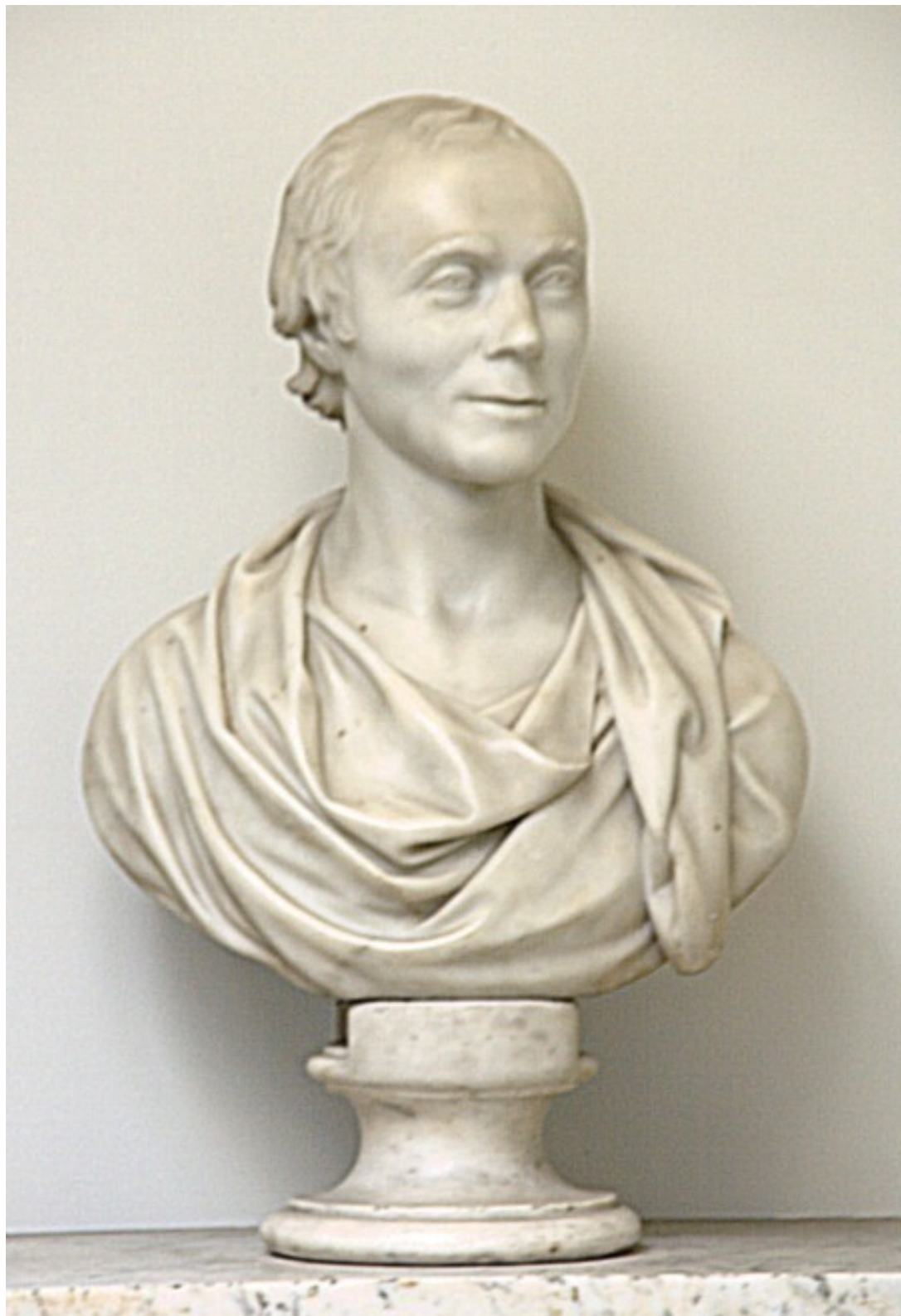
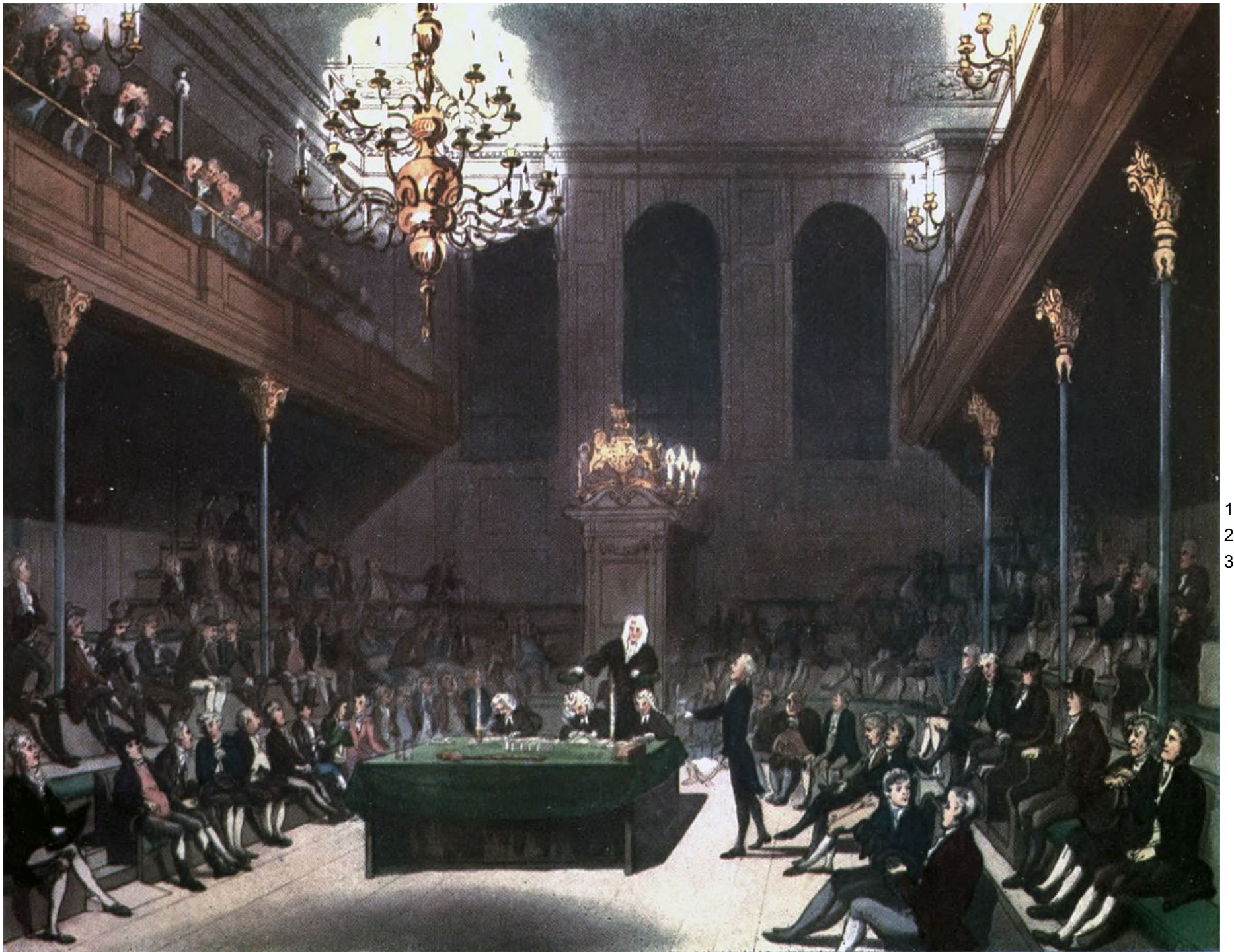


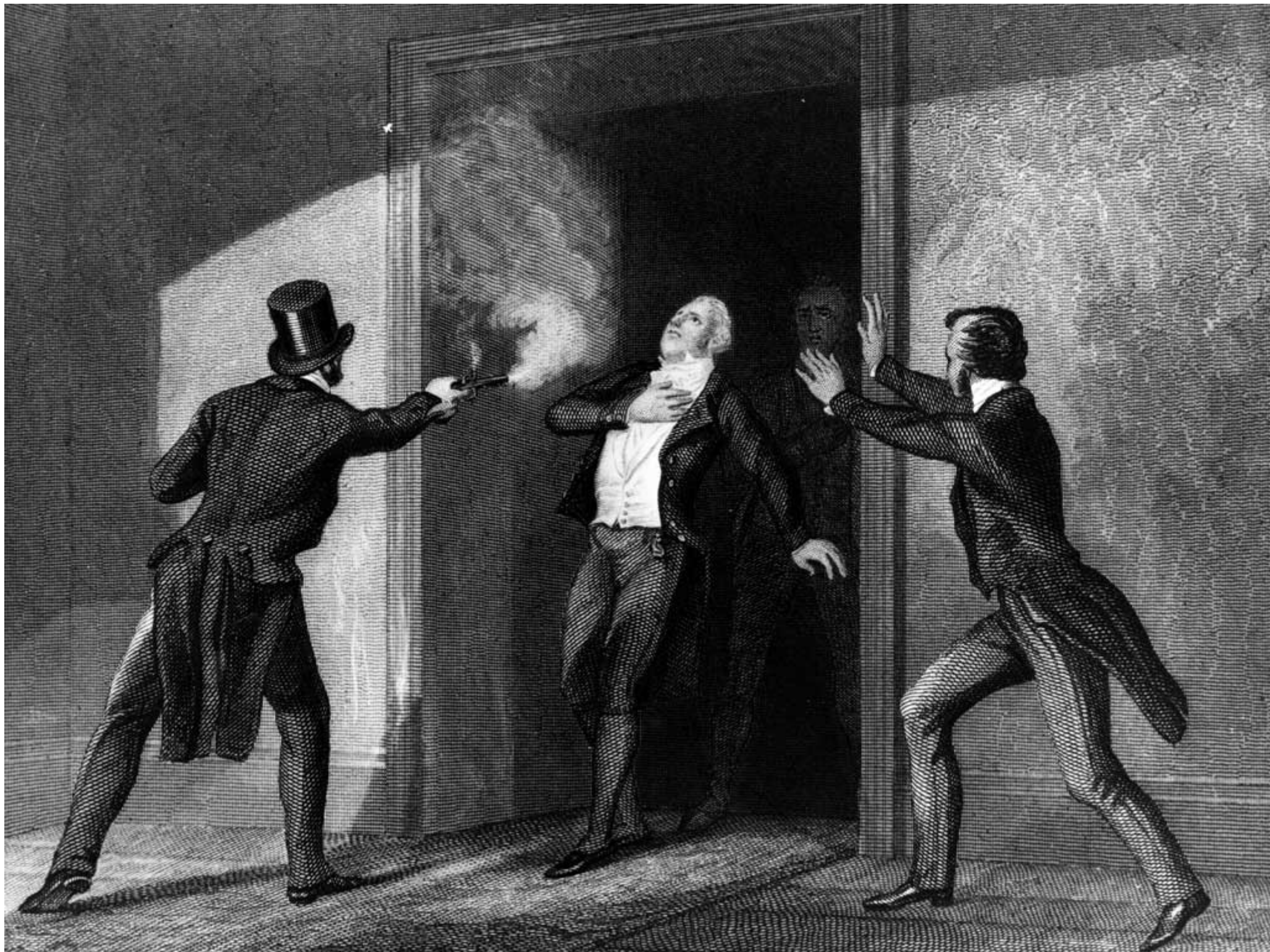
Spencer Perceval







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Spencer Perceval

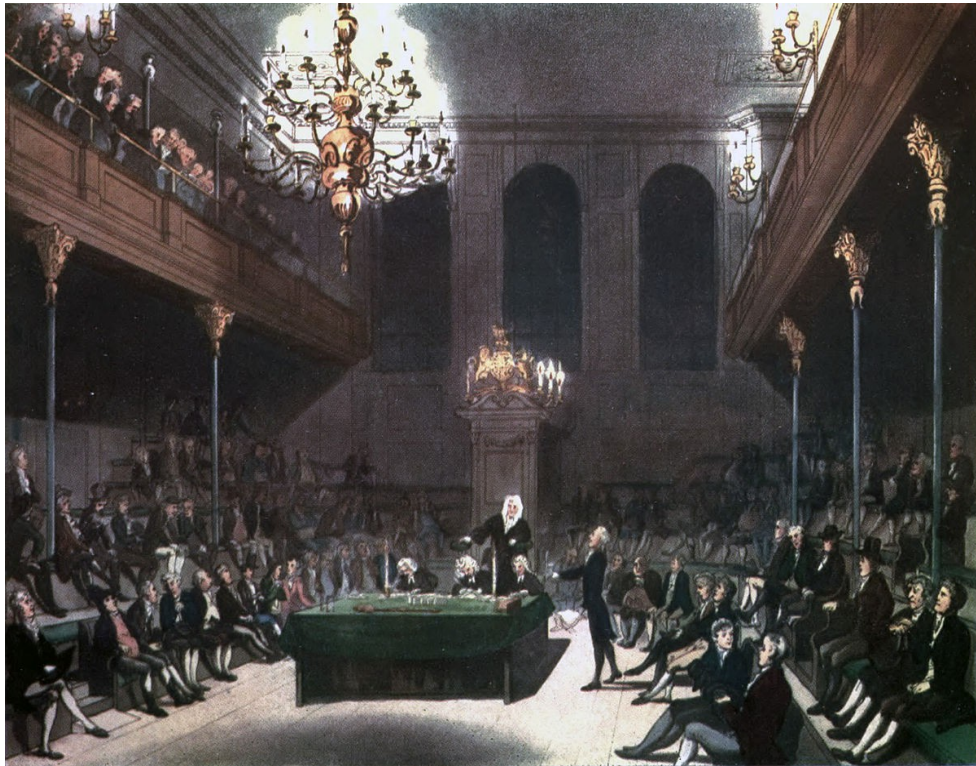


Spencer Perceval (November 1762- May 1812), who is sometimes referred to as one of Britain's forgotten prime ministers, remembered only for the manner of his death.

The second son of the second marriage of the Earl of Egmont, he had very little money, so, after his education at Harrow and Trinity College Cambridge, he studied Law at Lincoln's Inn, was called to the Bar in 1786 and practised on the Midland circuit, and in 1796 became a King's Counsel (at 33, one of the youngest ever). Perceval eloped with, and married, Jane Wilson, who was the younger sister of Margareta, the wife of his elder brother Charles. They went on to have thirteen children! Whilst practising Law, he acted as junior counsel for the Crown in the prosecutions of Thomas Paine for Seditious Libel (1792) and John Horn Tooke for High Treason (1794).

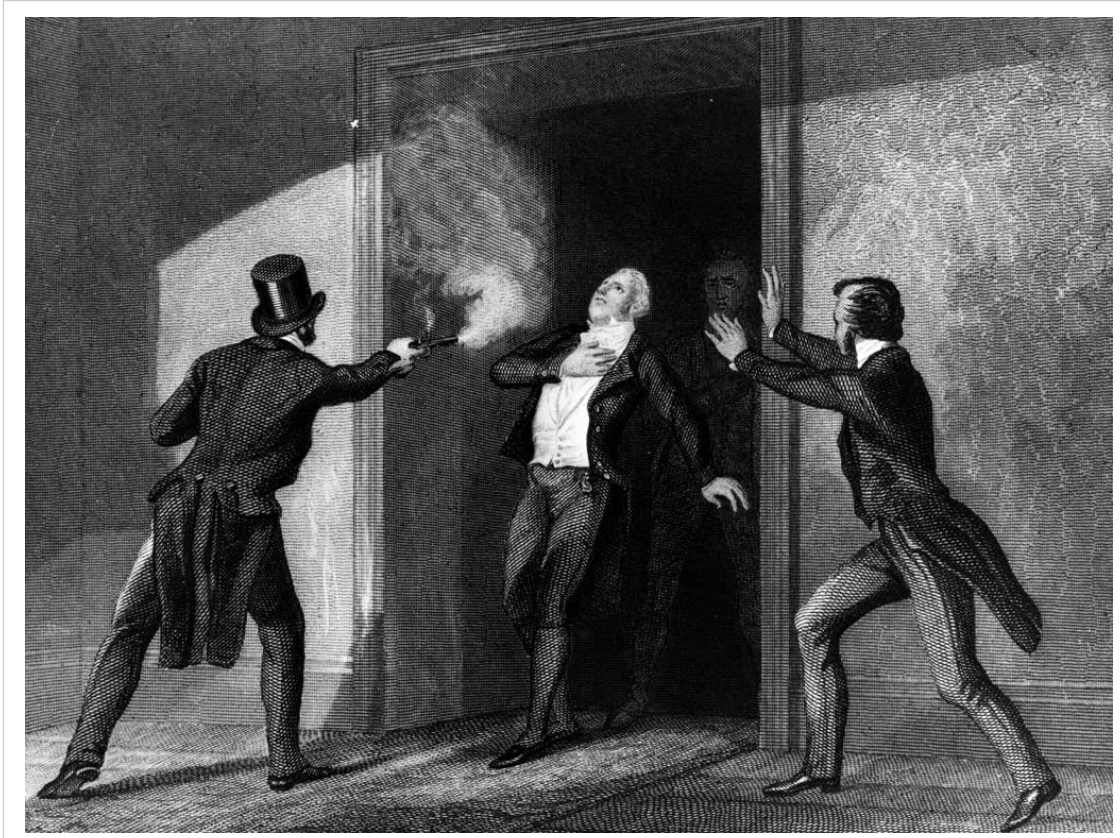


Marble bust (based on Perceval's death mask by Joseph Nollekens) at Pitzhanger Manor, London



House of Commons 1808 – Engraving

His rise to power from 1796 was rapid. Perceval was appointed Solicitor General and then Attorney General for England & Wales during Addington's ministry, became Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons in Portland's ministry, before becoming Prime Minister in 1809. At the head of a weak government, Perceval faced a number of crises during his term in office, including an inquiry into the Walcheren Expedition (one of a number of poorly planned, badly reconnoitred and badly led Continental excursions carried out during these wars. 40000 military were involved, larger than the Peninsular Army of the time, of whom 106 were killed in combat, 4000 died of disease and 10000 shipped home sick, of which nearly half were permanently incapacitated), the recurrence of the madness of George III, leading to the Regency, economic depression brought about by poor harvests, and Luddite riots. He overcame those crises, and in addition successfully pursued the Peninsular War in the face of Opposition defeatism, and won the support of the Prince Regent (no mean feat for a Tory). His position was looking stronger by early 1812, and then, on 11 May, he was assassinated by John Bellingham, a merchant broker from Liverpool, who had a grievance against his government (demanding compensation for his imprisonment in Russia).



Artist's Impression of Perceval's assassination – 11 May 1812

A little-known figure in history, Perceval has been described by his modern biographer, Denis Gray, as "a herald of the Victorians". He is known for being assassinated, but that's about all.

There has been suggested the interesting possibility that Bellingham was not a lone assassin, but in someone's pay! He was said to have had no money, and his rent was considerably in arrears, yet, in the days immediately before May 11th, he suddenly not only cleared those arrears, but bought two pistols, some new clothes and left a draft for more than £100 with his Landlady for safe keeping. Was he paid by an American to do the deed? Anglo/US relations were deteriorating rapidly towards the War of 1812, which started only a month later. It's doubtful that it will ever be known.