Life during the reign of George IV (1820–1830)

**Introduction**

George IV became King of Great Britain, Ireland and Hanover on 29 January 1820. During his long apprenticeship for the throne, as Prince of Wales and (after 1811) Prince Regent, he was a colourful and controversial figure. This exhibition, timed to coincide with the bicentenary of George’s accession, examines his life and reign through The University of Nottingham’s Manuscripts and Special Collections.

George inherited the throne at a difficult time. Revolutions were erupting in Europe and the British government faced opposition following the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819, when cavalry charged into a crowd demanding parliamentary reform, killing at least a dozen people. During 1820–1, a plot to assassinate the cabinet was uncovered, and the King generated further opposition through his unsuccessful attempt to divorce his wife, Caroline, and prevent her from being crowned Queen. Against this backdrop of turmoil, convention required that both a General Election and coronation take place.

The political role of the monarchy was a matter of keen debate. George was only the second monarch to rule the United Kingdom, after the Act of Union with Ireland in 1801. His opposition to Catholic Emancipation, and extravagant personal lifestyle, made him a subject of criticism and ridicule. However, he took a huge interest in architecture, music and the theatre, and he left behind a great cultural legacy.