

# THE WENDOVER ELECTION OF 1741

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*That bribery and intimidation were usual in eighteenth-century elections is a commonplace of the history books. Mr Mead puts flesh on this generalisation with this detailed study of their impact on the voters of Wendover. There is evidence, too, for the effects of alcohol on the outcome of the election.*

## *Background*

In the fourteenth century the Borough of Wendover enjoyed the right to return two burgesses to Parliament, and did so in 1300 and 1308; but this right lapsed. Largely due to the efforts of William Hakewell and John Hampden the privilege was restored in the reign of James I (West 1909, 17) and Wendover returned two members to Parliament from 1623 until the Reform Act of 1832.

Hampden himself was one of Wendover's representatives in the 1623 Parliament of James I, and also served the Borough in the first three short-lived Parliaments of Charles I in 1625, 1626 and 1628. Charles governed without a Parliament from 1629 till 1640, and during this time the ex-MP for Wendover achieved national fame for his refusal to pay 20s. Ship Money, for which he was tried in 1638. Although the verdict went against Hampden he became the most discussed man in the Kingdom, and regarded as a champion of the rights of the commons. When the King recalled Parliament in 1640, Hampden was therefore the obvious choice to represent his county, which he did until his untimely death in the Civil War in 1643.

It is interesting to note that two of Wendover's representatives in the Long Parliament at this time were Richard Ingoldsby and Thomas Harrison (Carlyle 1849, iii, 244-63). Both men's signatures appear on the Death Warrant of Charles I. Ingoldsby claimed later that his had been forced from him by Cromwell, who guided his hand (Fraser 1973, 287), but the signature is there, bold and flourishing for all

to see. Harrison was to become one of Cromwell's Major Generals during the Commonwealth.

## *Early Eighteenth Century Elections*

After the Restoration the Hampden family continued to play a prominent part in the life and politics of Wendover, and in the 1727 election all three candidates were descendants of the patriot (West 1909, 87). They were James (Hampden) Viscount Limerick, Richard Hampden and John Hampden, Lord of the Manor of Wendover. Limerick and Richard Hampden were elected, but Richard was subsequently chosen to represent the county, and John took his place as the second representative for the Borough.

In the 1734 election there was an outsider standing against the sitting representatives, Lord Limerick and John Hampden. The inducements that this candidate, John Boteler, offered the voters must have been attractive, for the result of the poll was:

John Boteler	Elected	100 votes
John Hampden	Elected	98 votes
Lord Limerick	Not elected	88 votes

Boteler was unseated after the election and Hampden and Limerick continued to represent the Borough (West 1909, 87). Boteler's fall was almost certainly connected with bribery. It may be noted that John Hampden's expenses for the same election amounted to £538.10.0, which suggests that he was not averse from a little bribery himself. An Act of Parliament was passed after this election to make such practices illegal.

### *The 1741 Election*

The main source of information for this election is the 'Election Poll' in the Hampden Collection (BRO D/MH/40). This document gives particulars of every voter in Wendover, by name, occupation, the owner of the house where he lived, how he had voted in the previous election (1734), how he voted in the current election (1741), and whether he had borrowed money from Hampden. Only male householders who were not on poor relief were qualified to vote, and the Poll therefore does not list every household in the Borough.

193 voters are listed, and of these 129 are shown to have voted in 1734. Thus 33% of the 1734 voters had either died or left the Borough in the preceding seven years.

### *The Candidates*

Both the sitting members, Lord Limerick and John Hampden, sought re-election in 1741. They were opposed by Ralph (Verney) Lord Fermanagh, later to become the first Earl Verney. He was a descendant of the Sir Edmund Verney who had been MP for Wycombe in the Long Parliament, and had been killed carrying the King's standard at Edgehill. The family seat was at Claydon, but in 1741 Lord Fermanagh owned 100 of the 193 houses occupied by voters in the Borough of Wendover.

John Hampden was not so well placed as regards influence. In a letter written to him by Henry Harding, dated 21 September 1740, he was advised of the current situation in the Borough (BRO D/MH/40/35). Harding, who appears to have been Hampden's election agent, warns that a Mr Gibbons is overcoming the recent Act against bribery by lending voters five or six guineas apiece, which they would not need to repay. Moreover, Henry Holmes would be giving a hogshead of ale to the poor men of the parish on the Court Day. The 'Election Poll' identifies Holmes as the landlord of the Maidenhead Inn, which was owned by Lord Fermanagh. Holmes, however, voted only for Lord Limerick, which suggests that Gibbons was in fact Limerick's agent.

The letter points out, however, that although in the past nobody had suffered for voting against the Lord of the Manor, many voters were vulnerable to pressure owing to having made encroachments on the Lord's waste; there was 'scarce a person in the whole town but has . . . erected cottages, barns, shops, bulks pales and rails on the waste'. Others were 'laying Timber and other materials upon ye waste', apparently preparatory to building.

### *Bribery*

The loans referred to in Harding's letter, which replaced the straight bribery of former days, were an idea that Hampden quickly seized on for himself, and in a further letter dated 14 January 1740/1 (BRO D/MH/40/35), Harding lists 20 people who have been lent 6 guineas each on Hampden's behalf. These are mainly farmers, maltsters and tradespeople, who were presumably the more influential voters in the community. The letter also refers to Mr Fowler, the Excise Officer, whom Hampden has overlooked, and who hopes he will be as generous to him 'as Lord Fermanagh has already been'. Harding points out that Lord Fermanagh's agent, Mr Pickton, has distributed 6 guineas each to 30 of his friends.

Mr Bigg, the schoolmaster, would like Hampden to contribute £10 to his school, and Mr Thomas Tuffin hopes that his son will be remembered. It is not recorded whether these requests were granted, but Richard Bigg certainly cast his vote in favour of Hampden, and Richard Tuffin did not.

The Election Poll gives further details of Hampden's generosity to the electorate. Altogether 115 loans of 6 guineas are shown, plus one of 11 guineas, which, added to the 20 already mentioned in Harding's letter give a grand total of £862.1.0, distributed between 136 of the 193 voters.

The 11-guinea loan was made to Thomas Smith, an innkeeper. Perhaps this was to provide a 'Hogshead of Ale' on Hampden's behalf, such as Holmes was providing for Limerick. Smith accepted the loan but voted for Fermanagh (his landlord) and Limerick.

Table 1. The pattern of voting, Wendover, 1741.

<i>Voted for</i>	<i>Fermanagh tenants</i>		<i>Loans from Hampden</i>	<i>Fermanagh tenants with loans from Hampden</i>
Hampden only	2	—	2	—
Fermanagh only	2	1	—	—
Limerick only	58	32	20	8
Hampden/Fermanagh	88	54	81	49
Hampden/Limerick	26	2	24	3
Fermanagh/Limerick	16	10	7	7
Did not vote	1	1	1	1
<i>Totals</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>68</i>

It appears that the scene was set for a close contest between Hampden and Fermanagh. Out of a possible 386 votes Hampden had 'bought' 136, Fermanagh had 100 tenants plus 30 'bought' votes, 130 in all, and this left Limerick with only 120 at most.

#### *The Results and the Pattern of Voting*

The results of the 1741 election for the Borough of Wendover were as follows:

John Hampden	Elected	116 votes
Lord Fermanagh	Elected	106 votes
Lord Limerick	Not elected	100 votes

Each voter had the right to elect two candidates, but 62 returned one vote only, and one voter did not vote, which accounts for the discrepancy between the votes cast, 322, and the possible total of 386.

The pattern of voting is shown in Table 1. Two facts emerge from this table. First, that tenants did not necessarily vote for their landlord: 34 of Lord Fermanagh's 100 tenants voted against him. Second, that voters who accepted loans did not always vote for their benefactor: 27 of the 135 who accepted loans from Hampden voted against him.

#### *Fermanagh Tenants voting against their Landlord*

10 of the 34 Fermanagh tenants who voted against their landlord were labourers. To put this in perspective, Table 2 shows how all the labourers in the poll voted, and compares this with their master's vote, where this is known.

Table 2. How Wendover labourers voted in 1741.

<i>Master</i>	<i>Master's Vote</i>	<i>No. of Labourers</i>	<i>Labourers Votes</i>
Hampden	Absentee	16	H/F 13; H/L 2; I did not vote
Wm Burnham	H/F	4	H/F 4
Thos Weedon	H/F	4	H/F 2; L 2
Wm North	H/F	3	H/F 3
Mr Geary	Absentee	3	H/F 3
Mr Kipping	L	3	L 3
Mr Stace	Absentee	3	L 3
Mr Tuffin	H/F	3	H/F 3
John Allen	H/L	2	H/F 2
Wm Ellwood	Absentee	2	H/F 1; L 1
Hen Holmes	L	2	L 2
Jos Parnum	H/L	1	L 1
Wid Aldridge	No vote	1	L 1
Thos Atkins	L	1	L 1
Thos Benning	F/L	1	H/L 1
Mr Hill	H/F	1	H/F 1
Thos Ginger	L	1	L 1

All Hampden's labourers voted for their master, with the exception of George Hayce, who did not poll. 13 voted additionally for Fermanagh and two for Limerick.

Where a master's vote is recorded, most labourers voted the same way. Only six showed any independence. Absentee masters' votes are unknown, but each small work force tended to vote in harmony with each other.

The fact that labourers' votes generally followed their masters' preferences suggests that this bond was more important than loyalty to a landlord. Jobs were more valuable than cottages.

The remaining 24 'disloyal' tenants were of various trades and status. It is perhaps significant that they all voted for Limerick alone, and did not try to gain favour with their landlord by using their other vote for this purpose.

### Eviction

A list of residents and tenants exists for 1742 (BRO AR/66/77/4), which follows the same order as the 1741 'election poll'. When the two lists are compared, using surname bench marks, a remarkable pattern of empty houses and changed tenancies emerges.

7 of the 10 labourers who voted against their landlord, Fermanagh, have vanished from the list, 2 are living in houses not owned by Fermanagh, and only one, John Brill, who worked for Mr Geary, is still in the same cottage.

Similarly 14 of the 24 tradesmen who voted against Fermanagh do not appear on the 1742 list, and 9 have a different landlord. Only one, Richard Dell, maltster, is spared.

It is clear that Lord Fermanagh carried out mass evictions of tenants who voted against him.

John Hampden owned only two houses in the Borough in 1741. Both tenants voted for Limerick and both are missing from the 1742 list.

There are many changes in the 1742 list apart from these, as Table 3 shows.

Table 3. Changes between 1741 and 1742.

Householders in 1741	193
Living in same house in 1742	103 = 53%
Living in different house in 1742	33 = 17%
Left the Borough	57 = 30%

Obviously not all those who left the Borough were evicted for their vote. Only 36 had voted against their landlords. The high number of people leaving after the poll may point to another well-known practice in eighteenth-century elections: filling empty cottages with

outsiders who could be relied on to vote the right way. No fewer than 32 of Lord Fermanagh's tenants had not voted in the previous election, and 15 of them had left the borough by next year, including 6 who had given their landlord no cause for complaint.

Some tenants took the opportunity of moving to bigger or better cottages after the many vacancies caused by the evictions, and this explains the large number of changed occupancies. The 33 rehoused within the Borough included 12 of Fermanagh's 'disloyal' ex-tenants.

A further point of interest is that in an election poll of 1753 (Claydon N2/5/20) 13 tenants who had left the Borough in 1742 are shown as householders again, including 3 of Fermanagh's 'new voter' tenants, and 12 who had voted against him.

### Wayward Voters

One of the most striking facts of the 1741 poll is the number of voters who accepted a loan from Hampden and then voted against him. 27 of the 135 who took loans voted adversely, and one did not vote at all. 8 of these also voted against their landlord.

14 of the 27 had left the Borough in 1742; 5 were still there in different houses and 7 still in the same house. No action appears to have been taken by Hampden against those who stayed. Possibly they had repaid the loan. Possibly there was not much he *could* do.

Thomas Smith, the innkeeper who received 11 guineas from Hampden, voted for Fermanagh (his landlord) and Limerick. He does not appear in the 1742 list and had presumably decamped with his guineas.

Each man was entitled to two votes, yet of the 34 Fermanagh tenants who failed to vote for him, 32 cast their votes for Limerick alone, and likewise 20 of those taking loans from Hampden. 8 men were obligated to both Hampden and Fermanagh, yet voted for neither.

Altogether 53 people voted perversely, in the sense that they failed to use one of their votes in favour of candidates to whom they were in some way obligated. Table 4 shows how they voted at the previous election, in 1734.

Table 4. 'Perverse' voters: how they voted in 1734.

Did not vote (new voters in 1741)	22
Hampden/Limerick	14
Limerick/Boteler	2
Boteler only	13
Limerick only	1
Hampden only	1
	53

16 had therefore cast both their votes in the earlier election, and their failure to do so on this occasion was wilful, and not due to ignorance of their rights.

#### *The 'Maidenhead' Factor*

The roll of 1753 is the most comprehensive of the three referred to in this paper, as it lists every householder, including women and those on poor relief. Comparison of the three lists (1741, 1742 and 1753) makes it clear that the compilers followed the same route round the Borough on each occasion. It is therefore possible to construct a schematic diagram showing where each voter lived in relation to others, and which houses were left empty after the election.

The first name on all three lists is Thomas Kirby, who lived in his own house on the waste. This stood at the top of Pound Street and probably disappeared when the Metropolitan Railway line was built. It is marked on the excellent map of 1768 (Claydon), where it appears as 'Kirby's', and is therefore the bench mark from which plotting has to begin.

Other bench marks are the Shoulder of Mutton Inn (though not mentioned by name, a public house is in the same position in 1741), the Maidenhead Inn (the corner building on the junction with North Street), and the house of Thomas Smith, which can be identified as the King's Head.

Unfortunately it is not possible to match the schematic to the 1768 map, since the former cannot indicate which houses were in courts or up alleys, and the latter does not distinguish non-domestic buildings. Fig. 1 shows the 'best fit' that can be obtained. Although not perfect, it makes two points sufficiently clear: that there is a marked clustering of those voting perversely for Limerick (i.e. for Limerick alone, or for Limerick and a candidate other than one to whom they were obligated); and further that there is a 'super cluster' round the Maidenhead Inn. It was at the Maidenhead, it will be remembered, that a hogshead of ale had been provided for Limerick's supporters.

It seems a fair inference that near neighbours encouraged each other in this course of action, and that this was particularly likely to happen where Lord Limerick's hogshead was close at hand.

#### *The Electorate*

Voting was restricted to male householders living within the Borough, which occupied a very small part of the parish of Wendover. The remainder was known as the Forrens, and none of the substantial farmers living there had a vote, unless, as 40s. freeholders, they were qualified to vote in the County election.

The survival of documents relating to the Wendover election of 1741 makes it possible to study the workings of manhood suffrage in a period over 100 years before it became universal, and the outstanding impression must be its genuinely democratic nature. Table 5 shows the composition of the electorate, and demonstrates that it was 158 labourers, craftsmen and small tradesmen that the candidates had to woo. Gentry were insignificant in the electorate, and the middle class—farmers and innkeepers—hardly less so, especially as it is quite uncertain how many of the latter should be counted among small tradesmen, as those listed as alehouse keepers have been. An attempt has been made to distinguish tradesmen and craftsmen, on the basis of whether or not they depended mainly on a manual skill or mainly on buying and selling. Clearly there are a number of borderline cases: butchers and



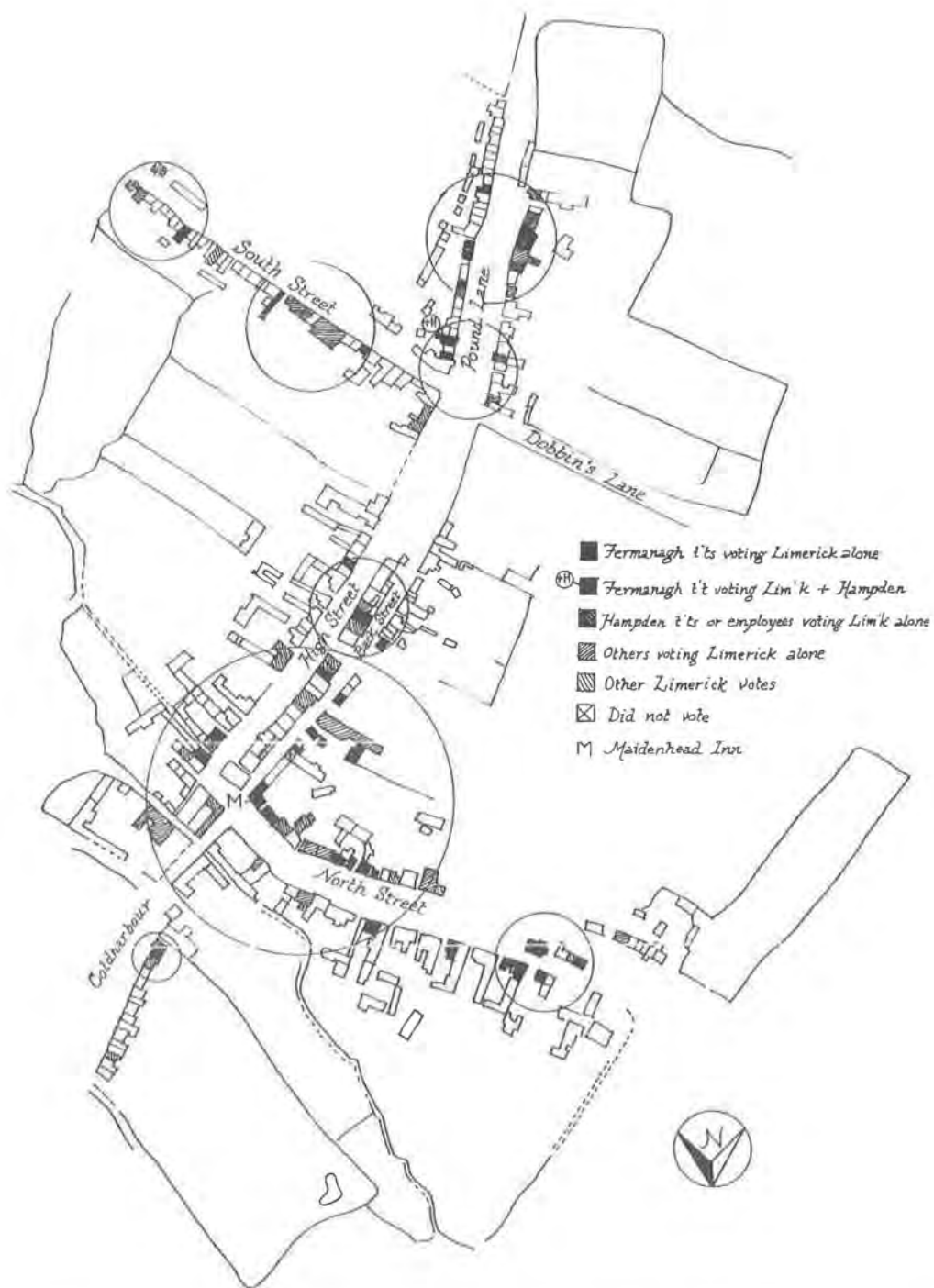


Fig. 1. The Borough of Wendover in 1768, from a map at Claydon House. There is a marked clustering effect of those voting 'perversely'.

Table 5. The composition of the Wendover electorate, 1741.

Gentry			2
Farmers			13
Innkeepers			11
Professional	Schoolmasters	2	
	Exciseman	1	
	<i>Total</i>	3	3
Small tradesmen	Bakers	6	
	Butchers	5	
	Maltsters	5	
	Drapers	3	
	Barbers	3	
	Potashmen	2	
	Carriers	2*	
	Lacemen	2	
	Millers	2	
	Grocer	1	
	Hog-dealer	1	
	Fellmonger	1	
	Chandler	1	
	Apothecary	1	
	<i>Total</i>	35	35
Craftsmen	Shoemakers	14	
	Tailors	8	
	Carpenters	7	
	Sawyers	6	
	Coopers	4	
	Chairmakers	3	
	Smiths	3	
	Hempdressers	3	
	Glaziers	2	
	Wheelwrights	2	
	Staymakers	2	
	Gardeners	2	
	Bricklayers	2	
	Collarmaker	1	
	Dogmaker†	1	
	Joiner	1	
	'Musicianer'	1	
	Weaver	1	
	Thatcher	1	
	<i>Total</i>	66	66
Labourers			57
Unspecified			6
<i>Total</i>			193

\* A Wagonner is counted as a carrier.

† A maker of fire dogs.

bakers need manual skills; but the distinction seems useful nevertheless.

Among these men the tradition, if not the reality, of economic independence was still strong enough to make them dare the displeasure of their masters and landlords—especially, perhaps, with a little alcoholic encouragement. Such was English democracy in the mid eighteenth century.

#### Acknowledgements

The genesis of this study was a local-history evening class jointly organised by Oxford University Department for External Studies and the Workers' Educational Association (Wendover Branch) between October 1983 and December 1984.

The combined efforts of the group resulted in an essay, 'Life in Wendover, 1620-1800', which was submitted for the Cicely Baker essay prize of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society in December 1984 and was awarded first prize. It was condensed from contributions by a number of members of the group, of which the present paper was one.

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