERT MAXWELL
BART., M.P., LL.D., F.R.S.

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I.
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.



“How little,” exclaims Mr. Birrell, in his recent memoir of William Hazlitt, “how little is it we know about the character of a dead man we never saw!” Little enough, as a rule, of the performer, even when the part he has played has been historical; still less when his natural gifts have not availed to raise him to distinction, or circumstances refused him a place above the common run of his kind. Nevertheless it is given to certain men of subordinate importance in their day so to reveal themselves in correspondence or, more rarely, in their journals, as to leave upon him who, in after years, shall stir the venerable store and decipher the faded pages, an impression of their personality so vivid as to convince him of the writer’s character and motives.

Of such was Thomas Creevey, sometime member of Parliament for Thetford, and afterwards for Appleby—both of them pocket boroughs of the most unregenerate type. He was born in Liverpool in March, 1768, and certain allusions in his correspondence seem to show that his parents were natives of Ireland. But Creevey himself seems to have been pretty much in

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

the dark as to his own origin. He formed an early and intimate friendship with Dr. J. Currie, a distinguished physician and leading citizen of Liverpool,* who writes as follows in 1803:—

“Well, I know all about your birth and parentage. You came originally from Galloway in Scotland, and settled on the Irish coast right opposite, within sight of the sweet country you had left—you are of an ancient Scottish family in that county, now nearly extinct (except that it revives in your own person) to whom belonged the castle and manor of Castle Creevey near Glenluce (with which I am perfectly acquainted) now in the family of Lord Selkirk, I believe. Then your grandfather who was an officer in the army, if not born was certainly begotten in Scotland, and as far as Mrs. Eaton and I can ascertain the fact, in the very town of Dumfries—but that we won't be sure of.—And to come to the point, it would not be at all surprising if in the last 500 years some of our ancestors had joined issue together, and if our great-grandfathers, ten or twenty times removed, had been one and the same person!”

Now in one respect, at least, the learned doctor's statements herein will not bear examination. Castle Creavie, indeed, is in Galloway; but it is not near Glenluce, which is in Wigtownshire (Western Galloway), and it never belonged to the family of Lord Selkirk. It is a farm in Rerwick parish, in the Stewartry of Kircudbright (Eastern Galloway), distant fully fifty miles from Glenluce, and has been owned successively by different families; but not since 1646, at least, by any of the name of Creevey or Creavie. Neither is there, nor has there

* James Currie, M.D. [1756–1805], son of a Scottish minister, emigrated to Virginia in 1771, where he studied medicine. Returning to Great Britain in 1777, he continued his studies at Edinburgh University, and ultimately became the chief exponent of the cold-water cure, and the advocate of thermometrical observations in fever.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

vii

been, any castle there, although the prefix doubtless was derived from a couple of pre-historic hill forts, of which the mounds remain on the north and east of the present farmhouse.*

This Thomas Creevey was educated at a grammar school at Hackney—"old School Lane," he calls it—and at Cambridge; after which he read law at Gray's Inn. The voluminous correspondence and journals left by him afford no explanation of how he obtained in 1802 the Duke of Norfolk's nomination for the snug little borough of Thetford with its thirty-one docile electors. That year was notable for another important event in his life, namely, his marriage with the widow of William Ord, Esq., of Fenham, Newminster Abbey, and Whitfield. This lady, who was the daughter of Charles Brandling, Esq., of Gosforth House, M.P. for Newcastle-on-Tyne, was possessed of comfortable, if not of considerable, means. To her first husband she had borne two sons and four daughters; and one of these daughters, Elizabeth Ord, who never married, became her step-father's confidante and favourite correspondent. After their mother's death in 1818, the Miss Ords lived at Rivenhall in Essex, and in Cheltenham; and Miss Elizabeth corresponded regularly with Mr. Creevey, whose industry and volubility in response are truly amazing. A large proportion of the following pages are filled with extracts from these letters—extracts which probably do not amount to more than one-fiftieth of the whole. As time went on, Mr. Creevey conceived the idea of compiling a history of his own times, and used to tell Miss Elizabeth Ord to keep his letters, "for," said he,

* *Land and their Owners in Galloway*, by P. H. McKerlie, vol. v. p. 113.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

INTRODUCTION.

“in future times the Creevey Papers may form a curious collection.”

In regard to the papers as a whole, Miss Ord faithfully observed her step-father's instructions. They have been admirably kept; many of them having been copied out in her clear, pretty handwriting—an immense advantage to the present editor, for Mr. Creevey's penmanship was simply execrable. It is characteristic of such matters that some of the events and episodes of which Creevey thought it most important to leave a detailed record, have parted with much of their moment, having received full explanation and description from other sources. What the modern reader is most likely to enjoy are the gossip of a bygone day, side-lights on society of the late Georgian era, and traits and illustrations of persons who figured prominently on the stage of public life. Creevey was admirably equipped as a purveyor of such information. His activity must have been as ceaseless as his curiosity was insatiable. His was one of those active intellects not of the first, nor even of the second, order, amassing details of the busy life in which they are cast, recording traits and chronicling episodes whereon the greater actors have no attention to bestow or time to dwell, and revealing his private motives and animosities with an almost Pepysian frankness. A very poor man most of his days, for with his wife Creevey lost whatever income she brought to him, he must have had social and conversational powers of no mean order to attract the endless hospitality of which he was the subject, and which he was wholly unable to return. The repository of innumerable confidences from persons of both sexes, it must be confessed that he was not always very

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978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

ix

scrupulous in observing the seal of secrecy, neither has it appeared expedient, even at this distance of time, to dispense with a severe system of selection in dealing with his *chronique scandaleuse*.

It is natural to compare a collection such as this with the well-known "Croker Papers" which have already seen the light, and indeed they cover much the same ground, but from an opposite point of view. John Wilson Croker was a Tory, and his party were in office during the long, weary years when it was the lot of Thomas Creevey and his friends to gnash their teeth in opposition. The two men probably were of not unequal calibre. Creevey had not the literary turn of Croker; but it was opportunity alone which prevented him becoming at least as distinguished a legislator as the other; and, had the fortune and position of parties been reversed, Creevey would, in all likelihood, have attained to higher office than Croker ever filled. He had been but four years in Parliament when, after Fox's death, the brief "All-the-Talents" Ministry was formed, and in this he received the office of Secretary to the Board of Control. By the time his party came into power again, Creevey was sixty-two, and had lost his seat; but his services received instant recognition by his appointment, despite his age, first to the Treasurership of the Ordnance, and afterwards to that of Greenwich Hospital.

If any evidence were wanting as to the disunion and its causes, which sapped the efficacy of the Whig opposition during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, it is amply forthcoming in Creevey's letters, and nobody can complain that it is not expressed in forcible enough language. It must ever be

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978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

INTRODUCTION.

a source of wonder to the student of history how the Tory Government weathered the stress and storm of those years. For twenty years a mighty war, taxing to the utmost the physical resources of a population not exceeding fifteen millions, was sustained at the cost of a crushing increment of debt. The fall in prices suddenly ensuing upon the peace of 1815, plunged the whole agricultural community into dire distress, and was accompanied by an almost total cessation of continental demand for British manufactures, arising from the utter loss of buying power in foreign markets, which involved the artisan population in the terrible distress. Nor was this all, though well it might be reckoned enough to bring about the fall of any administration. Ministers groaned under the affliction of a mad King and a deplorable Regent. The whole heart of the nation was stirred against the Administration by reason of the part assigned to Ministers in the proceedings against Queen Caroline. How was it that they survived a single session?

The answer may be clearly read in Creevey's correspondence. First, in regard to the war, the people were practically of one mind—to *see it through*. It has ever been so in our country, and please God it ever shall be so! Once let the drums beat the point of war, and they rouse an echo in British hearts which dies not away till the thing has been carried to a finish. Men will not listen to those counsellors who would have them believe that the policy which led to war was foolish or wrong—nay, they will not pause to weigh even the justice of the cause. Of all sentiments, patriotism is perhaps one of those least amenable to reason—the least calculating; those that hesitate in the crisis, still more those who carp and

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978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xi

thwart, become by force of circumstance and quite apart from their own honesty of opinion, the anti-national party. We have seen the same in every great war that it has been the lot of England to wage; and it is the knowledge of this and the feeling that lies deepest in every Briton's heart, that disorganises opposition at such times. The extreme men move resolutions which the moderate men will not support; then, when the moderates agree upon a line of action, the others stand resentfully aloof. Perhaps the most interesting and instructive political passages in these papers are those in which are revealed the most secret counsels of the opposition, and the course of action which repeatedly saved Lord Liverpool's administration from shipwreck.

References to Thomas Creevey in the published writings of his contemporaries are few, and for the most part slight. The fullest notice I have encountered is in some passages in the Journal of Charles Greville—he of whom it has been written

“For forty years he listened at the door,
He heard some secrets, and invented more.”

Writing in 1829, he has the following:—

“Old Creevey is rather an extraordinary character. I know nothing of the early part of his history, but I believe he was an attorney or barrister; he married a widow, who died a few years ago; she had something, he nothing; he got into Parliament, belonged to the Whigs, displayed a good deal of shrewdness and humour, and was for some time very troublesome to the Tory Government by continually attacking abuses. After some time he lost his seat, and went to live at Brussels, where he became intimate with the Duke of Wellington. Then his wife died, upon which event he was thrown upon the world with about £200 a year or

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

less ; no home, few connections, a great many acquaintances, a good constitution and extraordinary spirits. He possesses nothing but his clothes ; no property of any sort ; he leads a vagrant life, visiting a number of people who are delighted to have him, and sometimes roving about to various places, as fancy happens to direct, and staying till he has spent what money he has in his pocket. He has no servant, no home, no creditors ; he buys everything as he wants it at the place he is at ; he has no ties upon him, and has his time entirely at his own disposal and that of his friends. He is certainly a living proof that a man may be perfectly happy and exceedingly poor, or rather without riches, for he suffers none of the privations of poverty and enjoys many of the advantages of wealth. I think he is the only man I know in society who possesses nothing."*

Again in 1838 :—

"*Feb. 20th.*—I made no allusion to the death of Creevey at the time it took place, about a fortnight ago, having said something about him elsewhere. Since that period he had got into a more settled way of life. He was appointed to one of the Ordnance offices by Lord Grey, and subsequently by Lord Melbourne to the Treasurership of Greenwich Hospital, with a salary of £600 a year and a house. As he died very suddenly, and none of his connexions were at hand, Lord Sefton sent to his lodgings and (in conjunction with Vizard the solicitor) caused all his papers to be sealed up. It was found that he had left a woman who had lived with him for four years as his mistress, his sole executrix and residuary legatee (the value of which was very small, not more than £300 or £400), and to all the papers which he had left behind him. These last are exceedingly valuable, for he had kept a copious diary for thirty-six years, had preserved all his own and Mrs. Creevey's letters, and copies or originals of a vast miscellaneous correspondence. The only person who is acquainted with the contents of these papers is his daughter-in-law, whom he had

* *Greville Memoirs*, i. 235.

Cambridge University Press

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Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xiii

frequently employed to copy papers for him, and she knows how much there is of delicate and interesting matter, the publication of which would be painful and embarrassing to many people now alive, and make very inconvenient and premature revelations upon private and confidential matters. . . . Then there is Creevey's own correspondence with various people, especially with Brougham, which evidently contains things which Brougham is anxious to suppress, for he has taken pains to prevent the papers from falling into the hands of any person likely to publish them, and has urged Vizard to get possession of them either by persuasion, or purchase, or both. In point of fact, they are now in Vizard's hands, and it is intended by him and Brougham, probably with the concurrence of others, to buy them of Creevey's mistress; though who is to become the owner of the documents, or what the stipulated price, and what their contemplated destination, I do not know. The most extraordinary part of the affair is that the woman has behaved with the utmost delicacy and propriety, has shown no mercenary disposition, but expressed her desire to be guided by the wishes and opinions of Creevey's friends and connexions, and to concur in whatever measures may be thought best by them with reference to the character of Creevey, and the interests and feelings of those who might be affected by the contents of the papers. Here is a strange situation in which to find a rectitude of conduct, a moral sentiment, a grateful and disinterested liberality, which would do honour to the highest birth, the most careful cultivation and the strictest principle. It would be a hundred to one against any individual in the ordinary ranks of society and of average good character acting with such entire absence of selfishness, and I cannot help being struck with the contrast between the motives and disposition of those who want to get hold of these papers, and of this poor woman who is ready to give them up. They—well knowing that in the present thirst for the sort of information Creevey's journals and correspondence contain, a very large sum might be obtained for them—are endeavouring to drive the best bargain they can with her for their own particular ends, while she puts her whole confidence in them,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04496-7 - The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1

Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

INTRODUCTION.

and only wants to do what they tell her she ought to do under the circumstances of the case."

A couple of years later, Greville has a further reference to Creevey.

"*12th March, 1840.*—Her Majesty went out last night to the Ancient Concert (which she particularly dislikes), so I got Melbourne to dine with me, and he stayed talking till 12 o'clock. . . . He expressed his surprise that anybody should write a journal. . . . He talked of Creevey's journal, and of that which Dover is supposed to have left behind him. . . . He said Creevey had been very shrewd, but exceedingly bitter and malignant."

Mrs. Blackett Ord, of Whitfield, whose husband was the grandson of Mr. Creevey's eldest step-daughter, Anne, by her husband, Lieut.-Colonel Hamilton, having entrusted to me the task of examining these papers, and preparing for the press such parts of them as should seem worthy of publication, I have endeavoured to let Mr. Creevey tell his own story as much as possible, connecting the extracts only by such explanatory paragraphs as may serve to refresh the memory of the reader. The "copious diary" referred to by Charles Greville has not come into my hands with the letters. If it ever existed in fact, Lord Brougham probably succeeded in his attempt to get hold of it, for it is only brief and broken periods that are covered by anything of that kind in Creevey's handwriting.

In respect to orthography, I have thought it better to retain the characteristic archaisms of the period, such as "chuse," "compleatly," and "politicks." Misspellings of proper names, such as "Wyndham" for "Windham," I have altered for the sake of

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Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

xv

identification, and ordinary slips in spelling have also been rectified. Words and sentences enclosed in marks of parentheses () stand so in the original; those added by myself to supplement the meaning will be found in square brackets [].

HERBERT MAXWELL.

MONREITH, 1903.

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Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NICKNAMES USED BY MR. CREEVEY TO DESIGNATE SUNDRY PERSONAGES.



<i>Atty</i>	.	.	.	Lord Arthur Hill, 2nd son of 2nd Marquess of Downshire, and afterwards succeeded his mother as Lord Sandys.
<i>Arch-fiend, The</i>	.	.	.	See <i>Beelzebub</i> .
<i>Barney</i>	.	.	.	12th Duke of Norfolk. See also <i>Twitch</i> and <i>Scroop</i> .
<i>Beau, The</i>	.	.	.	The Duke of Wellington.
<i>Beelzebub</i>	.	.	.	Henry, 1st Lord Brougham and Vaux. See also <i>Bruffam</i> , <i>The Arch-fiend</i> , and <i>Wicked-shifts</i> .
<i>Billy, Old</i>	.	.	.	4th Earl Fitzwilliam.
<i>Billy, Our</i>	.	.	.	William IV.
<i>Billy Russell</i>	.	.	.	Lord William Russell, brother of 5th Duke of Bedford.
<i>Bogey</i>	.	.	.	Lord Grenville.
<i>Bruffam</i>	.	.	.	See <i>Beelzebub</i> .
<i>Calibre, Old or Lord</i>	.	.	.	Mr. Western, M.P., created Lord Western in 1833.
<i>Cheerful Charlie</i>	.	.	.	5th Duke of Rutland.
<i>Ciss</i>	.	.	.	Lady Cecilia Buggin, daughter of the 2nd Earl of Arran and widow of Sir George Buggin, married in 1826 to H.R.H. Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, and was created Duchess of Inverness in 1840.
<i>Clunch</i>	.	.	.	Lord Althorp.
<i>Cole, Mrs.</i>	.	.	.	Mr. Tierney.

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Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NICKNAMES USED BY MR. CREEVEY. xvii

<i>Cole, Young</i>	. . .	Hon. James Abercromby, elected Speaker in 1835 and created Lord Dunfermline in 1839.
<i>Comical Bob</i>	. . .	Lord Robert Spencer, brother of the 3rd Duke of Marlborough.
<i>Cupid</i>	. . .	Viscount Palmerston.
<i>Dear Eddard</i>	. . .	Hon. Robert Edward Petre.
<i>Denny</i>	. . .	Mr. Denison of Denbies.
<i>Doctor, The</i>	. . .	Right Hon. Henry Addington, created Viscount Sidmouth in 1805.
<i>Fergy</i>	. . .	General Ronald Ferguson of Raith.
<i>Frog, The</i>	. . .	King William I. of Holland.
<i>Frog, Young</i>	. . .	The Prince of Orange.
<i>Frothy</i>	. . .	Hon. H. G. Bennet, M.P.
<i>Gooserump</i>	. . .	The 6th Earl of Carlisle.
<i>Jack the Painter</i>	. . .	Right Hon. T. Spring Rice, created Lord Monteagle in 1839.
<i>Jaffa</i>	. . .	General Sir Robert Wilson.
<i>Jenky</i>	. . .	Lord Liverpool.
<i>Jockey, The</i>	. . .	The 11th Duke of Norfolk.
<i>King Jog</i>	. . .	J. G. Lambton of Lambton, afterwards Earl of Durham.
<i>King Tom</i>	. . .	Thomas Coke of Holkham, afterwards Earl of Leicester.
<i>Madagascar</i>	. . .	Lady Holland.
<i>Merryman, The</i>	. . .	Mr. Canning.
<i>Mouldy</i>	. . .	Lord Bexley.
<i>Mrs. P.</i>	. . .	The Princess of Wales (Queen Caroline).
<i>Mull</i>	. . .	Lord Molyneux, son of the 3rd Earl of Sefton.
<i>Niffy-naffy</i>	. . .	Earl of Darlington, afterwards 1st Duke of Cleveland.
<i>Og or Ogg</i>	. . .	The 2nd Lord Kensington.
<i>Old Nobs</i>	. . .	George III.
<i>Old Sally or Dow.</i>	}	Mary Amelia, Marchioness of Salisbury.
<i>Sally</i>		
<i>Old Stiff-rump</i>	}	Mr. Western, M. P., afterwards Lord Western.
<i>The Squire</i>		
<i>Pet, The</i>	. . .	3rd Earl of Sefton.
<i>P., Young</i>	. . .	Princess Charlotte of Wales.
<i>Pie and Thimble</i>	. . .	Lord John Russell.

Cambridge University Press

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Edited by Herbert Maxwell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii NICKNAMES USED BY MR. CREEVEY.

<i>Pop, The</i>	.	.	Countess of Darlington, afterwards Duchess of Cleveland.
<i>Prinney</i>	.	.	The Prince of Wales (George IV.).
<i>Punch</i>	.	.	Charles Greville, Clerk of the Council.
<i>Roscus</i>	.	.	Lord Henry Petty, afterwards 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne.
<i>Sally</i>	.	.	Sarah, Countess of Jersey.
<i>Sally, Old or Dow.</i>	.	.	Mary Amelia, Marchioness of Salisbury.
<i>Scroop</i>	.	.	The 12th Duke of Norfolk.
<i>Slice</i>	.	.	H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester.
<i>Snip</i>	.	.	Right Hon. Thomas Robinson, successively Viscount Goderich and Earl of Ripon.
<i>Snipe</i>	.	.	Princess Lieven.
<i>Snoutch</i>	.	.	Not identified.
<i>Squire, The, or Old</i>	}		Mr. Western, M.P., afterwards Lord Western.
<i>Stiff-rump</i>			
<i>Suss</i>	.	.	H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex.
<i>Spinning Jenny</i>	.	.	Sir Robert Peel.
<i>Taffy</i>	.	.	Lord Dinorbin.
<i>Twitch</i>	.	.	The 12th Duke of Norfolk.
<i>Vandernoot, Old</i>	.	.	William Van Mildert, Bishop of Durham.
<i>Vesuvinus</i>	.	.	Hon. Douglas Kinnaird.
<i>Vic., Little</i>	.	.	Queen Victoria.
<i>Wicked-shifts</i>	.	.	See <i>Beelzebub</i> .

CONTENTS TO VOL. I.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	v
NICKNAMES USED BY MR. CREEVEY	xvi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	xxiii

CHAPTER I.

1793-1804.

Creevey enters Parliament—Paris under the Consulate—Actors in the Revolution—The Addington Ministry—Sir John Moore—War—The return of Pitt—*Per mare et terras*—The Front Bench—*Laudator temporis acti*—Pitt and Fox as allies—The bonds of party—The hope of the Whigs—Threats of invasion—The Irish difficulty 1-31

CHAPTER II.

1805.

Melville's disgrace—The campaign against jobs—The Radicals make the pace—The Sheridans—Romilly declines Parliament—Irish affairs—Ulm and Austerlitz 32-45

CHAPTER III.

1805.

The Heir Apparent—Life at the Pavilion—Sheridan—Sheridan's marriage—Frolics at Brighton—Warren Hastings—Lord Thurlow—The Duke of York—Society at Brighton—Evenings at the Pavilion—Death of Nelson—The Prince of Wales and Mrs. Fitzherbert 46-73

xx CONTENTS TO VOL. I

CHAPTER IV.

1806-1808.

	PAGE
"All the Talents"—Creevey in office—Fox's last illness— Sheridan jibs—High living—The Portland Administration —Alliance with Spain—The Convention of Cintra—Mr. Whitbread unbosoms himself	74-92

CHAPTER V.

1809.

Walcheren—Castlereagh's duel with Canning—Whitbread on the situation—The passage of the Douro—Sir Arthur Wellesley remonstrates—Mr. Whitbread explains—Journal ...	93-116
--	--------

CHAPTER VI.

1810.

The sentiments of Brougham—Difficulties of the Opposition— Debate on the Address—Divided counsels—The Walcheren enquiry—Wellington and the Common Council—Defeat of the Government—A sailor's opinion of Sir Richard Strachan	117-134
--	---------

CHAPTER VII.

1811.

Cabinet making—Whitbread's proposals—The prospect of office —Creevey's conditions—The Prince's coolness to the Whigs —Journal—The Canningites scattered	135-152
--	---------

CHAPTER VIII.

1812.

Parliament is dissolved—Who shall be Premier?—Prolonged suspense—Lord Wellesley tries his hand—Lord Grey stands aloof—Lord Liverpool takes office—Creevey stands for Liver- pool—Re-elected for Thetford—Defeated at Liverpool— Visit to Knowsley	153-174
--	---------

CONTENTS TO VOL. I. xxi

CHAPTER IX.

1813-1814.

The Regent's domestic affairs—Brougham on the war-path— Brougham's opinion of Whitbread—Partisans—Plot and counter-plot—Napoleon abdicates—Tales of the town—The peace—Brougham without a seat—The Emperor of Russia —Princess Charlotte of Wales—The Princess of Wales throws over her advisers—Lord Cochrane's case ...	PAGE 175-204
--	-----------------

CHAPTER X.

1814-1815.

Brougham on the situation—The pinch of the property-tax—The Hundred Days—Brussels in 1815—The shadow of war— Napoleon's last stakes—Tidings from the frontier—Arrival of Wellington—Confusion in Brussels—The Iron Duke— The Duchess of Richmond's ball—The eve of Waterloo— The eighteenth of June—Conflicting rumours—Victory— Conversation with the Duke—Close of the campaign ...	205-239
---	---------

CHAPTER XI.

1815-1816.

Death of Whitbread—Misfortunes of the Opposition—The duke- dom of Norfolk—Disorganised Whigs—Brougham startles his friends—Who shall lead the Whigs?—Brougham's views —A lady's letter—A dispirited Radical—"You must come over!"	240-260
--	---------

CHAPTER XII.

1817-1818.

From Lord Holland—Mr. Tierney chosen leader—Napoleon at St. Helena—The Duke of Kent's confidences—Lord Kin- naird's affair—Mr. Creevey dislodged from Thetford— Journal—Sir Hudson Lowe—Objections to Tierney ...	261-291
--	---------

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Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M.P.: Volume 1
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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xxii CONTENTS TO VOL. I.

CHAPTER XIII.

1819-1820.

Lord Holland upon the situation—Death of George III.—Queen Caroline reappears—Dissension in the Opposition—Does Brougham run straight?—The question of the Liturgy—Opinion at Knowsley—Opening of the trial—Proceedings in the Lords—The case for the Crown—Unfavourable evidence—Louise Demont—The Solicitor-General sums up—The divorce clause abandoned—Brougham opens the defence—Ministers lose ground—The Duke of Norfolk’s opinion—Adjournment of the Commons—Brougham’s tactics—Mr. Denman sums up—Nearing the end—What will be the majority?—The division—The Bill abandoned—The pro-rogation	PAGE
... .. 292-342	

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.
VOL. I.

THOMAS CREEVEY	...	...	...	...	<i>Frontispiece</i>
					<i>From a Water-colour Drawing, in the possession of Miss Elizabeth Blackett Ord, at Brownside, Cumberland</i>
				TO FACE	PAGE
MRS. FITZHERBERT	...	...	...	...	50
					<i>From the Picture by JOHN RUSSELL, R.A., in the possession of Mr. Basil Fitzherbert, at Swinnerton Hall, Staffordshire</i>
LORD THURLOW	...	...	...	...	60
					<i>From the Picture by THOMAS PHILLIPS, R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery</i>
ADMIRAL SIR GRAHAM MOORE	...	...	...	...	90
					<i>From the Picture by SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery</i>
R. BRINSLEY SHERIDAN	...	...	...	...	146
					<i>From a Picture by SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A., in the possession of George Harland Peck, Esq.</i>
HENRY BROUGHAM IN EARLY LIFE	...	...	...	...	172
					<i>From the Picture by JAMES LONSDALE, in the National Portrait Gallery</i>
SAMUEL WHITBREAD	...	...	...	...	242
					<i>From an Engraving by S. W. REYNOLDS, after J. OPIE, R.A.</i>
SIR SAMUEL ROMILLY	...	...	...	...	290
					<i>From the Picture by SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery</i>
SARAH, COUNTESS OF JERSEY	...	...	...	...	296
					<i>From a Picture by SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A., in the possession of the Earl of Jersey.</i>
VOL. I.					c