

**John Bright**

Shannon Westwood traces the influence of John Bright on British attitudes to the American Civil War.

# 'The voice of reason'



# John Bright and his relationship with the Union during the American Civil War

THE AMERICAN CIVIL War was one of the most turbulent periods in world history. A nation founded on 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' suddenly found itself divided according to different interpretations of what those principles actually meant. Individuals such as John Bright and Richard Cobden were unshaken in their belief that the Union, which epitomised their views, would undoubtedly be the victors. Historians tend to focus on Cobden and his influence in transatlantic relations during this period, but Bright should be given equal importance. Bright often lives in the shadow of Cobden when it comes to the American conflict, with few pieces of literature solely focusing on Bright's involvement. As Louise Stevenson wrote, 'to Americans of the present day, John Bright is an unknown figure of unknown historical significance.'<sup>1</sup> Yet, Bright's prominent pro-Union voice was something that could not be ignored in the build-up to the conflict, and throughout its duration, since he regularly expressed his opinions on the events unfolding across the Atlantic. This was largely because the Union championed Bright's own core beliefs: abolition, extending the franchise, liberty and equality for all. Bright was a firm believer in democracy, inspired by the American system and the constitution that the country was founded upon. His countless speeches and relentless letter writing were pivotal in maintaining cordial relations between Britain and America throughout the conflict, whilst also providing Unionists with an insight into public opinion at the time. It is for these reasons that Bright's name should be 'most honourably & indisputably connected with the history of the great civil war.'<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on Bright's involvement in the American Civil War by considering his pro-Union voice and attitudes, and the political activities that he was involved in that helped spread the Union's cause. Such activities include a number of key speeches given by Bright on the subject of the Union, which will be considered alongside the regular correspondence with his American counterparts. The speeches used

are those that were conducted at public gatherings rather than behind closed doors, as these had the strongest impact and furthest reach. The letters sent between Bright and his American counterparts are an undervalued source of evidence and encompass proceedings from the pre-war period right through to the close of the conflict in 1865. These are found in the British Library and are a key resource when discussing Bright's influence in the conflict. This is because they clearly demonstrate Bright's integral role in maintaining lines of communication between Britain and America. Both of these political activities will be explored and dissected to highlight Bright's support of the Union, and the efforts that he went to ensure that this support was heard.

Firstly, it is important to state that Bright was not just a domestic reformer; he was an advocate for reform in the United States too. His political voice and opinions on the Civil War reached a global audience, despite him not actively supporting the conflict itself. Bright is renowned for being an international pacifist, stemming from his Quaker roots, so it should come as no surprise that he did not support a war between the Union and the Confederacy. More precisely, it was his Quakerism that did not bring Britain into the war on the side of the Confederacy, coupled with his influence over leading parliamentarians such as Gladstone and Palmerston. This was demonstrated at a speech in Rochdale in 1861, at the outbreak of the conflict, in which he described how 'no man is more in favour of peace than I am; no man has denounced war more than I have, probably, in this country'.<sup>3</sup> Bright's singular aim when it came to the American Civil War was to preserve American democracy. He had long admired the freedom of American democracy and longed for a similar system to be adopted in Britain, which was slowly widening the scope of democracy through several extensions of the franchise. He was regularly accused of 'wanting to Americanize their country' by his British counterparts and hoped that Britain would follow in America's footsteps to bring about a

John Bright (1811–89), 1864 (by Elliott & Fry; © National Portrait Gallery, London)

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more democratic society.<sup>4</sup> Bright's reasoning was that 'an instructed democracy is the surest foundation of government, and that education and freedom are the only sources of true greatness and true happiness among any people.'<sup>5</sup>

Bright's love for American democracy influenced his own campaigns for domestic reform, largely free trade and the extension of the franchise, as we know. President Lincoln and Bright shared these values in that respect; it was about the majority, not the elite few, with the ultimate goal being the preservation of democracy. In light of such beliefs, it is unsurprising that historians like James McPherson termed Bright as being 'the foremost British champion of the Union'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as well as being a powerful voice for the Union, Bright did not shy away from voicing his own opinion on slavery, despite never identifying as an abolitionist, and despite Quakerism being closely linked with the movement as a result of their early involvement in the destruction of slavery in Britain in the 1830s. He did not identify with the movement because abolitionists were often described as people who 'before the Civil War had agitated for the immediate, unconditional and total abolition of slavery in the United States', whereas Bright's interests lay with domestic reform.<sup>7</sup>

In his vocality surrounding slavery, Bright simply accepted and agreed that as an institution it was backward and outdated, and not in line with America's principles. In his speeches he regularly drew a comparison between slaves and the British working class, arguing that these people came from 'bonds' themselves, and how the lower classes could offer sympathy to those slaves who were still not free people.<sup>8</sup> This tactical move by Bright would have resonated with a good number of people at a time when many among the lower classes were regarded as social outcasts. The speeches provoked sympathy for the Union, culminating with the famous speech at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1862, demonstrating the power and influence of Bright's commentary of the conflict. There were two main ways in which Bright demonstrated his views: through his passion and oratory on the subject, showcased in his speeches; and in transatlantic correspondence to his pro-Union counterparts in the United States.

### Speeches

Bright's support of the Union was undoubtedly best expressed through his many speeches during the course of the conflict. Bright's oratory is

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widely celebrated, with him often described as a 'talent in presenting with so much eloquence and force.'<sup>9</sup> Bright made speeches to a variety of audiences, from MPs in parliament, to the masses squeezed into the union and free trade halls across the country. Without a doubt, the speeches made in parliament are of the utmost importance; however, it was not the location that made his speeches significant, but, rather, the audiences. Whilst all his speeches are important, the speeches made to the masses – mainly the working classes – were the ones that had the most impact. The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, the Union's rationale for the conflict reached a much wider audience than it normally would have – an audience that included many members of the public who were excluded from the political discussions of MPs. Secondly, the working classes were directly impacted by the Lancashire Cotton Famine of 1862, when their livelihoods were dramatically turned around due to the block on the import of Confederate cotton. Thirdly, and finally, by speaking to the masses, Bright was creating a grassroots movement that admired Lincoln and the Union and consequently fostered a patience for the situation that became crucial as the conflict continued.

Bright's idolised views of American democracy were a regular theme in his speeches. One particular example came in Rochdale in November 1863 and demonstrates Bright's ability to convince his audience of the benefits of American democracy. Attending alongside Richard Cobden, Bright used his voice to illustrate how his views on America were becoming popular among the many. In this, he made particular reference to the restoration of the Union and the abolition of slavery, and proposed that the rectification of these moral issues would lead Britain to 'learn that an instructed democracy is the surest foundation of government, and that education and freedom are the only sources of true greatness and true happiness among any people.'<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, he added that the conflict had gained much more recognition than the previous two years, when the people and politicians that defended the Confederacy were 'either profoundly dishonest or profoundly ignorant.'<sup>11</sup> At another speech at a dinner held in Rochdale in 1861, the *Rochdale Observer* had commented on Bright's speech and described him as being 'one man in England who did not forget he was allied with them in language and blood.'<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, such rhetoric ensured that Bright received increasing numbers of letters praising his efforts. For example, in 1864, Edmund Bittinger wrote to

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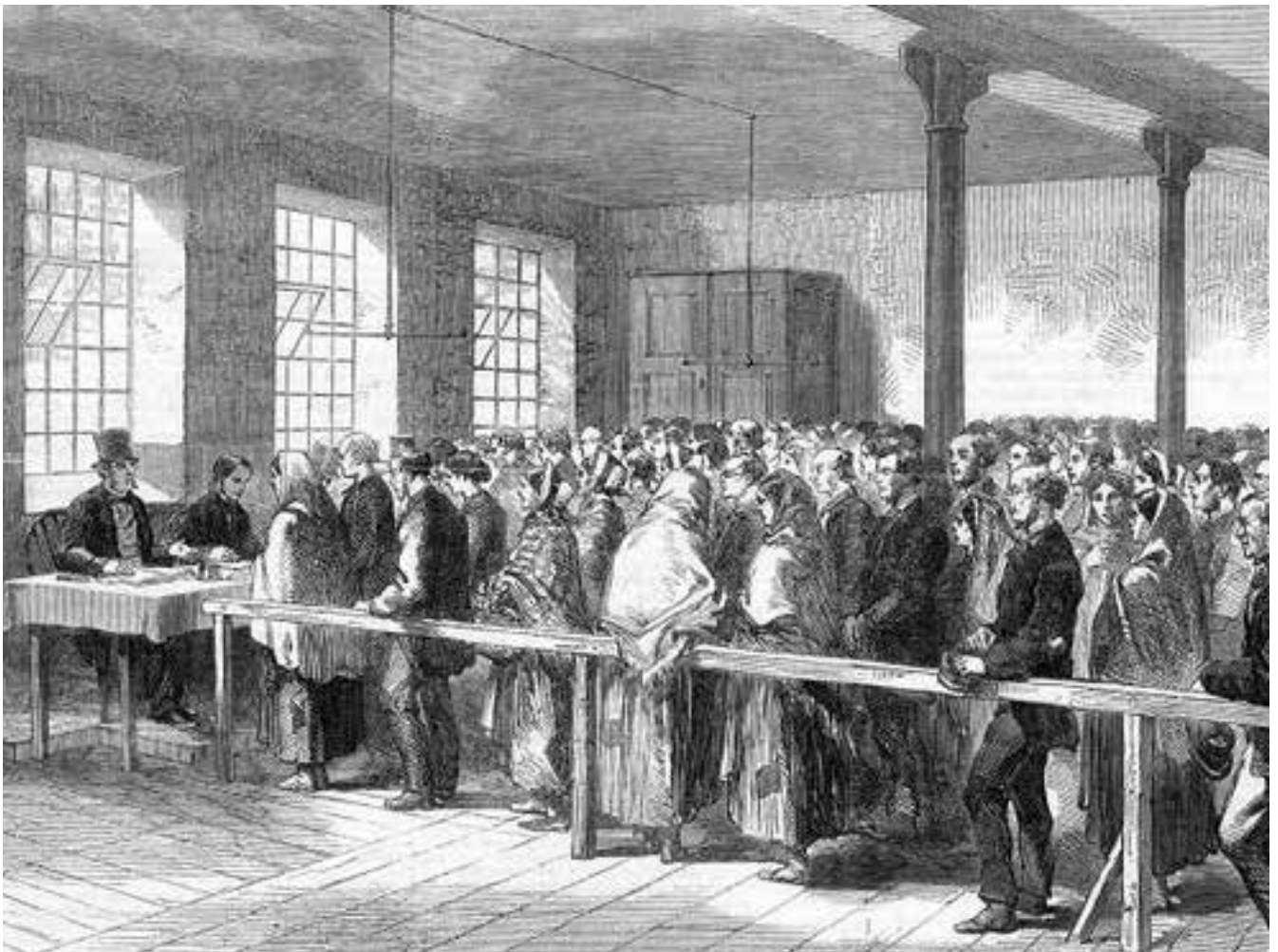
Bright in admiration, noting that his 'noble & exalted statesmanship, true philanthropy of love of liberty have given you a home in the American heart which has been awarded to the Englishmen of the present generation.'<sup>13</sup> The correspondence that Bright received will be discussed later in this article.

Additionally, at the meeting of the trade unions in London, in March 1863, Bright spoke to trade unionists about the war and emphasised that the sole purpose of their gathering was to express 'sympathy with the Northern States of America in the present struggle, and a belief that their success would lead to the speedy emancipation of the negro race.'<sup>14</sup> Bright spoke at great length about differing aspects of the conflict – including the economic impact it had had in Britain, owing to the blockades imposed on imported cotton – but made sure to underscore to those in attendance the importance of supporting the Union. As in his previous speeches, Bright emphasised the notion that both Unionists and the British workers were the same, regularly referring to them as brothers. This was further demonstrated at the closing of the speech, when Bright spoke of his hopes to 'see

Lancashire cotton famine: an 1862 newspaper illustration showing people queueing for food and coal tickets at a district Provident Society office.

the people of England and their brothers of America marching shoulder to shoulder determinedly forward, the pioneers of human progress, the champions of universal liberty.'<sup>15</sup> The language used by Bright was clearly influenced by the founding pillars of American democracy, the ones that he admired so much, and the very principles he wanted to disseminate and popularise among his biggest supporters.

When looking at Bright as a prominent voice in support of the Union, it is impossible to ignore the influence this had in Lancashire during the Cotton Famine. The Cotton Famine had huge repercussions for the county as a whole, as 310,000 out of 440,000 people living in Lancashire in 1860 were employed in cotton.<sup>16</sup> The cotton industry is enshrined in the history of the county of Lancashire and, for many years, it was by far the largest industry in the entire north-west of England. This extreme suffering gave Lancashire, as Mary Ellison argued, 'a basic involvement in the American Civil War.'<sup>17</sup> It is not hard to understand why the Union blockade on Confederate ports had such a negative impact on the economic health of the region. To further illustrate



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the importance of American cotton in Britain's industry, D. J. Oddy described how Britain 'bought nearly 71 per cent of the American crop in 1859–1860, which amounted to 80 per cent of the United Kingdom's total imports of raw cotton.'<sup>18</sup> As a mill owner however, Bright has been subject to accusations of double standards, for whilst he was expressive in discussing the suffering that working classes endured, he refused to contribute to the poor relief fund in Rochdale but instead offered his workers loans which they would eventually be unable to repay.

Of course, there was an alternate supply of Cotton from India, but Oddy's statistics show just how heavily reliant Britain was on its transatlantic supply. Bright vocally disagreed with changing suppliers largely due to his undying support for America. Bright, as a mill owner, was badly affected by the Cotton Famine, but, despite this, still disagreed with changing supplies to Indian cotton, thus demonstrating his support for the Union. His opinion was publicly showcased at a speech in Birmingham in 1862, in which he openly disagreed with economists like Edward Atkinson and clarified how, by continuing to trade with America, this did not correlate with supporting slavery or the Confederacy. Bright was thus responsible for educating the British people, and notably the working classes, who, without Bright, would not have had a full understanding of the conflict. James Skirving in 1864 would later go on to describe Bright as being 'vital to the interests of human freedom' and how the 'people of England have but a faint idea of it, and would have none whatever but for you.'<sup>19</sup> Bright was therefore considered almost crucial, by Unionists, for the education of the people of Britain about their cause and held that, without him, none of it would have been possible.

In summary, Lancashire and its inhabitants ultimately suffered so the Union could prevail in the conflict by crippling the Confederate economy. At a speech in Birmingham, Bright expressed the importance of this and, to further contextualise his arguments, explained the differing opinions concerning the Union among the aristocracy. This was a bold move for Bright, as he knew that this meeting, and the opinions voiced there, would eventually reach America, where they could be acknowledged by those close to President Lincoln. With this speech, Bright aimed to demonstrate how a complete severing of ties with American cotton would be disastrous for the longevity of the cotton industry. He amplified the views of the

working classes, and identified with them, as demonstrated in this extract:

But most of all, and before all, I believe – I am sure that is true in Lancashire, where the working men have seen themselves coming down from prosperity to ruin, from independence to a subsistence on charity, – I say that I believe that the unenfranchised but not hopeless millions of this country will never sympathize with a revolt which is intended to destroy the liberty of a continent, and to build on its ruins a mighty fabric of human bondage.<sup>20</sup>

In this, Bright brought attention to those suffering the greatest, and helped his listeners empathise and relate to those still held captive in slavery. He likened their struggle to that of the lower classes, who were collectively prisoners to the political and class system. Bright rightly stated that those that were unenfranchised but were free from suffering, say predominantly the middle classes, would not be able to relate to slavery in America because their struggle was not one and the same. It is partially true, as they had not suffered the greatest losses during the famine. This level of similarity and relatability between Unionists and the struggles of the working classes of Lancashire helped British workers understand the conflict on a deeper level and could now understand what their motives were for continuing the conflict. This was largely down to Bright's oratory and pro-Union voice being showcased at his speeches. Bright's insistence on standing by American cotton, and his desire to foment an element of relatability between those in the Union, those in slavery, and those among the British working classes, were greatly admired and appreciated by his American counterparts. People such as Theodore Tilton, an American newspaper editor, praised Bright for his and Lancashire's support in standing by this decision. Tilton hoped that 'God [will] help you, and all the rest of the nobility in England – by which I mean the noble souls of Lancashire, who know how to suffer ... I reach my hand to you over the sea!', and thereby acknowledged the suffering that British workers were experiencing in aid of continuing the Anglo-American cotton trade.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to his influence among workers during the Cotton Famine, Bright's pro-Union voice was significant in teaching the British people how to organise and conduct their own meetings. One of the most notable instances of this was at the Manchester Free Trade Hall

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in December 1862, which stands as the apex of Bright's voice and influence in British discussions about the American conflict. This was a meeting organised and attended by the working- and middle-class men of Manchester, which was something not uncommon in mid-Victorian Britain, and covered extensively by the popular *Manchester Guardian*. At this point in the conflict, a common understanding was being established between Unionists and the working people of Manchester and Lancashire, which was based on a shared struggle of mere survival. As stated earlier, for Unionists, the struggle was evidently the American Civil War and how it split the nation. For British working classes in Manchester and, more widely in Lancashire, it was the economic impact of the Cotton Famine and the blockade on Confederate ports. Transatlantic relations were strained prior to Lincoln's election, but now that abolition and slavery were widely understood factors in the conflict, Lancashire had sided once again with the Union and the majority pledged their support during the Civil War.

Many working- and middle-class men were educated on the issue of the conflict, slavery and Bright's desire to abolish it, and this led them to want to pass resolutions of their own. They had taken inspiration from Bright's earlier speeches in parliament, London and Rochdale, in which Bright had openly supported the Union. Bright's rhetoric and views on slavery were evident at this meeting, as the workers made particular reference to the choice of 'legal freedom' and stated that 'one thing alone has, in the past, lessened our sympathy with your country and our confidence in it, – we mean, the ascendancy of politicians who not merely maintained negro slavery, but desired to extend and root it more firmly.'<sup>22</sup> They went on to say that in such a short space of time, President Lincoln had made considerable steps to ensuring freedom would prevail, which 'fills us with hope that every stain on your freedom will shortly be removed, and that the erasure of that foul blot upon civilisation and Christianity – chattel-slavery – during your presidency, will cause the name of Abraham Lincoln to be honoured and revered by prosperity.'<sup>23</sup> When reading the speech in its entirety, it is unquestionable that Bright's experience and ideas were filtered throughout.

The *Manchester Guardian* reprinted the speech in its entirety and saw how the American Civil War was becoming an opportunity for the working classes to express their opinions on slavery and support the Union.<sup>24</sup> The newspaper, whilst directly not stating their own opinion on the content of the meeting, did

believe that it lacked influence due to the more respectable middle classes choosing to stay away from the hall.<sup>25</sup> Anonymous readers contributed their opinions however, which were published by the paper. In a follow-up piece entitled 'To the Editor of the Guardian', there was a response that produced an interesting debate. Whilst the author praised the organisation and publicity of the meeting, the contents of the event provoked a different reaction. The anonymous contributor wrote:

Why, sir, had not this rupture taken place, we should have gone on comfortably, taking slave-grown cotton (the real encouragement to slavery), and never had our consciences pricked about the question.<sup>26</sup>

It is not clear whether the 'rupture' mentioned referred to the meeting or the conflict itself, but it would seem the most logical for it to refer to the latter. Essentially it suggests that had the American Civil War not been brought into the public sphere, the British people would have gone about their livelihoods as normal. A thought would not have been spared for the origins of the cotton that they produced and sold. However, through individuals such as Bright and his public speeches, the middle and working classes acquired knowledge of the conflict and its origins, and therefore naturally raised questions with regards to the morality of slavery. Bright wanted to create this ongoing debate amongst the public; he wanted to provide awareness-raising information about the issues that were occurring. Bright's voice in the build-up to the meeting at the Trade Hall, simply put, paved the way for differing perspectives and arguments on the topic, and brought these debates that were being had about the Civil War, in private and parliamentary settings, into the public domain.

Therefore, Bright proved to be pivotal for the Union, not by strengthening transatlantic relations, but simply by maintaining them. What makes this even more impressive is the fact that the ever-present threat of domestic and economic turmoil in Britain did little to cool volatile Anglo-American relations. Whilst Bright was public in his support for the Union, he also continued his appraisal and admiration for America in his own, private letters with leading Unionists. Bright's letters are held in the National Archives in Washington DC, but, when considering Bright's influence, it is equally important to examine the letters that he received from notable figures at the heart of the American Civil War. Letters from

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his co-correspondents are held in the British Library and are an undervalued resource when examining Bright's pro-Union voice, as they give us a greater understanding of how deeply Bright was respected and adored on the American continent.

### Letters

Although Bright's pro-Union voice manifested predominantly in the public speaking arena, he privately showcased his support for the Union through the art of letter writing – corresponding with leading Unionists. For the purpose of this article, it is the content within these letters that provides the more convincing argument as to how significant Bright's voice was. His support from Unionists was paramount and is clearly demonstrated by the sheer volume of letters that he received. Patrick Joyce, in *Democratic Subject: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England*, likened the fanatical response to Bright's speeches as representative of a kind of 'cult'.<sup>27</sup> This suggests an almost religious, spiritual association with Bright's values and methods. From here, this article will consider the letters that Bright received, and highlight the abundance of praise heaped upon him. He was routinely invited to take part in, or be an honorary guest at, functions and trips overseas, illustrating just how well thought of he was. The letters that he received were largely in response to his speeches, which propelled Bright to worldwide recognition for his oratory. However, this was not their only purpose, and many correspondents wanted to question Bright's opinions and thoughts further, on issues such as abolition, and the very real prospect of a divided United States.

During the conflict, Bright corresponded with prominent Unionists, most significantly politicians and confidants of President Abraham Lincoln, and did his utmost to pledge support for their cause. Bright closely spoke with Charles Sumner and William Seward, who relayed these letters to the likes of President Lincoln in cabinet meetings. For example, in relation to Britain's response to the Lancashire Cotton Famine, Bright wrote to Sumner reassuring him that the British 'working-class is with you and against the South', something that was later read aloud to the president himself.<sup>28</sup> Another example is a piece of correspondence with William Henry Aspinall, who redirected Bright's response to Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, who also read Bright's ideas to President Lincoln. Bright's letters were described as having 'influence', though this was

never explained or discussed.<sup>29</sup> Bright and Lincoln never met in person, owing to the former's reluctance to travel to the United States as his close friend Cobden had done. However, the two enjoyed a mutual admiration, a relationship exemplified by the presence of a newspaper clipping of a John Bright speech calling for Lincoln's re-election. This clipping was found in Lincoln's jacket pocket, following his assassination in April 1865.<sup>30</sup> It is a clear demonstration that Bright's voice was highly regarded by not only Unionists, but those closest to the president and in top government positions.

It was mentioned earlier that Bright received a large volume of letters throughout his transatlantic network, and it could be argued that this 'fan mail' gave him an almost celebrity-like status. To examine a definition by Simon Morgan, a person became a 'celebrity' in the Victorian period when 'a sufficiently large audience is interested in their actions, image and personality to create a viable market for commodities carrying their likeliness and for information about their lives and views'.<sup>31</sup> So, to an extent, Bright's pro-Union voice propelled him to being at the forefront of international opinion on the conflict. His transatlantic correspondence began in the 1850s, discussing the American political and democratic system, as well as the prospect of the Civil War that loomed. What this shows is Bright's initial inquisitiveness into the nature of the American political system, and it traces his own growing desire for a British system that mirrored that of its transatlantic counterpart. In fact, Bright was often accused by his critics of trying to 'Americanize' Britain and move towards an idealist American system.<sup>32</sup> This is because the British elite were opposed to any form of American system as, at that time, the British aristocracy held the bulk of political power due to the lack of enfranchisement at that time. If Britain were to adopt a more American democracy-style system, the British elite would have to concede their own privilege, and almost monopolised access to the vote, to the public. For Bright, the American way of thinking incorporated the average working man and appeared to be more open than our system at that time.

The contents of these letters differ greatly in content. They include appraisals of Bright's most prominent and well-documented pro-Union speeches in Birmingham and Manchester, as well as invitations from committees across the country, and beyond, requesting his presence at their next conference. For the most part, John Bright was praised for both his activism in parliament, and his growing support

among the working people of Manchester and Lancashire. In a letter from the New York Chamber of Commerce, P. Perit wrote that 'to have found an able and fearless advocate under such circumstances; was a privilege, which we cannot too fully appreciate, or acknowledge with sufficient warmth.'<sup>33</sup> Unionists knew the risks that Bright was taking by being so outspoken about the Union and his support for it, and realised that there would be a backlash against him from the British government and its public. In an expression of deepest thankfulness, Perit emphasised how grateful America was for Bright's rallying cries to the masses in Britain in support of the Union. He summarised this best by stating that 'this nation will ever remember the gratitude, the noble advocacy of our cause, which you have had the firmness and courage to maintain, in face of public prejudice, and ministerial opposition.'<sup>34</sup> Likewise, at a council in Denver on 28 January 1864, resolutions were passed commending Bright and Cobden for their pro-Union support. From observing the correspondence, this appeared to be a normal procedure of this time. At this particular meeting, the first resolution passed was 'that we, the Union, freedom loving men of Denver, Colorado Territory, United States of America, recognize in John Bright and Richard Cobden, true representatives of the outspoken spirit of English liberty'.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, individuals such as Anson Gleason, a US Presbyterian minister who also served as a missionary to the Chocotaw Indians, praised Bright for his speeches on the conflict and for bringing awareness to the American situation. In one particular letter, Gleason made reference to a speech that Bright made in Rochdale in 1861, and he asked Bright if he had any 'room in your noble philanthropic heart for a yankee stranger, who with his family has been recently very highly entertained and electrified by your late speech at the dinner in Rochdale'.<sup>36</sup> This meeting was used by Bright as an opportunity to initially explain the situation in America and the reasons for the country splitting into two. His speech would later be reprinted in the *Rochdale Observer*, which would bring greater awareness of the conflict to the public domain. With regards to the speech made at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in 1862, Bright was recognised as having some involvement and received letters of thanks from his American counterparts. The scenes displayed at the hall attracted the attention of American author John Lothrop Motley, an individual who regularly corresponded with Bright. Motley praised Bright for his own

support of the Union and commented on the scenes that unfolded at the meeting, as well as the language used. Motley explained how this meeting illustrated to Americans how British perceptions of the American people and the conflict had changed, claiming that 'recent events have proved that the great heart of England is good.'<sup>37</sup> It was largely recognised therefore that whilst Bright did not attend the meeting, his American counterparts knew that he was somehow involved in influencing the organisation of the meeting. It was yet another avenue whereby Bright's pro-Union voice was demonstrated.

Bright's pro-Union voice also received recognition by those involved heavily in the abolition movement in the United States. As referenced at the beginning of this article, while Bright's stance on slavery was uncertain due to his lack of identification with the abolitionist movement, his principles and support of the Union clearly gained the attention of prominent figures who were supportive of the abolition of slavery. Bright, as we know, was more concerned with the freedom of everyone, not just specifically slaves. It could be argued that, in Bright's perspective, those without the franchise were equally as constrained within the British political system as slaves were in the United States. P. Wetmore, in one of his letters to Bright, described him as someone who articulated 'emancipated principles which lie at the root of international equity.'<sup>38</sup> Wetmore was also aware of Bright's attempts in parliament to defend the Union, which he had heard about through the correspondence that he had received from other individuals involved in the transatlantic network. Within this network they regularly exchanged newspaper transcripts of speeches, as well as reviews and coverage of international affairs. Moreover, influential figures in the abolitionist movement such as Harriet Beecher Stowe recognised Bright as part of the transatlantic network and praised his pro-Union stance in Britain. She commended Bright as 'the Liberal Member of Parliament John Bright whose constant support for the Union was a source of comfort for many in the North.'<sup>39</sup> Bright's constant support, as discussed here, had helped explain to workers how supporting abolition in the United States to some extent also signified support for President Lincoln and the Union.

Bright continued to receive this praise past the culmination of the conflict at Appomattox Courthouse and also received invitations to go on trips to the continent that he had long admired, as well as places in Europe. This is

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where the correspondence slows significantly, with the same figures, namely George Peabody, continually inviting Bright on trips and clearly stating that he did not receive his reply. Whilst this does not suggest that Bright's pro-Union voice was now dormant, the Union had become victorious and there was no longer a need for a rallying cry to support it. Although the lack of response and acknowledgement to Peabody's letters could be perceived to be as 'ignorant' on Bright's part, his attention was turned back to domestic reform once again and therefore his interest in the Civil War was no longer at the forefront of his agenda.

### Conclusion

Bright's influence is unquestionable in relation to maintaining Anglo-American relations during the Civil War, and it comes as no surprise that he gained the nickname as a 'member of the Union', alongside Cobden. This article purposely explored John Bright's role in Anglo-American relations and placed greater focus on the methods that he used in order to disseminate the Union's aims to the British people. Bright is not meant to stand in the shadow of Cobden when it comes to international relations. Having not long overcome such a turbulent time in the Anglo-American relationship, the American Civil War brought a whole set of new challenges that both sides would face, and in turn would strain their alliance. The majority of Europe and large sections of British society, including many MPs and business owners, were in favour of 'remaining neutral', yet still supplied the Confederacy with supplies and aid. This was done in order to keep business booming and the supply of money continuing. For example, William Gladstone's family fortune was built entirely on the slave trade in the West Indies prior to its abolishment in Britain, so he naturally was more supportive of the Confederacy. His feelings were reflected when he described the Confederacy as 'a nation rightly struggling to be free.'<sup>30</sup>

Lord Palmerston, British prime minister during the Civil War, was more focused on the brewing tensions in Europe between France and Germany and therefore issued the policy of neutrality to prevent the American Civil War from becoming a further distraction. It is hard, therefore, to imagine that, in the minds of those individuals of a similar stature, a thought was ever spared for their Unionist counterparts suffering from the internal turmoil that they were experiencing. Who knows what would have become of transatlantic

relations had it not been for Bright, and also Cobden, standing out from the hesitancy of radical and liberal opinion.

Through his eloquent speeches and extensive correspondence, Bright played a significant role in maintaining the line of communication and the spreading of information across both countries. As a result, Bright can be perceived as being a 'gossip' or 'nosy' when, in fact, it means quite the opposite: Bright's inherent interest and desire for American democracy in Britain, and wanting to protect that, is what influenced him to speak about these topics to the masses. Whilst his speeches in parliament were significant in the political sphere, it was his discussions at large public gatherings that propelled him into the Anglo-American discussion. His oratory and passion for the Union reached the masses, which eventually culminated in middle- and working-class men staging their own gathering, at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Bright likened their struggle during the Lancashire Cotton Famine to that against slavery and described how both workers and slaves were essentially trapped within the constraints of the political system that swore to protect their rights. The coverage of his speeches was wide-reaching, which prompted the influx of letters that Bright received from prominent Unionists. Bright's behaviour during the conflict can therefore be described as exceptional, as he was clearly politically active and outspoken about the conflict.

Furthermore, his correspondence helped to build the foundation of transatlantic correspondence that helped to spread the ideas of the Union, whilst also explaining the situation regarding Britain's stance. These letters were so widespread, that even Charles Sumner and Secretary of State William Seward took part in the correspondence, and as a result it culminated in Bright's letters being read aloud to President Lincoln. Bright's high status in America culminated in a marble bust being constructed in honour of Bright, which was placed in President Lincoln's office, but sadly the president never saw the finished piece due to his assassination. Additionally, the clipping of Bright's response supporting Lincoln's re-election in 1864 that was found on his person following his assassination, is a humble anecdote showing how much of an impact Bright's pro-Union voice had.

*Shannon Westwood works for Greater Manchester Police and has gained an MA History by Research with her original thesis entitled 'John Bright, Lancashire and the American Civil War'.*

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- 2 Motley to Bright, 9 Feb. 1863, BL, Motley-Bright MS, Add MS 43391, f. 137.
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