

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & PARLIAMENT

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In May, 1955, a special exhibition of prints, MSS. and posters relating to this subject was arranged in the County Museum. Some of the material was from the Society's Archives; some was kindly lent by the County Records Office.

THE political history of the county is a fine one. There is an intimate local association in all the high-lights of the national picture, and Buckinghamshire has produced many families and individuals whose contribution to English history will never be forgotten.

Early in the thirteenth century, when parliament in embryo can just be discerned, knights were being called from this county, as from others, to advise the monarch. Though we may not be certain which assembly in fact constituted the first real parliament, we know that burgesses had been called with the knights of the shire before the Model Parliament of 1295. About fifty years ago three writs addressed to the Sheriffs of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, Surrey and Sussex, and Wiltshire were discovered at the bottom of a chest which was being transferred to the Public Record Office. These summoned both knights of the shire and burgesses to a Parliament to be held at Westminster at Easter in 1275. It is true that the wording of the sheriff's instructions, "*Venire facias*", left the all-important condition of election unspecified, but there was always a certain elasticity in the form of directions issued by the King to the returning officers. In any case, the phrase "to cause to be elected" was using *elected* in the sense in which *election* is used in the 1918 Act—meaning *nomination*. In addition, the Sheriff's writs never specified the boroughs to which he was to issue his precepts, and the Sheriffs themselves were inconsistent, thus providing the boroughs with ample excuse for ignoring the precepts.

In 1298 the Sheriff of Bucks. returned no boroughs as fit for or liable to representation; two years later Wycombe was returned but not Amersham or Wendover; in 1308 all three and Marlow as well are listed. In 1311 the position is the same as in 1300, but Wycombe did not respond either then or in 1315. In 1353 the Sheriff sent a precept to Buckingham and entered it in his return—but neither then nor to any medieval parliament did that borough make any election. In spite of all these efforts, Chipping Wycombe was the only borough which was consistently represented in Parliament from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.

Today this prominence of Marlow, Wendover, Buckingham and Amersham seems strange, as does the fact that sixteenth-century Bucks. *could* send up fourteen members, when at present the county is represented by five. The county, of course, chose two knights, and each of the six boroughs—

Amersham, Wendover, Marlow, Wycombe, Buckingham and Aylesbury—could elect two Burgesses. The last two boroughs did not send up members until the sixteenth century, and up to 1625 only Wycombe returned with any regularity. William Hakewell of Wendover, while examining Parliamentary writs in the Tower, discovered that Amersham, Marlow and Wendover had not returned members since 1309. As a result of his efforts, and against the wishes of James I, these three boroughs returned members to the first Parliament of Charles I in 1625, from which date the county members numbered fourteen. This compares very favourably with nine each for Berks.; Northants.; Oxford; Northumberland; eight for London and Middlesex together; and Notts.; ten for Surrey; and four for Beds.

For most of the Middle Ages Bucks. did not send up its full quota of members and this reluctance on the part of boroughs was quite common. Shire representation remained fairly constant, but the 166 cities and boroughs from which Edward I had summoned representatives to Parliament had sunk to 100 in the reign of Henry VI. Medieval man was troubled by his liability to attendance at the Shire Court and election as a Member of Parliament—he was anxious to escape such liability, whether baron, knight or burgess. Two knights of Oxfordshire once fled the country on their election. Local parsimony prevailed over national interest. Not only did a borough which evaded representation escape responsibility of paying its members, it also got off with lighter taxation. Boroughs represented only by the knights of the shire were taxed with the shires and paid a fifteenth; boroughs with their own representation paid a tenth. In addition, the treatment of the Commons by the Crown during the first years of Edward III's reign was not calculated to encourage attendance. The King summoned Parliament to secure supplies—members attended to seek redress of grievances. In 1332, for instance, the Commons met on Monday, 17th March. After five days they were told their petitions had neither been received nor answered, and that they might go home—the King promising to call another Parliament to deal with such questions. This was certainly done in September, but as soon as money had been granted, members other than burgesses were asked to advise the King whether to deal with petitions or to proceed against Scotland. The latter course being advised, another promise to deal with petitions when convenient was given. A third Parliament met at York on 4th December, but in the absence of the requisite Lords and Prelates petitions could not be answered. Parliament was prorogued and met again at York in January. The cost and difficulties of travelling long distances reduced attendances, of course.

In 1322 the knights of the shire were entitled to 4s. per day whilst Parliament was in session, and the burgesses 2s. per day. The electors were responsible for these payments and often grudged paying. The rates of pay varied: 2s. at the beginning of the fourteenth century; 3s. 4d. in 1586; 5s. in 1604; 6s. 8d. in 1606; and nothing at all one hundred years later. Amersham once asked to be relieved of its burden and, as we have seen, many towns just did not return members. At one time (2 Ed. II) Sheriffs had to be restrained from levying too much in respect of members' expenses and then the number of days on which Parliament sat was specified (5 Ed. II). Gradually the

Money Paid at Wendover on Monday the 13th of October
 1740 when Mr. Stampson went round the Town to ask
 Votes

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Wm. Darvall | — | 6 | 5 | 5 |
| Thomas Smith | — | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Henry Holmes | — | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Thomas Lane | — | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| John Senior | — | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Wm. Hill | — | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| John Foster | — | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Wm. Birch | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Eliz. Charge | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Robt. Sharp | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Jos. Glenoster | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Abra. Stone | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Jos. Birch | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Cather ⁿ . Symonds | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| George Hayse | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Wm. Cozier | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Widow Aldridge | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Cap ^t . Charge | — | 2 | 2 | 0 |

ELECTORS OF BUCKINGHAM.

PRESERVE YOUR BOROUGH FROM
DISFRANCHISEMENT
AND
ULTIMATE ANNIHILATION.

Lord John Russell proposed wholly to Disfranchise

Andover,
Arundell,
Ashburton.

Calne,
Dartmouth,
Evesham.

Harwich,
Houlton,
Knareborough,

Lyme Regis,
Marlborough,
Midhurst,

Northallerton,
Reigate,
Richmond,

Thetford,
Toyness,

Wells,
Wilton,

He would lop off one Member from

Bodmin,
Bridgnorth,
Bridport,
Buckingham,

Chippenham,
Cirencester,
Cockermouth,
Devizes,
Borchester.

Guildford,
Hertford,
Huntingdon,
Leominster,
Lewes.

Ludlow,
Lymington,
Lichfield,
Maldon,
Malton,

Marlow (Great),
Newport,
(Isle of Wight),
Peterborough,
Poole,

Ripon,
Stamford,
Tamworth,
Tavistock,
Tewkesbury,

Tiverton,
Weymouth,
Windsor,
Wycombe
(Chipping),

AND DISFRANCHISE ALL FREEMEN.

Mr. Bright would do worse!

SEE HIS LIST OF DESTRUCTION:--

Arundel,
Houlton,
Ashburton,
Lyme Regis,
Thetford,
Toyness,
Harwich,
Dartmouth.

Evesham,
Wells,
Reigate,
Richmond,
Northallerton,
Marlborough,
Calne,
Leominster.

Lymington,
Thurs,
Ludlow,
Andover,
Knareborough,
Petersfield,
Tewkesbury,
Maldon.

Horsham,
Abingdon,
Launceston,
Brecon,
Ripon,
Cirencester,
Liskeard,
Huntingdon.

Chippenham,
Bodmin,
Borchester,
Great Marlow,
Devizes,
Hertford,
Radnor,
Guildford.

Malmesbury,
Lichfield,
Midhurst,
Westbury,
Droitwich,
Wycombe,
Wareham,
Cockermouth.

Bewley,
Helsdon,
Christchurch
Eye,
Bridport,
Bridgnorth,
Malton,
Woodstock.

And he would maim, dismember, mangle, and maliciously disable

Newport
Buckingham
Chichester
Peterborough

Stamford
Poole
Weymouth and
Melcombe Regis
Windsor
Lewes

Beverley
Bridgnorth
Newcastle-
under-Lyne.
Tunbridge
Grantham

Warwick
Tiverton
Newark
Barnstable
Pontefract
Salisbury

Bedford
Maidenhead
Hereford
Sandwich
Scarborough
Durham

Penryn & Falmouth
Tavistock
Winchester
Bury St. Edmunds
Taunton.

Rochester
Berwick
Tamworth

LORD DERBY

WOULD DISFRANCHISE

NO MAN & NO TOWN.

TO PRESERVE YOUR RIGHTS

VOTE FOR our Queen, Lord Derby, and

BARRINGTON,

The SUPPORTER OF OUR PROTESTANT
INSTITUTIONS.

position changed—prestige of Parliament increased and, as citizens began to vie with one another for seats, payment disappeared.

From the seventeenth century until 1832 Bucks. representation remained static at fourteen members and was changed only by the reforms of the nineteenth century, which altered not only size and shape of constituencies but also the qualifications of voters. The franchise for counties was determined by the statute of 1430 (8 Hen. VI, c. 7), which had restricted it to persons resident in the county having freehold to the value of 40s. per annum at least; the election took place in the County Court and the type of person to be chosen was specified in 1445. In the boroughs, however, the qualification for voting varied everywhere. In Buckingham the right of election was vested in a small body—the bailiff and twelve burgesses. In Aylesbury at one time the franchise was exercised by everyone who had a hearth of his own (“potwallopers”); whilst Amersham and Marlow were “Scot and lot” boroughs—those who paid “Scot and lot”, or rates, could vote. This was quite typical of the period. The average number of voters in the counties was 4,000, but even the largest boroughs fell far short of this figure, and only twenty-two had more than 1,000 electors, thirty-three more than 500, whilst the majority had less than 200. In the early eighteenth century Amersham and Wycombe had little more than 100 voters each and Buckingham, as we have seen, had thirteen.

More important than these disparities, however, were the corrupt practices and individual influence which often decided elections. Certainly patronage was always expensive, and often crippling, as witness the fact that Burke, in spite of his ability and renown, had to seek another seat when his patron, Lord Verney, could not afford to buy the votes necessary for his return. The county elections in 1679 and 1685 produced similar improper actions by the Sheriff, when a sudden change in the meeting place for election was made. In the former year the venue was changed from Aylesbury to Buckingham, whilst in the latter the Sheriff adjourned to Newport Pagnell. That of 1685 was the first election in the reign of James II and the notorious “Bloody” Jeffreys had come down to Bucks. to exert his influence for Hackett, the High Tory. The Whig candidate, Thomas Wharton, eldest son of Philip Lord Wharton, hurried to Newport Pagnell as soon as he learned of this move, but found all lodgings taken by the Tories. Whig freeholders were compelled to tie horses to the hedges and sleep in the open, and Wharton spent £1,500 in one day on food and comfort for his supporters. Hackett failed—he was bottom of the poll.

The worst corruption was in the boroughs, however; the fewer the voters, the greater the chance of corrupt influence. The Municipal Corporation's Report of 1835 stated that Buckingham was under the control and management of the Duke of Buckingham and had “for a long time served as an instrument for enabling the patron of the borough to return two members and nothing more”. Lord Shelburne, writing about the Dashwood influence in Wycombe, wrote, “What can you say to a blacksmith who has seven children, or a common labouring man who is offered £700 for a vote?” If such an amount is exceptional, fees of 2 guineas, 4 guineas and 6 guineas were frequently paid in Wendover, one of the worst “rotten” boroughs, in which

members were several times unseated because of corruption, and where, in 1768, tenants were dispossessed because they voted against the wishes of the landlord. Nevertheless, it produced a number of great men like Hampden, Steele, and Burke, who had to find a new seat in 1774. Burke, when he paid tribute to Lord Verney's patronage, emphasised that he had always had complete freedom in Parliament.

If Marlow and Amersham were comparatively honest, Aylesbury was a notorious centre of graft. The election of 1700 has become a classic case. A Tory Mayor, White—the Returning Officer—rejected a number of votes of Whig electors. A cobbler called Ashby, under Wharton's patronage, brought a successful action against White at the Assizes, but the decision was reversed by the Queen's Bench in 1704. The issue became one of possible Parliamentary privilege, but eventually appeared insoluble and Parliament was dissolved.

In 1802 punch and guineas both flowed freely; scaffolding was erected to prevent voters voting; Mr. Bent later lost his seat; and a special Act of Parliament was passed in 1804 to prevent corruption in future Aylesbury elections. John Wilkes had referred to bribery in 1755 when he wrote to his agent, "I am determined to oppose him (Willes) and will attack him with the utmost spirit, particularly the true Aylesbury way of *palmistry*".

County elections sometimes lasted fourteen days—time was necessary because of poor roads and transport—but if no vote was cast during a period of one hour the poll was declared closed. In 1784 Lord Verney was battling with Sir John Aubrey and the Hon. T. Grenville; Verney was thirty votes ahead of Aubrey with only fifteen minutes to go under the above rule. Ashridge and Ivinghoe contingents who were going to vote against Verney were delayed by the weather and the roads, but the agent from Buckingham rushed to the poll with a plumper for Verney—much to the dismay of Lord Verney and his committee, who told the unfortunate agent that his enthusiasm had lost the election. The automatic extension allowed the delayed parties to arrive. It is not surprising that this one-hour rule attracted the attention of dishonest agents and candidates.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were probably the periods of greatest political influence so far as Bucks. is concerned, but of course Disraeli brought this county to the political heights in the nineteenth century. Although all the outstanding personalities have been the subjects of detailed studies, it is worth remembering that Bucks. has produced a number of Prime Ministers—George Grenville, Lord Shelburne, Lord Grenville, Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Roseberry. A name which will outlast most of these is Burke, in spite of the fact that he was never even a cabinet minister. Shelburne, Disraeli and Burke may not have been sons of the soil, but the last two at least became men of Bucks. by adoption and grace.

Today Buckinghamshire is represented by five members only—a fair proportion on the basis of population. The rotten boroughs have disappeared, much of the colour has gone from elections; but practically all men and women have votes, and the present democratic constitution, which is the envy of many, is the result of a long gradual growth and owes much to events of the past.

Notice delivered to candidates in 1747 Wendover election—requesting no bribery, C.R.O.

Letter from Eyre Coote to Sir Wm. Lee, February, 1768—complaining about probable financial cost of coming election.

Agent's Notebook. September, 1779—Chipping Wycombe—Mr. Grenville's Canvass—promises of votes; dinners, etc. C.R.O.

Letter to Woolwich blacksmith—offering free transport to Aylesbury to vote. 1784. C.R.O.

8s. tickets for food and drink in Aylesbury. 1797 and 1802.

Minutes of evidence given in the House of Lords on the Aylesbury Bill, 8th and 11th June, 1804. (Referring to bribery and corruption in 1802.) C.R.O.

Bucks. Advertiser and Aylesbury News—1859 cutting referring to 1802 election.

1818 Committee Account. The Hon. C. C. Cavendish debtor to John Fowler for dinners, etc., Aylesbury election.

General

Poll books—various (in both archives), early eighteenth cent. onwards.

Register of electors, borough of Buckingham, 1845-6.

Marlow polling list, 1784.

Election cards—various, including one for 1876 which reminds voters that they need not fear landlord intimidation.

1780, Constables' Oaths, Amersham election.

Instructions to officials for election procedure, Wendover.

Indenture, 1756. Returning members for Amersham—signed by John Wilkes, Sheriff.

Election addresses, 1818. C.R.O.

St. James's Chronicle, 4th and 7th June, 1763.

The London Gazette, 11th and 14th April, 1761.

Reports on various boroughs, 1831 and 1867, with maps.

Posters

Close of poll, 9th May, 1831 (plumpers shown). C.R.O.

Close of poll, 1818 county election.

State of the poll—first day—Aylesbury election.

How to Treat Boroughmongers.

1859 *Buckington Spring Meeting.*

1859 *Buckingham Handicap.*

Tractarianism.

Also various cartoons and songs.

ERRATA: VOLUME XVI, PART 2

The captions to Plates 2b and 3b should read: Margaret Lady Verney and Mary Lady Verney respectively.

The printers greatly regret that by an oversight the Appendix to the article BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND PARLIAMENT was transposed to page 104,