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Pre-Reform Elections in Gloucester City, 1789-1831

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Pre-Reform Elections in Gloucester City, 1789-1831*

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AS the 18th century drew to a close, the ancient city of Gloucester, equally undisturbed by the fall of the Bastille or the noisy eruption of a factory economy, enjoyed what G. M. Trevelyan has called a 'rightful balance between nature and man'.¹ The ordered perfection of the Cotswolds, the sombre solitude of the Forest of Dean, the distant vistas of the Malverns and the Welsh mountains provided a fitting backdrop to the essentially rural activities of a market economy. Yet life in Gloucester was not devoid of movement and vitality. One of her citizens described the activity on Westgate Street:

There must have been an immense traffic along that street which was pitched with great egg-shaped limestone pebbles, then and for many years afterwards, over which rattled some thirty or forty daily Stage coaches and lumbered huge carriers wagons drawn by four to six and even eight horses, often with jangling bells on the collars. Processions of mules and donkeys came in from the Forest of Dean bearing back loads of charcoal and Coal, and there were trains of pack-horses bringing merchandise and country produce from the Welsh Counties and Herefordshire. There were droves of cattle and ponies extending from Westgate Street to the Cross, and herds of goats and flocks of turkeys and geese, besides in the harvesting times families of tramping Welsh and Irish reapers.²

In 1816 Gloucester freemen were engaged in no fewer than fifty-eight separate trades and occupations.³ The largest single source of employment was the pin-making industry which occupied 1,500 persons in or just outside the city.⁴ But Gloucester's essential economic strength lay in her market position giving access to the industrial wealth of South Wales, to the growing markets of the industrial

* This research was aided by the University of Illinois and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

¹ G. M. Trevelyan, *Illustrated English Social History*, III (London, 1952), p. 10.

² Frederick Sessions, *Memoirs* (unpublished MS.). In the possession of Mr Philip Sessions of Gloucester.

³ *Gloucester Poll Book, 1816*. All poll books cited in this article are held by the Gloucester Public Library.

⁴ *Gloucester New Guide* (1802), p. 12. Thomas Rudge, *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester* (Gloucester, 1814), pp. 119-20. Yet this industry was soon to decline. Frederick Bond, *The History of Gloucester* (Gloucester, 1848), p. 68 states that only two factories remained by 1848.

Midlands, to the agricultural hinterlands of Herefordshire and Shropshire, and to the great port of Bristol.¹

Despite this potential, however, a contemporary historian gloomily recited the city's economic disadvantages: too flat for mill industries requiring water falls; ringed by a barrier of hills that inhibited canal building; too far from the coast of South Wales to compete with Bristol for the riches of that area; too late to compete with Bath and Cheltenham in what he rather peevishly described as 'the toy and dissipation trade'.²

Nonetheless, there was a modest increase in population and building during the first three decades of the 19th century. Gloucester's population grew from 7,261 in 1801 to 11,933 in 1831. During the same period the number of houses increased from 1,366 to 2,163.³ Much of the new building was of a luxury type. The most important new area was the Spa, developed to capture a part of the 'dissipation trade', and its satellites, Brunswick Square and Montpellier Place. No less elegant were the houses built along the London road, Worcester street, and the Bristol road, all catering to the new mercantile and professional wealth of the city.⁴

Another index of economic growth was the increase in customs receipts at the port of Gloucester, although this varied considerably with changes in the rates of duties on Gloucester's principal imports, timber and corn. This figure rose from £28,550 in 1827 to £94,155 in 1831.⁵ Most of this increase resulted from the expanded traffic at the port following the completion of the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal in 1827, which provided a dependable, all-weather connection between Gloucester and the mouth of the Severn. Although the canal had long been projected, its completion was delayed by financing difficulties. These had not been resolved by the end of the period, yet the canal provided a major impetus to the commercial life of the city.⁶ In the first year of operation, 1827, the canal handled 106,966 tons of traffic with receipts of £2,836. By 1831 the tonnage had increased to 323,344 while the receipts had increased to £10,879.⁷

¹ Rudge, *op. cit.*, p. 122. G. W. Counsel, *The History and Description of the City of Gloucester* (Gloucester, 1829), pp. 233, 239.

² Rev. Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke, *An Original History of the City of Gloucester* (Gloucester, 1819), p. 213.

³ City of Gloucester, *Representation to the Local Government Board* (1899), Appendix III.

⁴ Counsel, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-92.

⁵ *Powers Illustrated Handbook* (1848), p. 66.

⁶ Charles Hadfield, *The Canals of Southern England* (London, 1955), pp. 187-8.

⁷ Gloucester and Berkeley Canal Company, *Book of General Information, 1833-61*. Property of British Transport Historical Records, Paddington, W.2.

This traffic was crucial to the economic well-being of the city. Timber from the Baltic, wine from the Mediterranean and the Atlantic ports of Spain, Portugal, and France, corn from Odessa and Cork, the raw materials of the industrial revolution from South Wales, and the manufactured products of the midlands, all found a natural vent in the port of Gloucester. Gloucester merchants, warehousemen, shopkeepers, dock workers and solicitors were bound together in a network of common interest, to expand the trade of the port. Gloucestershire gentry, especially those who were proprietors of the canal, or who were paid handsomely for allowing the canal to go through their lands, or who shipped their agricultural produce on the canal also had a keen interest in the progress of the port and were active in the affairs of the city.¹

Historical determinism might impose on this tranquil structure an harmonious pattern of political development. Because economic interests coincided, cooperation and uncontested elections should have accompanied this era of stability. Such was not the case. Against this background of modest economic expansion and cooperation politics were often turbulent, always acrimonious; elections were usually contested and then expensive; respites resulted from financial exhaustion rather than from any abatement of the fierce partisanship that characterized the parliamentary politics of the times.

Before 1789 elections were generally sharply contested. Local family interests such as the Yorke family of Hardwicke (Glos.) and the Selwyns of Matson, near Gloucester, often collided with the interest of the city corporation. On occasion the government would intervene on behalf of a candidate, sometimes, as in 1780, meeting a sharp rebuff.² In 1789 Gloucester's M.P.s were John Webb, of a Painswick (Glos.) clothier family, in the interest of the corporation and of the eleventh Duke of Norfolk, and Charles Barrow, who had represented the city since 1751 as an independent. In 1789 Barrow died and a sharp fight ensued for the vacant seat.

The Duke's association with Gloucester began with his marriage in 1771 into the Scudamore family, large landowners at Hempsted, near Gloucester.³ He was an intimate of the Prince Regent's, and there is evidence in his correspondence that his political activities at

¹ A list of the original subscribers may be found in *An Act for Making and Maintaining a Navigable Canal from the River Severn* . . . 33 George III, 1793.

² Cf. John Cannon, 'The Parliamentary Representation of the City of Gloucester (1727-1790)', *Trans. BGAS*, vol. 78 (1959), pp. 137-52.

³ Brian Frith, *The Duke of Norfolk and Gloucester City* (typescript MS.), Gloucestershire County Record Office, GMS 30.

Gloucester and at Leominster (Herefordshire), also a Scudamore preserve, were motivated by his desire to aid his royal friend in building a party. After a discouraging defeat at Leominster in 1796 he was only dissuaded from retiring from politics altogether by the wishes of 'a quarter where much good may be derived to the nation'.¹ He was mayor of Gloucester in 1783 and on three subsequent occasions, and recorder of the city from 1792 until his death in 1815. In 1789 he chose his nephew, Henry Howard of Thornbury (Glos.), to stand for Barrow's seat.

The corporation was whig throughout the 18th century and remained so until the Municipal Corporations Act (1835). This longevity is not surprising since the corporation co-opted its new members. Because it was politically invulnerable and because its politics were consistent, the corporation exerted considerable force in elections, but its very dominance earned it as much unpopularity as support among the independent voters.

In common with other boroughs in which the parliamentary franchise was exercised by the freemen, the corporation had often misused its right to create honorary freemen for electoral purposes.² But an act of 1786, withholding the franchise from honorary freemen created within twelve months of an election, somewhat inhibited this practice in 1789. From 1 January to 5 February, the corporation created 425 freemen, of which 212 were from outside the parliamentary boundaries of the city, the notorious 'outvoters'. All of these freemen, however, were admitted by inheritance or apprenticeship or by payment of a fine rather than by act of common council, and thus qualified as voters under the act of 1786. Despite later charges that many of these voters were in fact honorary freemen and thus illegal voters, the records of the corporation show the opposite.³ It was, however, a common practice for the corporation and other interested parties to pay the costs, during this period averaging around 13s, for taking up the freedom of the city, and this election was no exception.

Opposing the Duke of Norfolk and the corporation was John Pitt, former steward of the Yorke family estates at Hardwicke and collector of customs at the port of Gloucester. Pitt had been active in city

¹ Duke of Norfolk to Rev. Mr Lewellyn, 27/12/1801, *Pilley Collection*, Hereford Public Library, P.C. 2322, no. 14. W. Taylor to Rev. Mr Lewellyn, no date, *ibid.*, no. 11.

² In 1727 the whig corporation was accused by local Tories of creating and voting 140 freemen. MS. copy of handbill dated 25/7/1727, *Gloucestershire Collection*, Gloucester Public Library, NX 10.2 (20a). In 1779 the corporation made 513 freemen in one day for electoral purposes. E. and A. G. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons*, 1 (Cambridge, 1903), p. 66.

³ Gloucester Corporation Records, *Freemens Rolls, 1780-1838*, 1466D. In possession of Gloucester Town Clerk. Before the reform bill it cost £40 to purchase the freedom of the city by fine. This was required of public house keepers and had no political significance.

politics as early as 1754, then on behalf of the Yorke interests supporting Barrow and George Selwyn.¹ With the death of his patron and a quarrel with Selwyn, Pitt's politics became decidedly more partisan. He sided with the local blues, as Gloucester Tories described themselves.² This brought him into direct conflict with the corporation, a confrontation that was to engage his energies and passions for the rest of his life, and was to animate the local Tories until the Municipal Corporations Act allowed them to elect a majority to the corporation for the first time.

Pitt in 1780 became an antagonist of the Duke of Norfolk, who, as the Earl of Surrey, assiduously promoted the corporation-sponsored Gloucester Gaol Bill in the House of Lords.³ Pitt lobbied mightily but unsuccessfully to defeat this bill, which he feared would raise the rates to a ruinous level and give the corporation additional patronage through control of police and prisons.⁴ In 1786 he determined that in the event of Barrow's death or retirement he would stand for the vacant seat.⁵ But on Barrow's death the first in the field for the government was Charles Townshend, a nephew of the former M.P., George Selwyn. In the face of stiff opposition from Norfolk, Townshend retired. Pitt then announced his candidacy, resisting financial blandishments offered by Norfolk to keep him from contesting the seat.⁶ Pitt suffered from a legal disadvantage in that he had been secretly advised that the resignation of his patents as collector of customs, necessary under the place acts, was probably illegal. A handbill advertising 'Lost or gone astray a Customs House Officer . . . as he is not discharged'⁷ revealed that Pitt's disability had not gone unnoticed by his opponents. Pitt hit back with charges at Norfolk's 'unconstitutional interference' in Gloucester's affairs and against corporation efforts to secure a monopoly of the city's representation.⁸ His efforts to attack Norfolk as a papist fell short of the mark, since the latter was well-known to be, atypical of the Howards, a Protestant, if not a freethinker.⁹

No poll book exists for the election of 1789, so it is difficult to determine exactly the sources of support each side developed. The

¹ John Pitt to 1st Lord Hardwicke, 20/4/1754, Add. MSS. 35692, f. 120.

² Pitt to 2nd Lord Hardwicke, 11/3/1768, Add. MSS. 35608, f. 138.

³ Pitt to Lord Liverpool, 17/3/1781, Add. MSS. 38215, f. 313; 38218, f. 79.

⁴ Pitt to Liverpool, 10/5/1780, Add. MSS. 38213, f. 291; Pitt to Charles Jenkinson, 30/6/1780, Add. MSS. 38214, f. 48; Pitt to Liverpool, 11/7/1780, *ibid.*, f. 88; Pitt to Jenkinson, 21/3/1781, Add. MSS. 38215, f. 317; Pitt to Liverpool, 24/4/1781, Add. MSS. 38216, f. 68.

⁵ Pitt to Liverpool, 9/7/86, Add. MSS. 38570, f. 44.

⁶ Pitt to William Pitt, jun., 14/6/1789, P.R.O. 30/8/167, no. 133.

⁷ *Ibid.* ⁸ *Gloucester Journal*, 12/1/1789.

⁹ MS. broadside, 'Characters at Gloucester Election, 1789', *Gloucestershire Collection*, NF 10.17(1).

corporation exerted all of its influence but the extent of that influence was certainly overestimated by contemporaries. The evidence of later poll books indicates that residents of workhouse and infirmary voted overwhelmingly for corporation candidates, and this must have been the case in 1789.¹ The corporation was a large landlord, along with the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester Cathedral and John Pitt,² but the electoral influence of landlord over tenant has been overemphasized. In the first place the terms of Corporation leasing were generally favourable to the tenant's independence. During this period there were no corporation leaseholds or rack rents granted for periods under twenty-one years. Thirty parcels of corporation property were granted for twenty-one years, eighty-one for thirty-one years, and 150 for forty-one years.³ This indicates a practice that must have been general in the community. The possibilities of pressuring tenants who enjoyed such terms were slight. In addition, Gloucester's speculative housing boom outpaced the modest growth in population, and it was the tenant rather than the landlord who had the upper hand. John Pitt, Gloucester's largest private landlord, was reputed never to have raised his rents.⁴ This is not to say that landlord intimidation was never exerted, and, certainly when all else was equal, tenants of the poorer sort might be expected to follow their landlord's political direction, but claims of massive and decisive pressure on tenants must be treated with scepticism.

Nor is there any evidence that the corporation alienated any of its property or used its funds for electoral purposes. In a bitter election charges of this kind would have been made by the corporation's enemies, the bitterly-anticorporation blues, but they were not.

It was, in fact, a battle of economic resources, with the Duke of Norfolk ranged against John Pitt. In such a fight Pitt was no mean antagonist. As early as 1768 he claimed 148 tenants, most of them freemen, and he was supposed to own so many houses that he forgot exactly which were his.⁵ He had 'nursed the constituency' with a vengeance, claiming to have spent £1,200 per annum over a period of twenty-five years for civic improvements and in aid of the poor.⁶ In an abortive post-election attempt to obtain reimbursement from the government, he claimed to have spent £7,500 personally and his

¹ *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1816.

² Rudge, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³ *City Survey, 1781-1813*. Property of Gloucester Town Clerk.

⁴ *Gloucester Journal*, 15/7/1805.

⁵ Pitt to 2nd Lord Hardwicke, 11/3/1768, Add. MSS. 35608, f. 138; *Gloucester Mercury*, 24/1/1880.

⁶ Pitt to Liverpool, 17/3/1781, Add. MSS. 38215, f. 313.

committee another £2,500 at the same time maintaining that the Howard forces expended twice as much.¹

The crucial factor was the outvoter poll, and the results of the election are a measure of the evenness of the economic resources with which the election was fought. After a fifteen-day poll Pitt emerged the victor by one vote, 837-836.² An apocryphal story related that the deciding vote for Pitt was cast by a barber. When Howard asked him why he had done so, the barber replied, 'Because I shaved him twice and you only once'.³

The election of 1789 produced an important result. Pitt and the corporation negotiated an agreement to divide the representation of the city in the future so as to avoid such ruinously expensive contests.⁴ Gloucester tories institutionalized Pitt's victory by forming a True Blue Club, which met each year in early February to celebrate the anniversary of the great victory over the corporation.⁵ They grew to expect a divided representation, resting their claims on the agreement of 1789. Under the terms of the agreement there were no more contested elections until 1805. Pitt and Webb were elected without a contest in 1790, and on Webb's death in 1796 Howard replaced him without challenge from the blues.⁶ Again in 1802 Pitt and Howard were returned without a contest.⁷

In 1805, however, Pitt died, and the political *status quo* was once more disturbed by a contest. One candidate was Lord Arthur Somerset, a nephew of the sixth Duke of Beaufort. The Duke, long a power in Gloucestershire county politics, was making his first, but by no means his last, attempt to extend his influence into Gloucester city.⁸ Somerset's agent was the Duke's Gloucester solicitor, Thomas Davis, for the rest of his life the most active tory in the city.⁹

The other candidate was Captain Robert Morris, a local banker, who was chiefly distinguished as the founder of the Royal Gloucester Yeomanry Cavalry, organized to defend the county against the French

¹ Pitt to George Rose, 27/5/1789, P.R.O. 30/8/167, no. 125; cf. Cannon, op. cit., p. 152.

² *Gloucester Journal*, 9/2/1789.

³ *Gloucester Mercury*, 24/1/1880.

⁴ Pitt to George Rose, 31/5/1789, P.R.O. 30/8/167, no. 129. That Pitt's financial resources were not completely exhausted by the 1789 election is shown by his willingness to pay 'a thousand guineas or two' for a vacant prebendal seat at Gloucester Cathedral for his nephew. Pitt to Liverpool, 29/1/1792, Add. MSS. 38228, f. 181; 13/11/1797, Add. MSS. 38231, f. 342.

⁵ *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries*, II (1884), p. 270.

⁶ *Gloucester Journal*, 14/6/1790; 30/5/1796.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5/7/1802; 12/7/1802.

⁸ For Beaufort's county activities see John Cannon, 'Gloucestershire Politics, 1750-1800', *Trans. BGAS*, II (1960), pp. 293-7.

⁹ For Davis' activities in this election see his correspondence in *Gloucestershire Collection*, NF 10.12, nos. 1, 3, 4, 7, 8.

revolution and Napoleon.¹ Morris was an independent whose whole effect was to emphasize his local connections. The opening words of his election address were, 'My life has been passed with you, and my income spent among you'.² Because he was the local candidate and not blatantly blue, Morris enjoyed the support of the corporation and of Catherine Pitt, daughter of the late M.P., who inherited her father's tenantry and probably some of his political influence. But he was not the official candidate of the corporation. Had he been, the blues would have raised a tremendous outcry, as they were to do in 1816, against a betrayal of the 1789 agreement to share the representation. Their failure to do so in 1805 indicates the discretion of the corporation support for Morris.

Because of Morris' strong local position, Somerset relied on heavy outvoter support. He was disappointed in his efforts to win the support of the London outvoters.³ Although 340 new freemen were created by the corporation in the month before the election,⁴ the low poll (Morris, 535—Somerset, 338) indicated that neither side made a determined effort to poll the outvoters. Under these circumstances, Morris' local strength was enough to discourage the Somerset faction, which declined the contest after three days of polling.⁵

In 1806, 1807, and 1812 Howard and Morris were returned unopposed, thus maintaining the 1789 accord.⁶ But in 1816 Morris died, and for the first time since 1789 the corporation broke the agreement and entered the electoral lists. Their candidate was Edward Webb, son of the former M.P. and brother-in-law to Sir Berkeley William Guise of Highnam (Glos.). Guise had been victorious over the alliance of two great county families Beaufort and Berkeley in the exciting county election of 1811 and still represented the county in 1816.⁷ The death of the Duke of Norfolk in 1815 removed Gloucester's whig patron; the Webb-Guise alliance now replaced him.

Webb's agent was John Phillpotts, a local solicitor, strongly influential in city politics for the next thirty years. Phillpotts had also managed Guise's ruinously expensive victory in 1811. He now persuaded Webb to enter the field immediately to discourage the blues

¹ Roland Austin, 'The Early Years of the Royal Gloucester Yeomanry Cavalry', *Trans. BGAS* (1921), pp. 253-66.

² *Gloucester Journal*, 12/8/1805.

³ D. Taylor to John Vizard, undated, 1805, *Gloucestershire Collection*, NF 10.12(4).

⁴ Gloucester Corporation Records, Freemens Rolls, op. cit.

⁵ *Gloucester Journal*, 12/8/1805; *Bristol Gazette and Public Advertiser*, 15/8/1805; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 10/8/1805; *The Times*, 12/8/1805.

⁶ *Bristol Gazette and Public Advertiser*, 6/11/1806; *Gloucester Journal*, 4/5/1807; 11/5/1807; *Gloucester Journal*, 5/10/1812. The spelling of the title of the latter newspaper was changed 7/1/1811.

⁷ *East Gloucestershire Poll Book*, 1811; cf. Cannon, 'Gloucestershire Politics, 1750-1800', op. cit.

from doing so, estimating the costs of an uncontested election at a modest £4,000.¹ This strategy did discourage local blues of the Pitt-Morris type but, in so doing, gave the Duke of Beaufort another opportunity to intervene. His candidate was Robert Bransby Cooper of Dursley (Glos.), described as, 'the nominee of the Duke of Beaufort and party, and a Grateful proxy'.² Under these circumstances Phillpotts revised upwards his estimate of Webb's expenses to £15,000.³ Webb hesitated, Guise's expensive experience of 1811 still fresh in mind, but finally decided to go ahead. One factor in his decision was the newly-organized Whig Club, enlisting an impressive array of county families, founded expressly to combat the wealth and power of the Duke of Beaufort.⁴ The most important member of the Whig Club was Col. William Fitzhardinge Berkeley (later Baron Segrave and 1st Lord Fitzhardinge). His activity in this election marked the end of the Berkeley-Beaufort arrangement that had staved off contested elections in the county and the beginning of his long involvement in Gloucester city politics.⁵ Col. Berkeley had been frustrated in his attempts to claim the earldom of Berkeley after the death of his father, the fifth earl, and must have seen this as an admirable opportunity to expand his political influence.

Both factions depended chiefly on their abilities to poll the out-voters. Although Cooper polled within thirty votes of Webb in the city and actually outpolled him, 143-120, among the London outvoters, Webb won comfortably with a majority of 119.⁶ This was largely due to his strength among the gentry in the county, organized into the Whig Club, where he outpolled Cooper, 254-139.⁷ But the corporation's support was also important. Of aldermen, councilmen, and chaplains of the corporation who voted, twenty-eight polled for Webb, none for Cooper. Of the corporation-nominated occupants of St Margaret's, St Magdalen's, and St Bartholomew's hospitals who

¹ *Gloucester Journal*, 31/7/1830.

² Quoted in W. R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the County of Gloucester* (Hereford, 1898), p. 213.

³ *Gloucester Journal*, 31/7/1830.

⁴ Material relating to the organization of the club can be consulted in the *Painswick House Collection*, Gloucester Public Library, Series F, I, no. 5.

⁵ The formation of the club and the subsequent election ended a thirty-two year old electoral truce between Berkeleys and Beauforts and signalled a resumption of political warfare on both the county and the borough level. Cf. Cannon, 'Gloucestershire Politics, 1750-1800', op. cit.

⁶ All statistics for this election are derived from *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1816.

⁷ County outvoters were Gloucester freemen not forty shilling freeholders. They were either former Gloucester residents, usually of the artisan class, or, in a few cases, gentry who had been made honorary freemen of the city. They were probably less susceptible to what D. C. Moore has called 'the politics of deference' than the ordinary county freeholder but more responsive to direct bribery. Nonetheless, local gentry influences still counted for something. For example, at Painswick, where W. H. Hyett acted on behalf of Webb, his poll was ten while Cooper polled only three votes.

voted, thirty polled for Webb, only seven for Cooper.¹ The corporation-whig success marked the end of the peaceful era that followed the agreement of 1789 and emboldened these forces to attempt to dominate the parliamentary representation of the city throughout the 19th century. The blues, whether or not dominated by Beaufort influence, remained on the defensive, claiming only a divided representation as befitted the even balance of forces within the city.

The general election of 1818 gave the Beaufort party an opportunity to recover the second seat. Immediately following his defeat in 1816, Cooper began to canvass in anticipation of another contest.² This so discouraged Howard, since 1815 bereft of Norfolk patronage, that prior to the 1818 contest he resigned his seat. Again there was intervention from outside the city, this time from Col. Berkeley. Since the Webb-Guise finances were at a low ebb after the exertions of 1811 and 1816, this intrusion was timely for the corporation-whig cause.³ The Berkeley candidate was the Colonel's brother, Capt. Maurice F. F. Berkeley, R.N. (later 2nd Lord Fitzhardinge), who was to become a permanent fixture on the Gloucester political scene until 1857. Influential in the Berkeley decision was the omnipresent Phillpotts, who again acted as agent.⁴

The election was fought on traditional terms: a blue party resolution stating that 'the approaching Contest does not involve so much a question of General Politics, as the vital independence of the City of Gloucester', captured the flavour of the event.⁵ The blues hammered upon the theme of corporation monopoly and the betrayal of the 1789 agreement; the corporation rather lamely denied the charges. A newly-formed Conservative Association, a counterpart to the Whig Club, supported Cooper, who continued to receive support from the Beaufort faction, from Catherine Pitt, and from his London surgeon brother, Astley Cooper, whose generous subscriptions allowed him to bring down many London outvoters. Again his agent was the Beaufort solicitor, Thomas Davis.⁶

¹ The corporation sway over its pensioners was maintained in 1818 and 1830. In 1818 Cooper could poll only nine of fifty-eight votes cast by pensioners, while in 1830 he received only four votes of fifty-three cast by pensioners. *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1818, 1830; Voters List, *Gloucestershire Collection*, NF 10.16(35).

² *Gloucester Journal*, 21/10/1816.

³ In addition to the great expenses of 1816 to which Guise must have contributed a sizeable amount, his own county election of 1811 had been extremely costly. One estimate held that his friends so generously supported him that he was only out of pocket £30,000. Mary Yorke to Lady Lucas, 24/2/1811, Gloucestershire County Record Office, D 1137. Sir Anselm Guise told me that these early 19th-century elections eventually forced the family to sell their favourite estate at Rendcomb (Glos.).

⁴ *Gloucester Journal*, 31/7/1830.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8/6/1818.

⁶ *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 28/12/1839; Dr G. Cooke to Michael Hicks Beach, 16/6/1818. *Hicks Beach Papers*, Williamstrip Park (Glos.), Misc., pp. 10/2b.

Whig tactics aimed to overawe the blues by a Webb-Berkeley coalition and by an all-out effort to poll their supporters early; as a tory agent put it, 'to run upon us at first with full force—to try the effect of a [early] majority upon the common mind'. These tactics were also designed to secure the immediate financial support of the candidate's mother, Lady Mary Berkeley, up to that time reluctant to aid the cause.¹ Tory tactics involved an attempt to secure enough promises of second votes from Webb adherents to overcome the new candidate, Berkeley. They also prolonged the polling to allow time for Cooper's outvoters to come down from London.²

After a seven-day poll during which Cooper overcame an early whig lead, Webb headed the list with 894 votes, Cooper was elected with 868 votes, while Berkeley narrowly missed election with 841 votes. As in 1816 Cooper outpolled the whigs outside the county, 361-322, while the whigs showed continued strength among the county gentry, 240-164. In the city they were evenly matched, Cooper polling 257, the coalition, 254.³ Webb's margin of twenty-six votes over Cooper was due to his greater strength among county outvoters. Cooper's margin of twenty-seven over Berkeley can be explained by his success in securing seventy-one second votes from Webb supporters, whereas Berkeley received only nineteen second votes from Cooper supporters. Part of Cooper's success may have been obtained by bribery and intimidation, as Berkeley charged in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a scrutiny, but the larger number represented independent voters of county and city who preferred the old candidates to the new and resented corporation efforts to retain a monopoly of the city's representation.

As in 1816 expenses were very heavy. Estimates placed the Whig costs at between £14,000-£18,000. Of this total Col. Berkeley contributed £11,430 while the Webb-Guise contribution only amounted to £500. The Whig Club and other voluntary subscriptions made up the balance. Blue expenses, of which the Duke of Beaufort and Astley Cooper must have borne the heaviest burden, could not have been less.⁴

As in 1789 the representation of the city was divided, and once more the reason was financial exhaustion. In the general election of 1820 Webb and Cooper were returned without a contest.

¹ Cooke to Hicks Beach, *ibid.*

² Tory canvassing instructions, Gloucestershire County Record Office, *D 1430b/5*; W. G. Smith to James Evans, 20/6/1818, *ibid.*

³ Of sixty-nine honorary freemen created by the corporation in 1816 and 1817, forty-two voted for Webb and Berkeley, only four for Cooper. *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1818; Gloucester Corporation Records, *Freemens Rolls*, op. cit. ⁴ J. J. Powell, *Gloucestriana* (Gloucester, 1890), p. 38.

In June 1826 the parliament was dissolved, and the country was stirred by emotional battle-cries calling for the repeal of the corn laws and for Roman Catholic emancipation.¹ In Gloucester Cooper vigorously opposed both, while Webb ignored them and called for a reduction in taxes and for parliamentary reform.² His programme should be viewed as his effort to woo the support of the city freemen without alienating the county gentry who were so crucial to his success in 1816 and 1818. But despite the excitement of great national issues, the election of 1826 in Gloucester was chiefly remarkable for the appearance of a new local candidate and a new local party.

John Phillpotts, the erstwhile agent for Guise, Webb, and Berkeley in turn, emerged as a candidate in his own right. Son of the landlord of the Bell Hotel in Gloucester, Phillpotts claimed descent from Sir John Philpot, lord mayor of London, who, with Sir William Walworth, struck down Wat Tyler in 1381. In 1825, he emerged as the leader of an 'independent' party in Gloucester, very much in the tradition of Morris a few years earlier.³ Alarmed at this development, which was aimed at his exclusion, Webb sought and received from Phillpotts a pledge that the latter did not plan to contest the coming election.⁴ But despite this pledge Phillpotts used the occasion to develop his party for the future. He addressed many meetings, and on nomination day was brought to the place of nomination by his supporters who bore the flags of his party.⁵ Phillpotts took the occasion of the nomination to renew his pledge not to seek election. Gloucester, he explained, was on the verge of a great expansion of trade and commerce due to the completion of the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal and should avoid the bitter discord of a contested election. But, he announced, he felt free to stand for the city on some future occasion. In advancing his candidacy, he asked that the freemen consider his long years among them and his great experience in local affairs and that they not confine their representatives to 'some favoured caste or family'. Here he clearly aimed at Capt. Berkeley, who by virtue of his great efforts and his brother's expenditures in 1818 stood next to Webb in the whig succession. Berkeley responded by reminding the voters that Phillpotts urged him to stand in 1818 and must support his candidacy in the future, unless of course, his basic political convictions had in the meantime changed.⁶ This acrimonious exchange did not bode well for Gloucester's future political stability, but for the moment Phillpotts'

¹ Elie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, II (London, 1949), pp. 239-41.

² *Gloucester Journal*, 12/6/1826.

³ *Ibid.*, 7/7/1849. ⁴ *Ibid.*, 12/6/1826.

⁵ *Gloucester and Cheltenham Herald*, 17/6/1826. ⁶ *Gloucester Journal*, 29/5/1826; 12/6/1826.

decision not to contest the seat allowed Webb and Cooper to be returned once more unopposed.

Phillpotts' opportunity was not long in coming. King George IV died, 20 June 1830, and Parliament consequently dissolved. Borough elections were to begin 30 July. Since the elections of 1830 produced a whig government under Lord Grey, the first whig ministry in a generation, and since this ministry eventually produced the first political reform bill, an explanation of the reasons for whig success have posed problems of interpretation for historians. Elie Halévy held that a confused and anti-party atmosphere prior to July was transformed by the Paris revolution of that month. Inspired by the flight of Charles X and the installation of the 'bourgeois' king, Louis Philippe, Britain's voters produced a minor political revolution at the hustings.¹ This view has been seriously qualified in recent years by historians who argue that most contested elections took place before the news of the French revolution could have affected the results; that, in any event, the whig ministry was really not whig at all; and finally that, far from opposing political reform, the country party welcomed the new borough constituencies since they would include indigestible pockets of urbanism that had threatened the county dominance of the squirearchy.²

The evidence of the Gloucester election tends to support at least one of the revisionist views. The nomination proceedings of 30 July, the earliest occasion at which notice might have been taken of the events in Paris, produced no reference to them at all, and the *Gloucester Journal's* first reports of the cross-channel revolution appeared in the edition of 7 August, after the polling had ended. Nowhere in the copious election literature is there any reference to events in France. Not surprisingly, the election of 1830 revolved around local personalities and ambitions: Phillpotts, always a bridesmaid, was now determined to become a bride; Webb was fearful that Phillpotts' candidacy would dilute his whig support and resentful of the ingratitude of his former solicitor and agent; Cooper hoped to retain a decisive hard-core strength among the local blues and profit by the discord of the reformers; Berkeley strongly urged his right to represent a constituency upon which his family spent thousands of pounds in 1818.

¹ Halévy, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 308-9; E. L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform, 1815-1870* (Oxford, 1947), p. 75.

² Norman Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution in the General Election of 1830', *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier*, R. Pares and A. J. P. Taylor, eds. (London, 1956), pp. 258-88; A. Aspinall, ed., *Three Early Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, xxvii (London, 1952); D. C. Moore, 'The Other Face of Reform', *Victorian Studies*, v, no. 1 (Sept., 1961), pp. 7-34.

From the first, Berkeley's candidacy was hopeless as long as Webb stayed in the field. Fearing a repetition of 1818 when the corporation-whig strength was not sufficient to elect two members, Berkeley withdrew, pledging to support Webb. In return, Webb promised to step aside in favour of Berkeley at the next election.¹

Cooper's hopes rested upon a repetition of 1818, but several factors worked against a re-occurrence. First, Cooper had little or no financial support.² His agents earnestly requested that party stalwarts transport outvoters to the polls free of charge to the candidate. 'Cash', one lamented, 'is not so plentiful with us as it should be'. They hoped to remedy financial shortcomings by assiduous canvassing, by the continued support of the Duke of Beaufort, and by prying away enough second votes from the other two candidates to assure success.³

Cooper's agents attempted to forge a coalition with Webb against the new candidate, Phillpotts, and initial responses from Webb's camp were favourable. Election handbills called for Cooper and Webb. But they were strange bedfellows indeed. Cooper was adamantly opposed to political reform and to repeal of the corn laws; Webb had vigorously supported both in and out of parliament. An alliance with Cooper would render Webb's reformism suspect and leave Phillpotts to garner the considerable reformist support in Gloucester. Webb was, therefore, forced to repudiate the coalition with Cooper.⁴

Of the three candidates Phillpotts was the only one who lived in Gloucester and who had contributed to its economic growth. An important solicitor, a former member of the corporation, a confidant of the eccentric but very wealthy banker, Alderman 'Jemmy' Wood, an original subscriber in the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal Company, the developer of a housing boomlet along Worcester Street, Phillpotts was full square in the local tradition of John Pitt and Robert Morris. Until 1816 Gloucester always preferred that one of its representatives be a local man. The intervention of great families had masked that tradition; Phillpotts now asked them to return to the old practice of electing a local man. He promised to support political reform if 'the

¹ *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 10/7/1830; *Bristol Gazette*, 15/7/1830; 29/7/1830; 7/5/1831.

² Cooper had suffered financial reverses as early as 1824 in an unsuccessful speculation in grain. Rev. Francis Edward Witts, *Diary, 1820-1854* (unpublished). In possession of Major-General F. V. B. Witts, Cirencester (Glos.). Evidence that Cooper never recouped these losses may be inferred from the fact that he joined the army of unsuccessful applicants for public office during the first ministry of Sir Robert Peel. Add. MSS. 40404, f. 298; 40501, f. 125; 40529, f. 243. The extraordinary expenses of 1818 and the Beaufort involvement in the East Gloucestershire contest in 1830 may help to explain their neglect of Gloucester city.

³ R. J. Cooper to H. Vizard, 23/7/1830, *Gloucestershire Collection*, NF 10.16(2); J. L. Burrup to H. Vizard, 7/7/1830, *ibid.* (1); Cooper to Vizard, *ibid.* (1).

⁴ *Ibid.* (1), (8), Box V.39(3). *Bristol Gazette*, 22/7/1830.

collective sense of the city' so expressed itself.¹ In so doing Phillpotts was the first candidate to pledge himself to be bound by the wishes of his constituents. In this he anticipated the binding election promises of later decades. Yet his overwhelming emphasis was upon his local connections and his ability to care for the city's commercial interests. So devoid were the nomination proceedings of any meaningful debate on great national issues that Robert Gordon, M.P. for Cricklade (Wilts.) and a Gloucester freeman, told the assemblage in exasperation, 'Don't talk to me of your local interests or of the rights and privileges of the City of Gloucester. I say look to the country at large'.²

From the beginning of the polling it became clear that Cooper could not protect his seat against Phillpotts. Webb's poll declined slightly from the 1818 total (894-830); Phillpotts polled slightly fewer than Berkeley had done in 1818 (841-814); but Cooper's 1818 total was halved (868-415). In the city his plumper total dropped from 257-69; in the county it declined from 165-38 and in London he suffered a catastrophic collapse, 140-0. This last figure must be compared to Webb's total of eighty-four London plumpers and Phillpotts' total of 149.³

These results related directly to the financial resources of the candidates. Early in the canvassing it was noted that Cooper was not prepared to spend money. When, after the fifth day of polling, Cooper's vote showed a sharp decline, Berkeley requested that the polls be closed; he explained that the tories had no more money and thus no chance.⁴ Cooper ruefully admitted as much in his farewell address.⁵ Subsequently, it was reported that Phillpotts had conducted an energetic and well-financed canvass in Bristol, Birmingham and London, as well as in Gloucester itself. His London canvass, where he was aided by a 'host of subaltern professional men', had been going on ever since the election of 1826.⁶ By such assiduous efforts he was able to convert to his side no fewer than forty-nine Cooper plumpers (in 1818) while at the same time only eight made the switch from Cooper to Webb. In Birmingham twelve Cooper plumpers similarly switched to Phillpotts while none went to Webb; while in Bristol seven Cooper supporters in 1818 switched to Phillpotts in 1830, only three remaining loyal to Cooper and three others going to Webb.⁷ These figures only reflect the loss of votes from Cooper to Phillpotts among outvoters in three large cities. They do not include the new adherents won by

¹ *Gloucester Journal*, 31/7/1830. ² *Ibid.*

³ *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1818, 1830.

⁴ *Gloucester Journal*, 7/8/1830. ⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28/8/1830; *Bristol Mirror*, 7/8/1830.

⁷ *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1818, 1830.

Phillpotts in these centres and elsewhere, presumably by the same methods.

In Gloucester city, too, Phillpotts had an appeal to the supporters of both corporation and blue parties. Of the 1830 Phillpotts plumpers who can be positively identified in the 1818 poll book, thirty-one voted for Webb and Berkeley, twenty-four for Cooper and one split Webb and Cooper.¹ Phillpotts gained sympathy for his local background and benefited from anti-corporation sentiment, although he had to share this with Cooper, and from the emergence of the nonconformists as a power in Gloucester politics. His agent was W. T. Washbourne, a dissenting timber merchant. Also, he capitalized on his remarkable ability to disguise his reformist tendencies to the blues while at the same time revealing them to nonconformists and working men. After the election he construed his victory as a triumph over the aristocracy and club government (here he referred as much to the Berkeleys as to the Beauforts) but this class consciousness was much muted before the polling.² In the last analysis, however, his triumph over Cooper was the result of superior financial resources.

Webb retained the support of county whigs; his county poll was 284. Yet Phillpotts' total of 185 among county voters cut into the whig superiority. No doubt a shrinking budget was partly responsible for Webb's less impressive showing. The Berkeleys were active in the county elections and, in the absence of a candidate of their own in Gloucester, probably did not support Webb as strongly as in 1816 and 1818.

The crucial importance of money was conclusively proved in the last pre-reform election of 1831. It was brought about by the passage of a motion in the House of Commons construed by the Grey cabinet as hostile to the impending reform bill. King William, fearful of a revolutionary election, nonetheless gave way to cabinet pressure and dissolved the parliament. Halévy described the election as fought with revolutionary fervour,³ but in Gloucester the atmosphere was more prosaic. It is true that reform meetings were held in Gloucester and that a petition supporting the bill was sent to Westminster.⁴ Both Gloucester M.P.s, Webb and Phillpotts, had voted for the second

¹ *Gloucester, Poll Book*, 1818, 1830.

² *Gloucester Journal*, 14/8/1830. His opponents noted Phillpotts' inconsistencies in some barbed election handbills. One described him as 'The Gloucester Weathercock' and a 'turn-about'. *Gloucestershire* N 10.6. Another asserted that he 'has all his life been in the Practice of making rapid changes in Character, and is also much used to be more than half-masked', *ibid.*, DY IV (4).

³ Halévy, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 31-2.

⁴ *Gloucester Journal*, 29/1/1831; 12/3/1831; 19/3/1831.

reading of the bill, 24 March 1831.¹ Yet the burning issue of reform was not an issue at all in the Gloucester election.

The city sent two representatives to the commons, and although it did not stand to lose any seats by redistribution, it would not gain any either. The household franchise did not excite the Gloucester freemen, whose political monopoly would be ended by admission of the new voters, certain to be of a generally more prosperous class. The Gloucester merchants were, it is true, vociferously reformist since they would gain the franchise, but on the whole they were not freemen and thus did not vote in this election.² Finally, the anti-reformist blues had nowhere to go in 1831 because all three candidates favoured reform.

In the course of the 1830 election Webb had promised to step down to make way for Berkeley at the next election.³ But in 1831 both the whigs saw the opportunity of getting back at Phillpotts, whose expensive electioneering had affected the pocketbooks of both and whose subsequent active competition rankled. His financial vulnerability made him an easy target; he could not be expected to wage a second expensive campaign in less than a year.⁴ Thus Webb repudiated his decision to stand aside, and, in coalition with Berkeley, attacked Phillpotts' seat.⁵

The excuse for this attack was Phillpotts' vote in the House of Commons on a motion by Sir Henry Parnell that, in the interests of economic retrenchment, criticized the size of the civil list submitted by the Wellington government. Had it passed it would have been a vote of no-confidence against the government, and ordinarily Phillpotts would have supported it, but he inexplicably voted against it and tacitly gave his support to Wellington. His enemies in Gloucester found a sinister meaning in this vote. His brother, Rev. Henry Phillpotts, Dean of Chester and a well-known tory polemicist, became Bishop of Exeter shortly after the vote on the Parnell motion. Webb and Berkeley charged Phillpotts with a *quid pro quo*. The latter excused himself on the grounds that he did not understand correctly the meaning of the Parnell motion and furthermore that the decision to give his brother the bishopric had been made before his vote; only the announcement followed it.⁶

¹ *Ibid.*, 26/3/1831.

² Of 516 householders who voted under the new franchise in 1832, only twenty-eight had voted as freemen in 1830. *Gloucester Poll Book*, 1830, 1832.

³ *Gloucester Journal*, 30/4/1831.

⁴ M. F. F. Berkeley to W. H. Hyett, April(?), 1831, Gloucestershire County Record Office, D6/F32, no. 6.

⁵ *Bristol Gazette*, 28/4/1831; Handbill, 'Webb and Berkeley For Ever!' *Gloucestershire Collection*, NF 10.16. ⁶ *Gloucester Journal*, 7/5/1831; *Cheltenham Free Press*, 14/2/1835.

Despite the ideological ferment abroad in the country, the Gloucester election was fought with traditional weapons. Berkeley, his 'head . . . splitting from Beer and the Fumes of Tobacco . . .' found the Gloucester freemen 'all in the greatest possible distress and all have a Wife and Seven small children'.¹ The whig problem was complicated by the Berkeley engagement in county politics on behalf of Henry Moreton (later second Lord Ducie) and Sir Berkeley William Guise, Webb's brother-in-law and the doughty campaigner of 1811, who opposed the Beaufort member for East Gloucestershire, Lord Edward Somerset. Somerset had voted against the reform bill and thus called down opposition from reformists, but the county election was also the latest episode in the renewed Berkeley-Beaufort contest for political supremacy.

The implications of the county election for Gloucester were two-fold. First, Berkeley finances had to be stretched to meet the costs of both elections.² This proved to be less of a problem than in the past, as expenses in Gloucester were lower than usual. Nevertheless, monies promised by Gloucester whigs were not forthcoming after the election; Webb overspent despite his failure to contribute personally; and Col. Berkeley was left to pick up the unpaid bills.³ Secondly, Capt. Berkeley was fearful that the tories would retaliate for the whig attack on Somerset's seat by rushing to the support of Phillpotts in Gloucester.⁴ But this did not happen. The whig assault on East Gloucestershire was obviously more than a Berkeley power play. Moreton and Guise obtained 3,800 signatures in support of their candidacy, an impressive roster of Gloucestershire gentry.⁵ It was apparent that county freeholders supported the reform bill whatever their prior party allegiance. In the face of this opposition, Somerset retired without a contest.⁶ Also, Gloucester blues would hardly throw themselves into the fight on behalf of Phillpotts, who had so forcibly ejected their candidate several months earlier and in the interim voted for the reform bill.

Caught off balance by the whig coalition and weakened by his 1830 expenditures, Phillpotts could not retain his seat. Rumours of his expected resignation preceded the nomination.⁷ But his election agent, Washbourne, persisted in the canvass, perhaps, as Capt. Berkeley

¹ Berkeley to Hyett, April(?), 1831, Gloucestershire County Record Office, op. cit.; Mrs Charlotte Berkeley to Hyett, 5/7/1831, *ibid.*, no. 15.

² W. Harris to Hyett, 20/6/1831, *ibid.*, no. 12; Berkeley to Hyett, 5/7/1831, *ibid.*, no. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, nos. 10, 11, 15. They amounted to only £2,000.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 6. ⁵ *Gloucester Journal*, 23/4/1831; 30/4/1831.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14/5/1831. This would seem to support D. C. Moore's position—*supra*, p. 149 and n. 2 on p. 153.

⁷ *Bristol Mirror*, 30/4/1831.

suspected, to put the whigs to the expense of the poll.¹ On the hustings Phillpotts spoke out vehemently against the coalition of whig gentry and the corporation that threatened Gloucester's political independence, but after two days polling he resigned with the totals standing: Berkeley, 730; Webb, 699; Phillpotts, 276.² His resignation meant that he had exhausted his support and had no ability to bring in the outvoters. His Gloucester vote represented the hard-core merchant, non-conformist element, although due to the abbreviated polling, no poll book exists for this election and the *locus* of his support cannot be positively fixed.

For the moment the Guise-Berkeley-corporation alliance was reforged and dominated Gloucester politics. But this dominance was precarious, and Capt. Berkeley was fearful that the expenses of 1831 would weaken their cause in the election that was certain to follow the passage of the reform bill. He wondered privately whether Webb's personal gratification, for a few months at best, was worth the risks that financial embarrassment might bring in the future.³

A much-gnawed bone of contention between the Namierites and their antagonists is the issue of ideology and its place in the politics of the pre-reform era. In Gloucester, nuclei of parties based upon whig and tory ideology existed throughout the pre-reform era. Although the poll books reveal votes and not motives, many of the voters must have been moved by political conviction, if not by spite or ambition. On the other hand the Gloucester freemen, and especially the outvoters, tended to be apolitical, responding most readily to the party with the longest purse. Since all contested elections before 1832, except that of 1805, were decided by this element, the times, for ideologues, must have been discouraging.⁴ In the penultimate year before the passage of the reform bill, the tremendous oscillation of the poll for the avowed reformer, Phillpotts, reveals the inadequacy of ideological explanations. The Gloucester freemen did not change their minds about Phillpotts and reform between August 1830 and May 1831; they did respond to financial inducement.

¹ Berkeley to Hyett, Gloucestershire County Record Office, op. cit., no. 6; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 30/4/1831.

² *Gloucester Journal*, 7/5/1831.

³ Berkeley to Hyett, Gloucestershire County Record Office, op. cit., no. 15.

⁴ The importance of the outvoters may be seen from the following table derived from the *Gloucester Poll Books*, 1816, 1818, 1830.

Number of voters in Gloucester elections					1816	1818	1830
City voters	...	...	...	...	562	551	584
Outvoters	...	...	...	...	1017	1152	1016
Total	...	...	...	...	1579	1703	1600

The reform bill, by disfranchising outvoters who lived more than seven miles outside the parliamentary boundaries of the city and enfranchising the household voters, altered the techniques of electioneering in Gloucester, lowered the costs of election, and focused more attention on local interests and issues. But the reform bill did not end the pre-reform practice of paying for votes, nor did it prevent the intrusion of powerful men from outside the city, nor did it heal the animosities among the whig and radical reformers of the city. These factors provided continuity between the pre-reform and post-reform eras of Gloucester's political history.