EVERYDAY POLITICAL OBJECTS

From the Middle Ages to the Contemporary World

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7

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One of the most striking passages in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is where Lilliput's Principal Secretary explains the politics of the kingdom. In what is clearly a satire of contemporary Britain, he notes that the two rival parties were distinguished 'from the high and low Heels on their Shoes.' The 'low Heels' (the Whigs) were favoured by the present king (George I), whereas his successor (the future George II) supposedly had divided loyalties: 'we can plainly discover one of his Heels higher than the other; which gives him a Hobble in his Gait.'[1] Literary scholars have debated the significance of this joke: high and low may refer to their religious leanings, or to foreign affairs, since high heels was a French fashion and the Whigs favoured a bellicose policy. Either way, shoes could have political meanings in the eighteenth century.

Shoes may not seem to be an obvious topic for political history, but shoes were highly politicized in Georgian Britain. As expensive consumer articles, which were key markers of social status and gender identity, shoes were 'political' in the indirect sense of being bound up with social power, but this chapter will make the case that shoes were political in the more direct sense of the operation of power within the state. Shoes were an important component of the uniform worn by the class of men who wielded power at court, in parliament and in the localities. Footwear can help us to think about the precise ways in which their masculinity was embodied and lived, since it has an important impact upon the body in terms of its appearance, its posture and its ability to move. Work on political masculinities has emphasized the importance of the body in terms of rhetorical performance and the projection of a political personality.[2] Shoes were also an important topic of political discussion: they were at the centre of moral debates about consumerism and luxury, which dominated political culture in the eighteenth century. Their very importance for notions of class and gender implicate them in debates about citizenship, given that this was a period when the lines of political inclusion were being redrawn in those

terms. This everyday object can therefore contribute to our understanding of the new public sphere that was created in the eighteenth century, as well as the social world of high politics. Changes in shoe design, and the differences in the footwear worn by different social classes, shed light on the types of masculinity that came to be privileged within the political cultures of the day.

If political history has had little to say about shoes, it is also the case that shoe history has had little to say about politics. Whereas work on material culture has highlighted the political significance of other articles of clothing, Kimberly Alexander has noted that the 'signifying role' of shoes has been left out of such interpretations.[3] Where fashion history does consider shoes, it tends to be as a consumer article or a marker of identity. Some recent studies of shoes have taken on board their material as well as symbolic significance, and Ellen Sampson argues that we need to consider the shoe 'as a habitual, worn and bodily object.'[4] As such, this chapter will consider both representations of shoes and surviving examples of shoes themselves. Studying shoes from the time – and assessing their shape, weight and texture – can give an insight into what they would have been like to wear and the impact that they would have had upon the body. Shoe collections in museums are skewed in gender and class terms since, historically, the fancier and finer examples are the ones that have tended to be preserved. Men's shoes were generally plainer than women's, and many more elite shoes have been kept than plebeian ones, due to the relative quality of workmanship and the fact that working people wore shoes until they could no longer be repaired. By drawing on three key museum collections, however, it has been possible to locate a representative range of footwear from across the long eighteenth century.[5]

This chapter therefore makes a case for a political history of shoes, by bringing together these two rich fields. It will begin by thinking about the nature of political culture in the eighteenth century, where political virtue was evaluated in highly moral and gendered terms, and where shoes became the focus of debates about masculinity and citizenship. It will then turn its attention to citizenship in a national sense, to think about how certain types of leather shoes came to be seen as synonymous with Britishness, and how wearing them informed what it meant to live as a 'Briton.' Debates about politics and gender were inseparable from those on social class, and shoes worn by different social classes were loaded with political meaning. They also give us an insight into how people from different social classes moved and comported themselves. Focusing on the history of shoes in these ways can therefore show how embodiment should be central to our understanding of the practice of politics in eighteenth-century Britain.

Gender and politics

Let us begin with some background about shoes in the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the century, shoes for elite men and women were often remarkably similar. They both typically had a high heel: although men's tended to have a wider heel of stacked leather, and women's a carved wooden heel, the visual effect was the

same.[6] Both sexes could wear shoes decorated with brightly coloured and patterned fabrics (Figure 7.1). Neither men nor women from the upper classes were expected to walk any great distances outdoors, where they would be conveyed by carriage or sedan chair, or ride on horseback, wearing boots made specifically for riding rather than walking.[7] Their footwear was therefore not designed to facilitate ambulation nor to protect against the elements: its very impracticality signalled the elite's social status and political power.

Historians often argue that it was over the eighteenth century that modern, binary schemes of gender difference emerged, positing that men and women had different bodies that befitted them for different spheres of activity. Gender difference certainly existed prior to the eighteenth century, but it was relatively fluid and was not grounded in sexual anatomy to the same extent: Thomas Laqueur argues that men and women shared a common 'one sex' body. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, men and women came to be seen as different creatures with distinct anatomies and social roles: gender came to be conceived of in more binary terms as it was increasingly grounded in the 'two sex' body. Crucially, Laqueur argues that political considerations rather than medical 'discoveries' were the drivers of the process, as women's place in society came to be a focus of the Enlightenment.[8] This argument has been widely debated,[9] as has the 'separate spheres' interpretation in women's history that complements it in many ways,[10] but historians agree that gender roles were reformulated over the course of the eighteenth century. Not coincidentally, the styles of men's and women's shoes diverged at this time. Given the impact that shoes have on the appearance of the body and its capacity to carry out certain tasks, shoes were arguably integral to this process. Although shoes today are instantly recognizable as being 'male' or 'female,' and women's feet are on average smaller than men's, differences in shoe styles are not down to anatomical differences. Rather, shoes have become a site for the construction of gender difference.[11]

FIGURE 7.1   Men's silk brocade shoes (1730). Northampton Museum, 1975.23.1P.

As the century wore on, men's and women's shoes went their separate ways. Men's shoes became plainer in style and their heels lowered. Heels now carried the taint of the aristocracy and 'polite' manners came under attack for their insincerity and effeminacy. Lower shoes did not seek to deceive and placed their wearers on a level with one another, so were symbolic of equality in the Age of Revolutions.[12] Increasingly, men's shoes were only to be had in black (or, occasionally, brown). Colour disappears from the male wardrobe in general by the Victorian period. Historians have conventionally argued that this constituted a 'renunciation' of bodily display, which smoothed over distinctions between propertied men, giving them a common identity and a moral justification for their collective power.[13] Far from being dull or self-abnegating, some recent commentators have pointed out that sartorial blackness could in fact be very showy, and made a collective statement about men's 'standing, goods [and] mastery.'[14]

By contrast to men, Elizabeth Semmelhack argues that women came to be seen as sensual and irrational over the course of the Enlightenment, and their footwear followed suit.[15] Whereas men's shoes were usually made of leather, women's were typically made from silk or wool.[16] By the end of the eighteenth century, fashionable women were wearing delicate fabric pumps tied with ribbons, which wore out so quickly they bought several pairs at once. Boots were available for walking or riding but, unlike men's, these were for a specific purpose and were not for general wear. In the 1800s, half-boots were fashionable among female walkers, but even these were narrow and relatively flimsy, being made from kid leather or cotton.[17] So whereas men's shoes were avowedly practical articles that equipped them for mobility within the public sphere, women's footwear restricted them to domestic arenas and roles.

This divergence of gender roles was relevant to the politics of the century, since recent historians have shown how Georgian political culture was fundamentally gendered.[18] The primary critique of the establishment was known as 'Country patriotism,' which alleged that the Hanoverian monarchs and their governments were not ruling in the interests of the people. Derived from neoclassical republicanism, it believed in the power of propertied citizens, whose virtue and independence allowed them to speak out against the corrupt oligarchy.[19] The power of this appeal rested on nationalism and gender. Country thought pitted the patriots and 'the people' against an establishment that they alleged was culturally foreign. The polite classes' desire for foreign luxuries – such as food, art and fashion – was taken to be evidence of their lack of patriotism and moral fibre. Worse, in the neoclassical tradition, 'luxury' was a source of corruption in the body politic: it upset the constitution, both in the sense of the individual's bodily health and in terms of the political system.[20] As we will see, expensive consumer articles like shoes could therefore be the focus of anti-establishment political critique. As well as being unpatriotic, their targets were 'effeminate,' suggesting that they lacked the moral qualities of true men. In opposition to this, the patriots revelled in a culture of sturdy masculinity, which celebrated physical strength, direct manners, simple tastes and rural virtue.

The political subject of the Georgian period was a male head of household, who governed and represented those who depended upon him, on the model of a Roman citizen. This political celebration of virtuous masculinity evolved over the course of the century. In the later eighteenth century, radicals who sought to reform the political system usually made their case within this tradition, arguing that the establishment was morally and politically corrupt, and that ordinary men deserved citizenship rights on the basis of their masculine independence. This involved organizing citizenship along gendered lines, since women, children and any man who did not meet the required masculine standard were excluded from political rights.[21] Radicals too celebrated a muscular, assertive vision of masculinity and politicized the ways in which that body was clothed, as we shall see.[22] It was therefore not the case that men's claims to political citizenship were based upon disembodiment or 'renunciation,' as the corollary to women's exclusion on bodily grounds. On the contrary, men's political claims were highly corporeal, based upon a particular vision of the virtuous body.[23]

In this context, the masculine body was politicized and particular attention was paid to what men wore on their feet. As a commentator of 1825 noted: 'Religion, patriotism, public and private virtue, pure and fixed principles of taste, intellectual and corporeal refinement, all – all depend upon the choice of *shoes*.'[24] Shoe leather itself could even be said to be a masculine material, given its toughness, dull colours and earthy smell. It comprised an area of consumerism that included horse tack, breeches, luggage and other safely masculine accoutrements.[25] Real men wore leather shoes whereas women, foreigners and the poor often did not, highlighting how notions of manhood were constructed in terms of gender, race and class in this period.

Shoes and the nation

The consumption of foreign goods and styles could be highly politicized in the eighteenth century. As a first example, let us consider John Gay's *Trivia* (1716), a satirical poem about walking the streets of London. The fact that the narrator is walking is itself pointed, since the fashionable elite come in for criticism in the poem for not doing so. The fashionable lady whose feet are bound in 'braided Gold' travels by coach or chair: 'Her shoe disdains the Street.' By contrast, the narrator offers advice to the manly urban walker:

> Then let the prudent Walker Shoes provide,
> Not of *Spanish* or *Morocco* Hide;
> The wooden Heel may raise the Dancer's Bound,
> And with the 'scalloped Top his Step be crown'd.[26]

Gay condemns these fine soft leathers from abroad, which were both culturally suspicious and not up to the rigours of a London winter. Instead, Gay recommends 'firm, well-hammer'd Soles': Aileen Ribeiro notes that such shoes would have been

made from 'sturdy English cowhide with well-nailed soles.' Unlike dancer's shoes, these would have modest heels and would be wide at the front and fitted at the back, so as to be suitable for walking.[27] The discussion of shoes throughout *Trivia* has a political focus. Gay associated with Tory writers and was critical of the Hanoverian establishment. Whereas Whig writers like Joseph Addison and Richard Steele promoted 'polite' urban behaviours, Gay celebrated the sturdy indigenous culture of the lower and middling sorts.[28]

Gay's focus on footwear in the poem was quite deliberate, since shoes were redolent with national symbolism. It was partly a question of supporting indigenous manufacturers, on mercantile grounds.[29] The connection between shoes and Englishness went deeper, however. Most shoes were made from cowhide, which was a by-product of the meat industry.[30] Beef was of course synonymous with Englishness, being associated with strength and prosperity: cartoonists celebrated it as John Bull's favourite dish, and Hogarth's 'The Gate of Calais' (1748) suggested that it was the envy of the French in particular.[31] If food symbolism could be deployed to suggest that other nations were poorer and less free, then so could leather and the articles manufactured from it. Leather too was a product of the English landscape, which provided rich pasture for grazing cows and also materials such as bark and acorns (from the symbolically redolent oak) that were used in the tanning process. Edmund Burke famously used the image of 'thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak' to signify the silent majority who rejected revolution and radicalism in the 1790s.[32] Leather was therefore of 'the country' in an organic way and leather shoes mediated between the wearer and the land on which he trod. Clothes' proximity to the body make them expressive of the politics of the wearer, but given that leather articles like shoes function as a 'literal second skin,' they embody that connection in a particularly direct way.[33]

If sturdy English footwear connected the wearer to their country, then footwear or styles from abroad represented a form of contamination. Critics of the elite noted that they were corrupted by the experience of the Grand Tour, where they acquired foreign clothes, tastes and manners. The 'macaroni' was the man who brought effeminate manners back home with the pasta dish, and became a stock figure in prints, satires and on the stage. Gay condemned the 'Fop, of nicest Tread' who sported his 'red heel'd Shoes' on the streets of London: *talons rouge* originated in the court of Louis XIV and were copied by fashionable and francophile Englishmen.[34] Historians debate whether the fop was a sexual or a social figure: did he represent a queer sexuality, or was he a heterosexual figure who took 'polite' manners too far?[35] Either way, Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello argue that he 'undermined social hierarchy and the English pragmatic sense of style.'[36] The cartoon 'Welladay! is this my son Tom' (1773) juxtaposes the fop with his father, a farmer who has come to town and is shocked at his attire (Figure 7.2). The fop's tiny slippers with fancy buckles contrast with the farmer's top boots, which are bulky in order to protect the leg while riding, and which are fitted with spurs. Their masculinities are embodied in their contrasting postures, since the fop's refined step contrasts with his father's broad gait. This relates to their choice of footwear, since the fop's heeled

FIGURE 7.2 'Welladay! is this my son Tom' (1774). Lewis Walpole Library.

slipper lent itself to a refined, toe–first step, whereas the farmer's riding boots would have fostered a broad–legged stride.[37]

As well as providing a means to satirize the foreign tastes of English elites, foot–wear also served to characterize foreigners themselves. 'Wooden shoes' came to symbolize poverty, oppression and foreignness. A poem of 1734 condemned the '*Wooden Shoe*, that *Type* exotick/Of *Tyranny* and *Pow'r Despotick*.'[38] In particular, it was used by the English to caricature the French. This symbolism was widely employed in the politics of the 1670s when Charles II was criticized for allying with the French against the Protestant Dutch. In 1673, a wooden shoe was placed

in the speaker's chair, bearing the arms of Charles on one side and the king of France on the other.[39] As one satirist put it:

> When the English Prince shall Englishmen despise,
> And think French only loyal, Irish wise;
> Then wooden shoes shall be the English wear,
> And Magna Carta shall no more appear;
> Then th' English shall a greater tyrant know
> Than either Greek or Gallic stories show.[40]

Forcing Englishmen to wear 'wooden shoes' meant imposing French-style absolutism upon them. James Gillray satirized the prejudices of 'patriot' politicians in his print 'Independence' (1799). It depicted the backbencher Thomas Tyrwitt Jones, ranting to an empty House of Commons about foreigners, non-Anglicans and corruption, among other things: 'I don't like Wooden Shoes! no Sir, neither French Wooden Shoes, no nor English Wooden Shoes neither!' Jones is presented as a John Bullish squire, of sturdy build and clothed in dishevelled rural attire, including bulky leather riding boots.[41]

Throughout the eighteenth century, 'wooden shoes' stood for the footwear supposedly worn by the French. Gay noted that, in Paris, 'Slav'ry treads the Streets in wooden Shoes' – in contrast to the comfortable and expensive leather shoes worn by his English narrator.[42] Leather shoes permit an easy freedom of movement that clogs do not, so footwear can relate to notions of liberty in a direct, corporeal sense. The availability of such shoes was a direct consequence of the political system: before the Revolution, the French leather industry was tightly controlled and heavily taxed, so France suffered from 'an endemic absence of leather' whereas Britain was more successful at meeting demand.[43] During the Revolutionary wars, leather was required for the military so clog-wearing became even more common, and the *sabot* became a revolutionary symbol. In the 1790s, British caricaturists depicted bloodthirsty *Sans-Culottes* either in wooden shoes or barefoot. In James Gillray's 'Un petit soupèr a la Parisiènne, Or A Family of Sans-Culotts refreshing after the fatigues of the day' (1793), their huge clogs emphasized their emaciated frames, and contrasted with the buckled leather shoe and shapely leg of the murdered aristocrat under the table (Figure 7.3).

Class and the politics of the body

In reality, of course, many British people wore wooden shoes as well. This only serves to demonstrate how notions of nation intersected with those of class in this period. Working people in Britain commonly wore clogs.[44] They were widely worn in the Lancashire mill districts, for example, where clog fighting or 'purring' was a violent popular pastime. Northern radical politicians were aware of the class connotations of the wooden shoe. George Williams was a former soldier who supported universal suffrage and the ballot, and opposed slavery and the Corn Laws.

FIGURE 7.3   James Gillray, 'Un petit soupèr a la Parisiènne, or A Family of Sans–Culotts refreshing after the fatigues of the day' (1793). Beinecke Library.

He stood for Ashton–Under–Lyne when the borough got its first parliamentary seat as a result of the 1832 Reform Act. A deputation from the town found him working on his farm 'with a spade in his hand and good strong clogs on his feet,' which apparently confirmed his radical credentials. After his victory, he was presented with 'a pair of clogs strong enough to trample a score of boroughmongers to the dust.'[45]

Rather than being fully wooden shoes, these clogs commonly had thick leather uppers on wooden soles. Wooden soles were cheaper than leather and wore out much less quickly. Thick leather uppers were nailed to the wooden sole, so they were sturdy and quick to produce. The disadvantages of wooden soles are their lack of flexibility and their weight. A pair of crudely constructed clogs from the early nineteenth century in Northampton Museum are notably heavy, with soles that are a minimum of 15 millimetres thick (Figure 7.4). Leather shoes provide a very different sensory and corporeal experience to wooden ones. Leather soles mould to the insole, providing comfort that unyielding wood does not. They also become flexible and sympathetic to the motions of the foot, allowing the wearer to walk with a smooth gait. By contrast, clogs are noisy and cumbersome, and promote an inelegant walking style. In terms of the body's appearance, they exaggerate the size of the foot, which would have had particular class connotations in the early

FIGURE 7.4   Clogs, early nineteenth century. Northampton Museum, D.3/59–60.

nineteenth century when it was fashionable to have the appearance of small feet. Footwear can therefore help us to understand how social class manifested itself in bodily terms in the past.

Many working people in Britain did wear leather shoes, but these too could be signifiers of class. Shoes were expensive consumer articles in the Georgian period. Before the introduction of sewing machines and new welting techniques in the 1840s, shoes were very labour intensive to produce and were therefore a signifi-cant purchase. Whereas the elite could afford bespoke footwear that was made to measure, others had to make do with readymade footwear that was only available in a few sizes. As Margo DeMello notes, most people in this period therefore wore shoes that did not really fit.[46] As well as having implications for comfort, it will have affected how large numbers of people walked and comported themselves. Work-ing people commonly made do with cast-off or second-hand shoes, which could be uncomfortable if they had moulded to the foot of their previous owner. Shoes were also repaired and adapted, to eke out as much wear in them as possible. A pair of early nineteenth-century ankle boots from Northampton Museum have clearly been cut down from riding boots: of fairly crude construction to begin with, this adaptation will have given them a new lease of life.[47]

Whereas the elite could afford several pairs of shoes in a range of shapes and colours, working people typically only had one or two pairs in much more generic styles. The divergence of men's and women's styles was far less pronounced among working people than it was for their social betters: linking shoe design to widening sexual difference only works to an extent, since social class also needs to be taken into account. Working-class footwear gravitated around particular styles, such as the Blücher boot, a laced ankle boot that shod private soldiers and working men in

the early nineteenth century. A lower quality version was the brogan, which often had wooden soles and 'stiff leather that dug into the skin of the wearer.' Cheapest of all was the 'Negro brogan,' which was exported to America to be worn by slaves.[48] A common feature of working people's footwear was hobnails. Hobnails added to the durability of the sole and also provided grip when walking on muddy ground: they were therefore useful for private soldiers and working people, but rarely appeared on elite footwear. Hobnails had the disadvantages of being noisy and unyielding on hard ground, and were notorious for causing leaks when the nails fell out.[49] Alison Matthews David notes that common soldiers were 'beasts of burden,' who had to carry heavy packs and were shod with metal much like the horses.[50] A horseshoe-shaped plate was often attached at the heel to stop it wearing out.[51]

Shoes were therefore highly symbolic of social class. Although sumptuary laws that restricted certain clothes to certain classes had been repealed in 1604, the exigencies of economics and culture were almost as effective at prescribing footwear styles. Rebecca Earle notes that 'a deep sartorial gulf . . . separated the rich from the poor' by the nineteenth century.[52] In today's parlance, to be 'well heeled' implies wealth and station, whereas to be 'down at heel' is its opposite. In the eighteenth century, these phrases were not yet proverbial: they could be used to comment on someone's shoes, but the social comment was only implied.[53] For example, at a criminal trial in 1784, a witness described a defendant as having 'one of his shoes down at heel.'[54] This was a comment on the shoe rather than the man, although it was in keeping with his shabby appearance. In the nineteenth century, however, these phrases took on their modern meaning as describing the person themselves, implying a close identification between clothing and its wearer. All of this has wider implications for the nature of social identity. Dror Wahrman argues that the 'modern self' emerged over the course of the eighteenth century and that, by the nineteenth, individuals were strictly classified in terms of gender, race and class. He also argues that clothes became detached from this process, as one would see through them to perceive the real self.[55] Earle agrees that clothing 'was no longer considered a racial characteristic' by the nineteenth century.[56] As we have seen, however, shoes became *more* important to the ways in which their wearers were socially classified. Perhaps more than any other item of clothing, shoes are synonymous with their wearer: they are identified *with* the body rather than merely being an adjunct to it.

It is therefore worth concluding by focusing on elite men's footwear and their implications for politics. We have noted how, over the course of the century, men's shoes became plainer and lower-heeled. The shoe remained an important part of the elite male ensemble, however. As McNeil and Riello note:

> The male shoe also acted as a type of emphatic punctuation stop at the end of silk-stockinged legs, which marked out his gender distinction from young boys and women, and his class distinction from working men wearing leather or cloth protective leggings, ragged shoes, and clogs.[57]

As Karen Harvey has noted, apparel such as leather breeches emphasized the shapeliness of the leg and the prominence of the genitals, so was highly sexualized.[58] It was therefore men's very *bodiliness* that marked out their status in society and the public sphere. Although shoes were usually plain, one opportunity for decoration was the buckle. These went out of fashion in the 1790s when they became a politicized symbol of the aristocracy, along with the stockings-and-breeches ensemble. Nathaniel Wraxall noted in his diary that, in 'the era of Jacobinism and equality,' men's dress was characterized by 'pantaloons, cropped hair and shoe strings, as well as the total abolition of buckles and ruffles.'[59]

Boots came into vogue in the 1790s and remained central to the gentleman's wardrobe for decades to come. The adoption of trousers had implications for shoe fashions, since trousers and pantaloons would typically be worn with boots rather than shoes. In 1801, Hampton Weekes wrote from London to his brother in the country to offer him his old silk breeches, since 'I wear my boots and Pantaloons now': he later added, 'indeed it is the wear of all the young Men here.'[60] Given their association with the military and equestrianism, boots are often fashionable in times of war. In the democratic political atmosphere of the time, however, boots became synonymous with public life. Boots suggested energy, activity and a statesmanlike attention to the febrile international situation.

The boot *par excellence* was the wellington. This was developed by the bootmaker George Hoby following the instructions of the Duke of Wellington, who desired a simple, smooth boot for wearing on campaign. As the invention of the victor of Waterloo, and later prime minister, the wellington's patriotic credentials were never in doubt. In common with other fashionable footwear of the early nineteenth century, the wellington was cut close, and was manufactured from leather that was more flexible than was traditional for riding boots. Examples from museum collections have supple soles and uppers, making them suitable for walking as well as riding (Figure 7.5). It was therefore notable for its adaptability. As J. Sparkes Hall noted, 'We go to the ballroom in it, the theatre, the houses of parliament, and even royalty itself is approached in boots!' The 'we' that he referred to were of course elite men, and the locations were the centres of the public sphere, where statesmen were expected to dress and move in a particular way. He continued:

> A good Wellington boot of the softest calf leather, the sole moderately thick, the waist hollow and well-arched, firm and yet flexible, cut to go on without dragging all your might with boothooks, and made with an intermediate sole of felt to prevent creaking, is the best boot for general wear that can be made.[61]

The fitted wellington, whose soft leather hugged the leg, therefore provided a silhouette for elite men that emphasized the contours of their bodies. At a time when men of Wellington's class dominated political life, the wellington boot underlined their manly qualifications for office. Dandyish but sober, elegant but practical, the wellington epitomized the balancing act lived by late-Georgian gentlemen, who

FIGURE 7.5   Wellington boots, 1800–1825. Northampton Museum, 2000.27.33.2.

were expected to embody a refined but moral masculinity. The wellington there-fore befitted this transitional period in masculinities, between what John Tosh char-acterizes as the eighteenth-century 'polite gentleman' and the 'simple manliness' of the Victorian period.[62] Such men were required to be virtuous in both their public and their private lives, to synchronize the 'outer' and the 'inner' man, and footwear – that most liminal of garments – helped them to achieve this.

In conclusion, shoes were loaded with political meaning in the Georgian period. The wellington boot, the wooden shoe or the women's silk pump all mark out their wearer in terms of class, nation and gender. Shoes were therefore 'politi-cal' in the sense that they contributed to the process of classifying people. As I have argued here, however, shoes also had a more direct bearing on the politics of the day and were bound up with debates about political participation in the Age of Revolutions. The 'wooden shoe' carried connotations of foreignness, poverty and oppression, whereas the leather shoe was replete with masculine and national asso-ciations. These were not just symbolic traits, mere facets of representation: rather,

these qualities were inherent in the materiality of the objects themselves and the ways in which they were used. If men of a certain class made a case for their right to rule based upon their masculine attributes, then we need to pay attention to the ways in which they mobilized their bodies in order to make this claim. Gentlemen shod in expensive, supple wellingtons moved and comported themselves in a very different way to a millworker in clogs, or a lady in shoes made from fine textiles. What we wear on our feet can therefore help us to understand the ways in which political cultures have historically been embodied.

Notes

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2 Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), chap. 2.
3 Kimberly Alexander, 'Shoes and the City: Shoes and Their Sphere of Influence in Early America, 1740–1789', in Deborah Simonton (ed.), *The Routledge History Handbook of Gender and the Urban Experience* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), pp. 296–308, p. 306.
4 Ellen Sampson, 'Entanglement, Affect and Experience: Walking and Wearing (Shoes) as Experimental Research Methodology', *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 5 (2018), 55–75, pp. 61, 66. See also Giorgio Riello, *A Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers* (London: Berg, 2006); Kimberly Alexander, *Treasures Afoot: Shoe Stories from the Georgian Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018).
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6 June Swann, *Shoes* (London: Batsford, 1982), p. 20.
7 Matthew McCormack, 'Boots, Material Culture and Georgian Masculinities', *Social History*, 42 (2017), 461–479.
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9 For example: Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).
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11 Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, 'Footprints in History', *History Today* (March 2017), 30–36, p. 30.
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13 John Carl Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930); David Kuchta, *The Three Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550–1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Thomas A. King, *The Gendering of Men, 1600–1750 Vol. I: The English Phallus* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).
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15 Elizabeth Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style* (London: Reaktion, 2017), pp. 170–172.
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