

A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE TORY: THOMAS HACKETT OF NORTH CRAWLEY (1627-1689)

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The county election of 1685 must rank among the most dramatic in Buckinghamshire history. The setting, the personalities of the leading protagonists and the result, combine to give it something of a symbolic quality, for it saw ranged against each other in John Hampden's native county, Thomas Wharton of Nether Winchendon, future Earl of Wharton and Whig manager extraordinary, and the arch-Tory, George Jeffreys, Lord Chief Justice and later Lord Chancellor to James II who personally took a hand on behalf of Wharton's opponent for the one contested seat. It is not surprising that the election merited a place in Macaulay's *History* which relates with some relish how the bluff Wharton overcame the cunning stratagem of a last minute adjournment of the poll from Aylesbury to Newport Pagnel by which the court party had hoped to defeat him.¹ It makes lively reading, though Macaulay fails to notice that Wharton could hardly have been taken by surprise since an exactly similar ploy had been tried at a previous election in which he had taken part in 1679!

With two such famous names involved it is understandable that the Tory candidate of 1685 receives scant attention in the later accounts of the event. Macaulay refers to him simply as "a gentleman named Hackett" while Lady Verney² describes him as "an unknown young gentleman of the neighbourhood of Newport Pagnel". Thomas Hackett of North Crawley is indeed an obscure figure, but the fortunate survival of some of his correspondence in the famous Phillips collection³ has made it possible to throw some light on his personality and career. Considering their relative sparsity—about seventy items in all, covering almost thirty years, from 1659 to about 1688—they enable us to form a surprisingly rounded portrait of a member of that neglected group, the Buckinghamshire Tories of the late seventeenth century. In them we have glimpses of him as a family man, a landowner and a public servant; incomplete though the portrait is, it is difficult to recognise in it "Jeffrey's tool" as Lady Verney calls him, or even the "rabid partisan" of Lipscomb's account.⁴

¹ Macaulay, *History of England*, vol. I, p. 473 (the relevant passage is quoted in F. Bull, *History of Newport Pagnell*, pp. 8-9); *A Letter from a Freeholder of Buckinghamshire* (1679).

² M. M. Verney, *Memoirs of the Verney Family* (1899), vol. IV, p. 335, apparently quoting from the correspondence. Hackett, who, incidentally, was 58 years of age in 1685, was certainly not unknown to Sir Ralph Verney, a fellow justice of the peace.

³ The correspondence in question is part of a small collection of Hackett and Langford correspondence sold at Sothebys in June 1971. The purchaser, Mr. R. M. Willcocks, very kindly lent the originals for photocopying by the Buckinghamshire Record Office. The photocopies are hereafter referred to as BRO, D/X 464. In addition to Thomas Hackett's correspondence, they include some correspondence of his son Nicholls for the period 1703-18, and other miscellaneous items.

⁴ *Verney Memoirs*, IV, p. 335; Lipscomb, *History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham*, I, p. 550.

The Hackett family's association with Buckinghamshire went back almost a hundred years before 1685. Like many another local family, they sprang from the London merchant class. The first to settle in North Crawley, Roger Hackett, (or Hacket), Doctor of Divinity (1559-1621), whose fame as a preacher merits him a paragraph in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, was the son of a Lord Mayor of London. Roger Hackett obtained the rectory of North Crawley in 1590 and afterwards purchased the advowson in 1604⁵. Then, according to Browne Willis "having bought in several estates and laid them together he built himself the principal House in the whole parish". The house, afterwards called Crawley Grange⁶, and the estate descended to Roger's son, another Roger, about whom little is known beyond that he displayed royalist sympathies during the Civil War, for his name appears on a warrant of 1644 for sequestering the estates of "delinquents and papists".⁷ In 1650 Roger settled his estate on his eldest son Thomas, the subject of this paper, on the latter's marriage to Elizabeth, daughter and heir of Augustine Nicholls of Halstead in Leicestershire.⁸

At the time of his father's death in 1657, Thomas Hackett was thirty years of age. His mother, Frances Preston of St. Albans, had died when he was five; of three younger sisters, one had died in infancy and a second in 1651 aged only seventeen. Within a year or two of his wife's death, Roger Hackett had remarried and Thomas thereby acquired three half-brothers, the oldest of whom, Roger, was born in 1636, nine years his junior.⁹

Relationships between step-children are traditionally difficult and the Hacketts seem to have been no exception. A draft letter of 1659 in Thomas' handwriting, the earliest of his that we have, written within two years of his father's death, reveals a state of affairs not lacking in dramatic content, and incidentally affords some valuable insights into the writer's character. The "Cousin" who was the intended recipient of the letter is not named but from internal evidence was almost certainly Thomas Hackett's kinsman, Robert Langford of Salford, Beds., and Grays Inn, London.

"My Brother Nick: hath whispered it that Mr. Smith hath continued by councill how my Brother Roger might sell his estate and cutt of all intayles and barre our remainder that the thing is done and the estate settled upon Mr Smith for 90£ annuity for Rogers life and if Roger die without issue, 300£ to Nick: nothing to me. Now Cosen if things be thus setting aside the ill requitall of my Brotherly kindness to Roger almost beyond example, how perfidious an action it is in Mr Smith I leave to you to iudg, after I had given him abundant thanks for the testimonys of his Love to my Brother and to ye family which I did often in your hearing, I besought him to continue a friendly correspondence with Brother, as being the only civill

⁵ *D.N.B.*; *Victoria County History, Buckinghamshire*, IV, p. 337.

⁶ It still stands, but is usually described as 16th-century in date, though containing panelling of the early 17th; a carved chimney-piece is dated 1686 (Pevsner, *Buckinghamshire*, p. 216; *Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Buckinghamshire* (1913), II, p. 222). Dr Hackett's will dated 1621 refers to "my house now building" (BRO, D/A/We/28/245).

⁷ Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 283. Roger's brother Thomas, rector of Compton All Saints, Hampshire, was one of those who refused to take the covenant (Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*).

⁸ *V.C.H. Bucks*, IV, p. 331.

⁹ *Heralds' Visitation of Bucks in 1634*, Harleian Soc., vol. 58, p. 67; North Crawley parish register (Ms. transcript in the Society's collection).

person with whom my Bro: did associate that might take cognisance of his affayres and prevent these surprizalls upon his careless & easy nature, and when he desired the morgage I had for 100£ upon my Brothers estate to be assigned to him for security of the 100£ he layd downe for my Brother rather than my bond I made no scruple to give it him I having my Brothers desire in a letter to doe it, and his character of Mr Smith as to his honese and good meaning: of ye morgage I have a cobby but of the assignment I kept none (which would by no meanes they should know) and have blamed myself infinitely since I heard these things, for my indiscreet confidence in men, such is the infirmity of my nature that one treacherous friend may wound me more than tenn open enemies. . . .”

In a situation calculated to provoke a sharp reaction from even the least suspicious person, Thomas Hackett's response shows hurt rather than anger at betrayal by a friend combined with an almost paternal solicitude for the wayward Roger. The plan of action which he outlines to Robert shows commendable prudence:

Now Cosen my only hopes rest in you and I shall give you my thoughts how the after game may best be played to retreeve the estate, if men be not past all shame & modesty and cosen I shall desire no undertaking of you which privatly I will not inable you to make good if you heare nothing of this business it may be all false, but I srewdly by some circumstance doe suspect it too true but take notice of nothing but what you have heard or shall fall from themselves that way as I imagine the plott will work more virtually. Cosen my advise is that you send for my brother alone, take notice of any reformation in him you have heard of (& I assure my selfe its not so bad with him as it hath bin) tell him that for his incouragement to his studdys and that he may not be [illegible] in his estate if money come to your hands which you expect suddenly you will take the morgaged assigned to you rendering to Mr Smith his money and damages and give him [Roger] some easier payment for the repayment of you, than may be desired of Mr. Smith that is a stranger & accordingly wish my Brother to bring his owne part of ye morgage and a cobby of my assignment of it to Mr Smith that you may consider of them to those intents This will surely discover what is done for if Mr. Smith have purchased the estate he will not assigne to you the morgage but it will break out presently how fair he hath iudged with my Brother and if you find the estate be made over to him you must take it for granted till he denie it that it is not his intention to make a prey of my Brother and of the family that cheifly relied upon him of any man to prevent such practices upon the weaknesses and imperfections of Roger. I know that he stands in some awe of you as well for the interest you have in his best freinds and for his reputation concerned in your censure as for that [you are one of the masters of the society*] he

* Struck through in the Ms. In this, and following quotations from draft letters only those erasures which seem to be significant are given.

may be scorned and cast out of the society if you froune upon him for such unhansom actions"¹⁰. . .

One hopes that the writer's fears proved unfounded on this occasion but the threat of the scheming lawyer was not one to be taken lightly at the time and—as we shall see—one of the more notorious of the breed, James Selby of Wavendon, described by Cole as “a man of very indifferent character who raised a large fortune from nothing by all the worst arts of his profession” was to cross Hackett's path some years later to his cost.¹¹

This is the only letter with the exception of a brief note from his father dated 1649 and another later one from his son Nicholls, which takes us into Thomas Hackett's immediate family circle. A considerable number of letters, however, refer to family affairs in the wider sense, revealing an extended “cousinage” taking in places as far apart as Northampton and Gloucester and embracing the families of Paynter, Rushton, Window and Vassal. Precise relationships are difficult to determine and were probably not particularly close in some instances. The connection with the Langfords (a family of ecclesiastical and common lawyers), for instance, went back two generations to Thomas Hackett's grandmother Elizabeth Langford, daughter of Dr. John Langford, Chancellor of Worcester diocese. Doubtless the link was strengthened by proximity of residence—Salford is only five miles from North Crawley—and the long survival of the lady in question, for she did not die until 1652, having outlived her husband by over thirty years.¹² On the other hand, so far as we can judge from the correspondence, the earlier London connection had lapsed.

A stray letter from one “cousin”, Henry Rushton of Northampton, written in 1667 when Thomas Hackett was forty, full of facetious allusions and private jokes, is of particular interest, implying as it does, a convivial side to Thomas's character not otherwise apparent in the correspondence¹³

You cannot imagine with what Joy I received your Collar or with what delight I read yours as if you had sent a Pacquett in one Letter I must admire your Ingenuity in speakeing much in a little and crowding so many dangerous Adventures strange Accidents and prodigious appearances in one small sheet of Paper . . .

I wonder you would have ventured your Wine had it proved according to your expectations amongst so many old Soakers who when they had filled their Bellys each man might have carryed away a Bottle in his Beard you needed not to have been surprised att the opening of the Basket for Anchovies & Olives are usual dishes in such places and welcome to such Company. But now me thinks I see your Worship mounted on your Courser filled with brave Resolutions for Crawley whence I observe that

¹⁰ BRO D/X 464/1/3. The entailed property referred to was settled on Roger under his father's wil (see below), but was not to come into his possession until he reached the age of 24.

¹¹ Quoted by W. Bradbrook in *Records of Bucks*, IX, p. 52.

¹² *Heralds, Visitation 1634*; transcript of N. Crawley parish register. Dr Langford's wife Martha was a daughter of Garbrand Herks, the famous Oxford printer, and sister of John Herks, D.D., Roger Hackett's predecessor in the rectory of N. Crawley (Will of John Langford, D.C.L., P.C.C., 1579; *D.N.B.*).

¹³ BRO, D/X 464/1/4.

Good West (*sic*) is a good Guard against Rayne itself and good Sacke the only Holy water to preserve us against ill Spectrums or Strong apparitions. .

Probably there were other such letters, but most of those which survived have a more businesslike tone, many of them relating to Thomas Hackett's duties as executor of the will of his "kinswoman" Elizabeth Paynter of Northampton¹⁴. It was a responsibility which evidently entailed much time and trouble, involving the administration of moneys held in trust for various beneficiaries over a period of some five years from 1677. There are references to investment and the payment of interest money. In a letter of 1681 Thomas Hackett regrets that "I cannot make so good improvement of it for my cousin as I would" . . . In the following year arrangements were made to transfer the sum of £100 to Nowell Bassano at the Unicorn in Aldgate on behalf of his niece and nephew. The nephew in the meantime had got into trouble for theft and Bassano wrote that "the lost sheep being now found or rather taken . . . must be speedily disposed of . . . or else he will certainly come to the gallows". A little later, he wrote again "After noe little trouble we have at last disposed of my Brother Painter's untoward son . . . he is consigned to a verry Eminent Merchant in Virginia".¹⁵

In addition to the Paynter executorship Thomas Hackett also acted as executor to another kinsman, Dr William Clark, Dean of Winchester and rector of North Crawley from 1650 until his death in 1679.¹⁶ The nine letters relating to this business are spread over an even longer period of nine years. Personal experience may explain why when he came to make his *own* will in 1688 he was reluctant to impose the "Burthen and Trouble" of executorship on his son Nicholls.¹⁷

It is unfortunate that no detailed particulars of Thomas Hackett's estates are available. A number of miscellaneous letters from tenants scattered over thirty years from 1658 onwards show that, in addition to the Crawley Grange property he also held lands in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire.¹⁸ The Leicester, shire property presumably came to him on his marriage, but part at least of that in Northamptonshire was acquired by purchase. Not all the North Crawley estate was included in the 1650 settlement; certain lands in the parish were settled on his half brother Roger under the complicated will of their father which, however, made provision for their eventual exchange for other lands in Kent probably deriving from Roger's mother. Nicholas Hackett, the other surviving son of Roger Hackett's second marriage, received an estate in Hanslope. What Nicholls Hackett, Thomas Hackett's son thought of the arrangement is revealed in a draft letter of his written in 1706 to his uncle Nicholas, then residing in Bladon in Somerset in which he tells him "you had a considerable estate (for a younger brother) left you out of a very small one for the elder".¹⁹

¹⁴ The relationship apparently goes back to William Paynter of Northampton who married Ann Herks, sister of Thomas Hackett's great-grandmother.

¹⁵ BRO D/X 464/3/1-10.

¹⁶ Relationship uncertain; he is described as "cousin" in the will of Thomas Hackett's father P.C.C.)1657.

¹⁷ BRO, D/X 464/2/1-9; will of Thomas Hackett, P.C.C., 1689. It may also be an allusion to his son's indifferent health (see below).

¹⁸ BRO, D/X 464/4/1-16; *V.C.H. Northants*, IV, p. 124.

¹⁹ BRO, D/X 464/6/3, Jan. 1706.

Nevertheless, and in spite of probable losses to the estate during the Civil War period, there is evidence from a number of scattered sources to show that Thomas, who also received by his father's will certain "bonds, specialties and mortgages" of indeterminate value, was in a position to invest in land on his own account during the following twenty years or so. In 1658, with two others, he advanced money on mortgage to the profligate Sir John Thompson on the security of the Little Linford estate (he had sold his interest again by 1670) and in 1678 he purchased the manor of Ecton in Northamptonshire for six hundred pounds. Modest additions to the North Crawley estate are also recorded in 1663 and 1673.²⁰

Some of the resources for these transactions may have originated from an unexpected inheritance resulting from the death in 1656 of his cousin Nicholas Langford which included leasehold property in Salford, Beds., and the advowson of the church there. Unfortunately, the windfall proved a mixed blessing for it embroiled Hackett in expensive litigation over Nicholas Langford's most valuable asset, a forfeited mortgage of the Digby estate made in 1652 and assigned by Nicholas to James Selby. In the collection is an undated draft legal bill of complaint in Thomas Hackett's handwriting which states that Selby had been "for divers years . . . meniall servaunt to Nicholas . . . and taken in by Nicholas a youth very poore and at the time of the assignment, agent Baylife and solicitor in all his business whatsoever" and that the assignment was "meerely a trust of Nicholas on his Solicitor for the better bringing in of his money". But in the absence of a counterpart of the deed Selby was in a strong position and it is unlikely that Hackett recovered the proceeds of the mortgage which he claimed amounted to over twelve hundred pounds. A copy letter of 1686 referring to a legal action against "select persons of our creditors" suggests money difficulties at this time but neither their nature nor their extent is disclosed. Nicholls Hackett, in the letter quoted above, states that "at my father's death I was left between 2 and £3,000 in debt". Two thousand pounds of the debt is, however, attributable to the charge of his sister's marriage portion.²¹

As a landlord Thomas Hackett seems to have enjoyed a good, even close, relationship with, at any rate, his more distant tenants, if their letters are any guide.²² Most are of a fairly routine nature, with one or two references to occurrences of interest—a whirlpool near Leicester in 1658, an outbreak of smallpox in Somersly in 1680 making it "not convenient to hassard the yonge gentlemen to come over to mee". The problem of remitting rent over long distances is alluded to in one letter which states that "returns of money are very difficult to be found". Two longer letters in 1665 and 1679 from Thomas Franklin at Ecton, who evidently also acted the part of agent, are evidence of the landlord's interest in the details of husbandry. Written on the back of one of them is a draft of a letter from Hackett to a tenant who was disputing payment of his hearth tax for which he was legally liable and of whom Franklin had a low opinion. If typical, it shows Hackett as by no means a grasping landlord.

²⁰ O. Ratcliff, *History of the Newport Hundreds* (1900), p. 260; *V.C.H. Northants*, IV, p. 124; *A calendar of Buckinghamshire Records* (Bucks Rec. Soc. no. 5), pp. 45-6; *V.C.H. Bedfordshire*, III pp. 424-5.

²¹ BRO, D/X 464/1/17; *ibid.*, 1/11; will of Thomas Hackett, *loc. cit.*

²² BRO, D/X 464/4/1-16.

I received yours dated the 14th of the Instant, I pray let it not be unkindly taken that I cannot consent Fallow close should be sowed with wheat—I have written to Tom Franklin more largely my mind concerning that close than I have now time to write or perhaps you have my desire to know . . . I do not denie you the coales at your request and am unwilling to denie you any thing, knowing you are never backward in interchange of civility, and therefore you paying this halfe yeares duty of Harth money wch will be due Michaelmas I will pay the next half yeares duty wch will be due at Lady day, being the halfe year in wch the house may have some benefit by the influence of your fires . . .

That tenants might also be party to business of a more personal nature is revealed by an enquiry from one tenant, John Smith of Tilton, in February 1688. After discussing the sale of hay and other similarly prosaic topics, he asks “what Mr Nicholls his resolution is to the proposition made concerning the Lady in Leicestershire” . . . Nicholls Hackett got married that same year but his bride Elizabeth Middleton came from Westmoreland, not Leicestershire,²³ so it looks as if this particular proposition came to nothing. In November 1688, Smith wrote again “according to your order there was Twenty Pounds rayseed among your tenants to send to Mr. Nicholls”. It seems appropriate that one of the legatees in Thomas Hackett’s will was “Old Richard Sheffield my late Tennant.”²⁴

Of Thomas Hackett’s personal finances and general style of life there is little or no information in the papers. Crawley Grange, the family seat, is an attractive but unpretentious country gentleman’s residence; apart from a carved chimney piece bearing the date 1686, it shows no sign of enlargement or embellishment in this period. Hackett’s will indicates that he kept more than one coach and mentions an unspecified number of household servants.

Thomas Hackett’s part in public affairs was by no means confined to electioneering. The records of Quarter Sessions commencing in 1678 show that as a justice of the peace he was one of the relatively small band—under forty—of regular attenders at the Quarter Sessions and several interesting letters in the collection attest the seriousness with which he took his judicial duties.²⁵ The earliest of these, a draft letter of 1664²⁶ has a special interest since it relates to the immensely important Settlement Act of two years before which had imposed drastic restrictions on the freedom of movement of the poor by enabling parish officers to obtain the removal of newcomers thought likely to become a charge upon the rates. But the Act left certain loopholes as the letter, addressed to a fellow justice, makes clear:

“ . . . one Brittin of a neighbour towne takes a cottage in Crawley under 20s. per annum whether for a year or more I know not, comes not himself

²³ She died two years later, in December 1690, in her twenty-eighth year (N. Crawley P.R. transcripts).

²⁴ A William Sheffield had been tenant to Dr Roger Hackett in 1621 (BRO, D/A/We/28/245).

²⁵ *Bucks Sessions Records*, ed. W. Le Hardy, I, pp. 509-11; J. L. Stern, “Worthies of Buckinghamshire . . ., 1678-1689”, *Records of Bucks*, XVII, pp. 3-19.

²⁶ BRO, D/X 464/5/1.

except by night or privately but sends his wife and children which was done with design as vainly supposing they could not be layd hold of by the late Stat(ute) 14 Car 2nd. 243 if he came not, and so when they have past 40 days in Crawley then he to follow, imagining that then the parish would willingly admitt him also having his wife and children already settled parishioners”.

The letter then goes on to relate that Hackett had informed the parish officers of Crawley that the whole family might legally be sent away, but advised them first to try whether Brittin would give them good security indemnifying the parish “which could hardly be imagined he being so miserable poore as to be in collection in the towne from whence he comes”. Brittin’s response was to furnish a bond from himself and his brother (“as poore almost as he”) which was not accepted. Hackett, with “Mr. Eaglestone”²⁷ then issued a warrant for the removal of the family from North Crawley; “but on the morrow she and they remoue to the same house in Crawley where in peremptory contempt of the law they will continue . . .” The recipient of this letter was Bernard Turney²⁸ whose reply dated 8 July 1664 has also been preserved. It confirms Hackett’s interpretation of the Act: “Some may question the fitnessse of it in a case where your self is concerned. But no man certainly will deny the legality of it in this matter”. But, he goes on, “The great doubt in this buisnesse is as I conceive it what course may be taken to compell Brittin and his family to obey your order and how they may be punished for their contempt in returning to Crawly . . .” Here, it seems, the wording of the statute is ambiguous and Turney’s advice is to wait until the assizes “unless they should appeal to the Sessions which is not probable there being no Colour to reverse your order”.

Two other draft letters show Hackett’s zeal for the interests of his native parish. The first, dated February 1665, is addressed to the Earl of Bridgewater, the Lord Lieutenant of the county,²⁹ and alludes to the dispute between the writer and Sir Anthony Chester of Chicheley³⁰ which, he explains, is not personal but arises from “the very many wrongs that he presseth upon the parish of Crawley”. He adds “had Sir Anthony bin my father or as dear to me as all my children, yet the lawes of honesty due to the neighbourhood, the just vindication of our lawes and govert are [duties above all relations*]. The second letter, dated 1680,³¹ is apparently about the Dean of Winchester’s property of which he was executor:

“The lease was drawn by the deane’s single direction every word of it, and read in hast to the illiterate subscribers, trusting to him who ment not to deceive, they subscribed. . . .”

* Struck through.

²⁷ Not identified.

²⁸ Of Cublington (*V.C.H. Bucks*, III, p. 339).

²⁹ BRO, D/X 464/5/3. John Egerton, 2nd Earl of Bridgewater (1623-86), of Ashridge Park, was Lord Lieutenant of Bucks from 1660 until his death.

³⁰ A prominent Tory and a near neighbour of Hackett’s; he owned some property in N. Crawley parish (*V.C.H. Bucks*, IV, p. 333).

³¹ BRO, D/X 464/5/9.

In a draft letter dated February 1677³² we find Hackett this time giving, instead of receiving, advice in judicial matters. The letter is addressed to a "Mr. Dimock" and the advice evidently concerns the proper conduct of an inquest into a case of poisoning; like the earlier letter it shows his concern for the observance of the due processes of the law.

"The iury agreed as you know at last parting to find the substance of the inquisition wch does but put the woman upon tryall and is no condemnation, that is left to her tryall and it is too nice for a iury of inquiry as yours is to stand upon the forme & words of the inditment wch forme is seteled by law and cannot be altered but by act of parliament. . . . And no indictments or inquisitions can ever be taken if the Jury of enquiry as yours is shall be allowed to dismember it and not follow the formes the law hath settled these many hundred years. And as to the substance of the indictment that she did poison her husband, the indictment it selfe is but a vehement suspition and only puts her upon tryall. And truly when we consider the bitter violent course of life she lead J. Earle to the last, the spoon meat taken the present falling ill, the many expressions upon it, the violent drought and vomiting to the last he chosen to be of the iury that can say he does not vehemently suspect she poisoned him will be found to have lesse care of his soule than his [illegible] for if a mess of the same pottage was offered him his hand would quake as he eate them and yet at the same time whilst his hand is quaking in the sight of all men must dair to swear he does not vehemently suspect they are poisoned. Sir the mater is now before you and I am so well assured of your knowledge & discretion that you need no advise only give me leave to say: when you parted with the iury last you left them in a right mind only quarrelling some words in the forme of the inquisition: I wish in this long time you doe not find they have bin tampered with the woman and her friends no doubt have solicited and the blood of J. Earle grows colder . . ."

As a justice of the peace, Hackett also had a hand in the administrative business of Quarter Sessions relating to county affairs generally. A draft letter of 8th January 1668 addressed to "Mr. Farrar"³³, concerns the mastership of the house of correction at Newport Pagnell:

"At our last monthlyly meeting at Newport before Christmas in which only Mr. Duncumbe³⁴ and my self were mett, Ambrose White³⁵ under his suite to be recommended by us to the quarter sessions for Presman's place in the mastership of the house of Correction at Newport, which the truth is Presman through poverty had ill discharged as Mr. Stafford³⁶ and the

³² BRO, D/X 464/5/7.

³³ Probably Thomas Farrar of Aylesbury, who was chairman of Quarter Sessions in 1663 (A. Baines, *The Signatories of the Orthodox Confession* (1960), p. 8; *Bucks Sessions Records*, I, p. 510).

³⁴ Probably Francis Duncombe of Broughton, J.P. (*Sessions Rec.*, I, pp. 237, 509).

³⁵ He evidently obtained the appointment, for he was discharged from it in 1683 on the grounds that he "hath beene very remiss and negligent in his said office and suffered severall prisoners to escape" (*Sessions Rec.*, I, p. 128).

³⁶ Probably Edmund Stafford of Westbury, J.P. (*Sessions Rec.*, I, pp. 140, 511).

Gentlemen of the adjacent hundreds and our selves were very sencible of . . .”

The reference to monthly meetings of petty sessions is interesting, indicating as it does that they were well established at this date.

Another public duty which Thomas Hackett undertook was that of assessor of taxes. A letter dated 1666 in Hackett's handwriting refers to a disputed assessment on Lathbury and gives his reasons for not reassessing the parish and there is also an unsigned copy letter of 1673 in a different hand reporting on measures taken for the collection of a tax in the Newport hundreds.³⁷

The office of Sheriff was a somewhat dubious honour involving considerable expense to which gentlemen of Hackett's rank might expect to be nominated in due course. Hackett's turn had evidently come round in 1680 but he asked to be excused; a draft letter to an unnamed correspondent written about November of that year gives his reasons.³⁸

“ . . . If my sonne doe find I am one of the 3 in nomination, I request this very great favor that you will please to waite on my Lord Bridgewater with him and let him know the indispensible necessity to excuse me at this time, the circumstances of these hundreds are so well known to your selfe that I shall not need to offer them to you . . .”

The letter also mentions the illness of Sir Anthony [Chester] “which forceth me to stay from on guard and adventure my owne danger at London in service to the country”. The allusions here are mysterious but they may well be connected with the effects of the Exclusion Bill crisis of that year in which Thomas Wharton played a leading role. Whatever the reasons, they obviously carried weight for in the list of sheriffs the name of Thomas Hackett has been struck out and that of his son Nicholls substituted.³⁹

The relationship of trust between Hackett and the authorities implied in this last letter helps to explain how he came to stand as Tory candidate in the 1685 election. His candidature was linked with that of Lord Brackley, son of the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Bridgewater. Wharton's Whig running-mate had been Richard Hampden who, however, later withdrew on being elected for Wendover and Brackley was not opposed. Lord Chancellor Jeffreys exerted himself in rallying support for the two approved candidates but he could spare only a week for the campaign. When the poll was finally taken on 9th April the obnoxious Wharton had 1607 votes “with many hundreds yet to poll”, Brackley, to whom Wharton had asked his followers to donate their second votes after his own election was sure, had 2,521 and Hackett 1,201.⁴⁰

Only two of the letters relate to the election. The first, dated 2nd March

³⁷ BRO, D/X 464/5/4, 6.

³⁸ BRO, D/X 464/5/9a.

³⁹ E. Viney, *The Sheriffs of Buckinghamshire* (Aylesbury 1965), p. 94. Hackett was one of fifteen justices to sign an agreement in 1680 concerning sheriff's livery (*ibid.*, p. 127). A copy of a similar but unsigned agreement for Hertfordshire, dated 1676, is in the collection (BRO, D/X 464/11/13).

⁴⁰ R. H. George, “Parliamentary Elections and Electioneering in 1685”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XIX (1936). The voting figures are taken from the copy of the poll book in the Chester Mss. (see below), and differ somewhat from those given in the *Verney Memoirs*, IV, p. 337.

1685, just over a month before polling day, is from a supporter, one Henry Robinson of Buckingham and it shows that canvassing was already well advanced.⁴¹

“As for the the (*sic*) toune of Bouckingham your worship may a sure your self will be for you and most of the neber towns a bout us for i hauf mad it my bisnes this fornit to spek with the pepel in the country and i find the all very willin to saruf your worship and my lord of Brackly. Mr Whorton sent for me to tak oup my hous for his and Mr. Hamden bout i refused them . . .”

Although Buckingham is some twenty miles distant from North Crawley, Hackett was no stranger in the town, having stood unsuccessfully as a candidate in the parliamentary election for the borough in 1679.⁴² He had also done the town some service, as is clear from a letter in the collection dated 1677 from George Dancer, bailiff, and ten other members of the corporation (Henry Robinson among them) thanking him for “procuring and promoting the first settlement upon our Minister” and requesting him to undertake “the Trust of the Augumentations”.⁴³

Defeated in the election, one hope yet remained—to petition to have Wharton unseated for corrupt practice—and this was duly done. On 6th June 1685 Carew Weedon wrote from the Inner Temple:⁴⁴

“Your cause is sett downe to be heard before ye house of Commons the 26th instant But the thing next to be done is the obteneing one of the Polls from ye Shereife Mr Hart who every body agreeth ought to give you one of them or at least a true Copy Attested by him. Wherefore pray send to him And if you please to acquaint him from me that nere a Councell in England but will agree it matter of justice from him to give you one of the polls the Shereiffes in most other Countyes haveing done ye same long agoe as particulerly Kent & Essex insoe much that ye Duke of Albemarle & other persons have since ye last Election Convicted many persons that falsly polled of perjury & since pillory’d them wch without any doubt you will find many such ag[ains]t you as Sir Anthony Chester will tell you in your very neighbourhood Olney almost all that polled ag[ains]t you had not neere a 40s. freehold wherefore pray Sr Speedily send to my Cosen for ye polls for wee can doe nothing further without them the scrutiny into them being the very first thing to be done next . . .”

Weedon goes on to inform Hackett that if Hart should prove “so unneighbourly & unkind” as to deny him the polls he will be put to the expense of petitioning against him. The business was, in any case, not likely to be cheap. “. . . I recd

⁴¹ BRO, D/X 464/5/10. The writer is perhaps to be identified with Robinson, the lace buyer whom Edmund Verney helped to prevent being elected bailiff of Buckingham in 1683 (*Memoirs*, IV, pp. 323-4).

⁴² G. Eland, “Buckingham and the Exclusion Bill in 1679”, *Records of Bucks*, XIII, p. 455.

⁴³ BRO, D/X 464/5/8.

⁴⁴ BRO, D/X 464/5/11.

5 guineyes by Captn Chapman but you must be pleased to remit further moneys for you cannot but Imagine proceedings of this kind chargeable . . .". A post-script adds encouragingly "If you can prove but two persons brib'd twill avoid Mr. Wharton's Election or any other one thing fowle practice from him". Whether because of the expense or because firm evidence of corruption was hard to come by, Hackett failed to support his petition and Wharton retained his seat. Copies of the poll were indeed secured but it is probable that they were never sent up for among the archives of the Chester family are two copy poll books for this election, duly certified by the sheriff Robert Hart.⁴⁵ Although incomplete, they show *inter alia* that Hackett and Brackley were strongly supported by the clergy and the county gentry (including, surprisingly, Sir Ralph Verney the Whig hero of Lady Verney's account⁴⁶). Otherwise their strength tended to be highly concentrated in a few centres—North Crawley, Newport Pagnell and Olney in the north (doubtless representing Hackett's personal following) the Bridgewater estate parishes of Edlesborough, Ivinghoe and Pitstone in the east, and Marlow in the south, with lesser concentrations in Iver and Beaconsfield. By contrast, Wharton's votes were spread much more consistently throughout the Chilterns and well into the vale to the north. There is also evidence, though less conclusive, that Wharton drew his main support from husbandmen, artisans and tradesmen. To what extent such support reflected strongly held political sentiments is difficult to say, but there is little doubt that Wharton's superior political organisation and his ability to lay out unlimited quantities of money in getting his supporters to the polls and perhaps in outright bribery (he is said to have spent £1,500 in one day in this election⁴⁷) contributed greatly to his success.

It is fitting that almost the last letter of Thomas Hackett's that we have is, in effect, his letter of resignation from public life. Though undated, it can, from internal evidence, be assigned to the fateful year 1688; it was evidently intended for the Lord Lieutenant.⁴⁸

My Lord

I am to thank your honor for the great condescention and kindness of yr Letter wch came to me by the hands of your messenger on [Sunday last*] the 8th instant. Soe great is my obligation zeale and affection to the kings service and particular to your Honor; that tis not my age (above 3 score years) should make any excuse of waiting on you if I were in usual health, this freind of mine I intend to present this Letter to your hand was with me the last sumer when by my carelessness I was strook downe by a mill sayle going & supposed dead upon a slow recovery I have bin so dull and aguish that about a month since attempting to travell 4 miles, I was forced to turne back at one miles end, if this be not enough to cleare me of neglect

⁴⁵ BRO, D/C/3/61, a loose sheet inserted in one of the documents gives the total voting figures for each candidate. I hope to publish a more extensive analysis of these documents.

⁴⁶ Since Sir Ralph had instructed his agent to "work up" his tenants on Wharton's behalf, Jeffrey's description of him as a "trimmer" is justifiable (*Memoirs*, IV, pp. 335-8).

⁴⁷ Macaulay, *History*, I, p. 473.

⁴⁸ BRO, D/X 464/5/12.

* Struck through.

in your Lordships thought and if you shall so express it to my freind I will adventure all hazards to waite upon your Lordship [or upon 3 or 4 lines from your secretary to prevent all mistake I will answer to your Ldship in writing*] having alwais a fixt resolution and courage more than ability to express my selfe my Ld

Your most obliged humble sert

T.H.

In a postscript to the letter, Hackett asks that "in regard of my age and indisposition" he might be "eased" from the commission of the peace after twenty-seven years service.

This letter must have caused its writer considerable heart-searching for it almost certainly refers to the famous three questions of James II concerning toleration which Lords Lieutenant were instructed to put to all justices of the peace to ascertain whether they would support the repeal of the penal laws and the Test Act. The Buckinghamshire replies to the questionnaire are dated 29th February 1688⁴⁹ while the reference to "Sunday the 8th" in the letter, combined with the reference to the writer's age, places it early in that same month. To us the King's questions seem unexceptionable, if not praiseworthy, but to Hackett, as to many others, it must have seemed that he was about to be asked to choose between loyalty to the Crown and loyalty to the Church of England with which as we have seen the Hackett family had particularly close ties and he was not alone in wishing to evade the choice. The crossing out of the offer to send a written reply can be seen as evidence of this conflict of loyalties. Much had happened indeed during the previous three years to arouse disquiet in even the most loyal subjects as to the King's intentions. In Buckinghamshire, for instance, Lord Brackley, who had succeeded his father as Lord Lieutenant in 1686, had been dismissed the following year for refusing to produce lists of Roman Catholics and Dissenters to serve as justices and as militia officers. His successor and the recipient of Hackett's letter, was Lord Chancellor Jeffreys himself, who can hardly have been pleased with Hackett's reply to his summons, though the official return merely notes him as "absent".

The excuse of ill health in Hackett's letter can probably be taken as genuine for two months later he drew up his will and within a year after that he was dead.⁵⁰ It was a timely ending to his career for by 1689 England had a new king: Hackett's old opponent Wharton was now supreme in Buckinghamshire with power to make and unmake justices — and he was not of a forgiving disposition.⁵¹

Nicholls Hackett, Thomas Hackett's son and successor in the North Crawley estate, appears to have played no part in public affairs during the reign of William III or indeed after it. However, like many other Tories he felt able, on

* Struck through.

⁴⁹ Sir G. Duckett, *Penal Laws and the Test Act in 1687-8* (1882-3), II, p. 155.

⁵⁰ Will of Thomas Hackett, *loc. cit.* The will, which is short, is principally concerned with the provision of a portion for his daughter Elizabeth, still unmarried at twenty-seven; a codicil dated 5 November 1688, records her marriage. Two younger sons, Thomas and Roger, are also mentioned.

⁵¹ One man who ventured to disagree with him, Sir Roger Hill of Denham, soon found himself off the commission of the peace (G. Vesey, "A Justice's Diary", *Records of Bucks*, XVII, p. 184).

the succession of Queen Anne, to take the oath of allegiance to the new monarch. On the return of the Tories to office soon afterwards he was made a deputy lieutenant, but declined to play an active role. An extant letter of his dated January 1705 addressed to the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Bridgewater explains his reasons⁵²:

I received the deputation your Lordship was pleased to send me purely to accept of your Lordship's kindness, in which sort I only took it, and not with any resolution to act of which my not taking the appointed oath and otherwise qualifying myself is something of a proof . . . My Lord, tis my lameness and frequent illnesses which renders me unfit for public business, and causeth me to beg of your Lordship to excuse me. My Lord I am heartily sorry I am no better able to serve my country and especially under this government that is so well pleasing to

Your Lordship's most obedient and most humble servant,

N. Hackett.

Nicholls Hackett was the last male member of the family to hold the Crawley estate. His only child Elizabeth married Nicholas (afterwards Sir Nicholas) Carew of Beddington, Surrey, in 1710. Crawley Grange eventually passed to Sir Peter King and was finally purchased in 1723 by William Lowndes who incorporated it into his own estate.⁵³

⁵² Printed in "*Recusant Documents from the Ellesmere Mss*", ed. A. G. Petti, Catholic Record Society, vol. 60 (1968), p. 311-12.

⁵³ *V.C.H. Bucks*, IV, p. 331. A rejected suitor for Elizabeth Hackett's hand was the antiquary Browne Willis. Her father appears to have objected to him on grounds of his doubtful health; perhaps his own afflictions made him particularly sensitive on this point (J. G. Jenkins, *The Dragon of Whaddon*, pp. 14-16).