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By J. K. GRUENFELDER

IN CONTRAST to most early Stuart boroughs, Gloucester retained its electoral independence, its freedom from patronage and the election of 'foreigners', throughout the elections of 1604-1640. Its members of parliament from 1558 to 1640, were, with very few exceptions, its recorders, town clerks or former mayors and aldermen. It refused the nominees of that avid place-seeker, the earl of Leicester in 1580 and 1584; no other peer apparently even attempted to influence the city's choice of candidates.¹ Yet its elections were often bitterly fought contests caused by the continuing struggle between Gloucester's leadership and its commoners who, usually in alliance with a minority of the aldermen or a mayor, upset the corporation's electoral plans. Gloucester's large electorate—it may have been as great as four or five hundred—probably contributed to the disputes that first occurred in 1555 and were sporadically repeated through the election for the Long Parliament in November 1640.²

An election in Mary's reign in 1555 established a pattern for succeeding election battles. The commoners joined forces with a minority of the corporation and overthrew the return of the city's recorder, John Pollard, the candidate of the majority of the aldermen and common councillors. Pollard was a 'foreigner' and therefore unacceptable to the greater number of the electorate who preferred 'a good Gloucestershire squire', Arthur Porter, even though he was a non-resident. Gloucester's corporation was so upset with the outcome of the election that it passed an ordinance that forbade any burgess, 'on pain of disfranchisement', from voting or campaigning for 'anyone who was not a burgess and freeman, or else Recorder of the city.'³ The ordinance, with one exception, was observed through the elections of 1640.

The battle between 'the many and few' erupted again in 1571 and 1572 when the town clerk, Thomas Atkins, apparently representing the popular faction, won election over the recorder, Richard Pates, who appealed against the results to the master of the rolls, the privy council and indeed, even to Elizabeth's great adviser, Lord Burghley, without success. Pates was returned in 1586 and, thanks to his determination to select his successor as recorder, touched off a dispute with mayor Luke Garnons that lasted a year and involved, among others, the privy council and the chief justices before it was over. Garnons's stand against Pates, the aldermen and their weighty royal supporters apparently secured his 'popular' reputation since his election, with Atkins in 1588, has been described as 'a double triumph for the popular party'. Garnons repeated his success in the disputed elections of 1597 and 1601 but Atkins, owing to his financial folly and domineering personality, was twice refused. He had lost the support of both 'the many and the few' in Gloucester.⁴ The quarrel, however, between the corporation and the commoners and their allies was not yet over as the election of 1604 was to illustrate.

There was no hint of impending trouble when Gloucester's corporation met to discuss who might

1. Sir J. E. Neale, *The Elizabethan House of Commons*, (1949), 275; W. B. Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A Study in Local Government, 1590-1640*, (1940), 32.

2. Neale, *Elizabethan House of Commons*, 272-81; M. F. Keeler, *The Long Parliament, 1640-1*, (1954), 47.

3. Neale, *Elizabethan House of Commons*, 272-3.

4. *Ibid.*, Neale, 274-81.

be suitable members for the parliament. The mayor and his brethren decided that 'Nicholas Overbury Esquire Recorder . . . and Thomas Machen Esqr. one of the aldermen . . . were persons most fittest [sic] to be burgesses' for the forthcoming parliament.⁵ It was at this meeting it seems, that the first sign of trouble emerged when another alderman, John Jones, announced that he 'much desired to be one of the burgesses' because of 'his own private respects'. Jones, Gloucester's sheriff in 1587 and 1592 and mayor in 1597, was the registrar of the diocese, a position that he believed was at risk in the impending parliament. He also claimed that his 'lease belonging to the see of the Bishopric of Gloucester the state whereof & of all other leases of that nature & quality he feared would be likewise questioned in the said parliament'. His fears had apparently been aroused by a letter that 'was written unto [him] by an honorable personage [Godfrey Goldsborough, bishop of Gloucester?]' which urged him to seek election to protect his and the church's interests.⁶ Jones's candour about his motives for seeking a place, however, rebounded against him. The corporation denied Jones's candidacy, noting that the proclamation summoning parliament ordered that no one should be chosen because of 'partial respects or factious combinations'. Jones gave way and agreed to the nomination of Overbury and Machen.⁷ The meeting ended in apparent unanimity. A tranquil election seemed in prospect.

Jones, however, was playing a double game. He and his band of followers promptly began to conduct an energetic campaign amongst the commoners of Gloucester to reverse the corporation's decision. Jones's campaign was a shrewd and skilful affair, emphasizing the economic benefits that would accrue to the citizens should he win the election. He would, if returned, 'procure an Act to be made' that no non-resident 'should make malt within the said City . . . & that no hasting pease which were a great commodity to them which had gardens in the said City should be sown in any fields & corn grounds adjoining or lying about the said City but only in gardens within the said City'. In addition, he promised 'that he would procure a grant of more fairs to be kept in the said City then before had been kept there'. Jones's canvass quickly won over 'many of the meaner sort of Burgesses to promise to give their voices with him'.⁸

The mayor and aldermen, however, were soon aware of Jones's activities and summoned another meeting, this time a gathering of the whole common council to discuss developments. While no doubts could be raised about Machen's eligibility for election—he was a city resident and, like his father before him, had served as a sheriff and mayor of Gloucester—some questions had arisen over Overbury's eligibility. He was 'neither citizen resident nor freeman' of Gloucester. Overbury, of Aston Subedge and Bourton-on-the-Hill, resided at the Middle Temple in London. However, a careful reading of Gloucester's ordinance apparently ended any doubts over Overbury's eligibility since it specifically allowed the election of the recorder, whether resident or not.⁹ Jones used the occasion to raise the question of his election once again but to no avail. The corporation remained adamantly opposed to his candidacy. Jones seemingly accepted the refusal in good grace and 'openly yielded his consent thereunto & did then and there faithfully promise to surcease & give-over his suit and further . . . did too signify & make known the same to the inferior burgesses who had voices . . . & especially to such persons whom the said Jones had formerly laboured to give their voices with him.' But Jones did not keep his promise. As soon as the meeting ended, Jones and his allies began, again, to 'solicite and stir up many of the basest & meanest burgesses' who were, Machen later complained in his Star Chamber suit, most readily 'seduced against the corporation's decision.'¹⁰

On election day, Jones and his friends, including the officials of the consistory court ruined the

5. Gloucestershire Record Office, GBR 1376, Gloucester Corporation minutes, 1565–1632. no. 1376, ff. 196v, 201, 201v; W. R. Williams, *A Parliamentary History of Gloucestershire*, (1898), 192–3.

6. *Ibid*, Williams 192; P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25.

7. P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25.

8. P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25.

9. Williams; *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 192–3; Gloucester Record Office, Gloucester Minute Book 1565–1632, no. 1376, ff. 101, 201v.

10. P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25.

plans of the city's corporation. The embittered Machen claimed that 'great numbers of strangers & others such as had no voices in the same Election to the number of 200 persons at the least' carried the day for Jones. They had, he alleged, been 'kept together in several Inns, Taverns & Alehouses there drinking and carousing in very disorderly manner' at Jones's expense and, given subsequent events, Machen's allegations about the entertainment Jones provided for his followers may well have been true. Jones led his supporters noisily into the hall, all of them shouting 'John Jones for burgess' over and over again. It was a tumultuous scene; the sheriff, aldermen and mayor, fearing a riot, tried to quiet the mob but 'the more they laboured to stay the unruly clamour, the more they still cried and shouted out Jones, Jones for A Burgess!'. The mayor and aldermen were powerless to control events. Jones, so Machen claimed in chagrin, was 'by the meaner sort of Burgesses & by the multitude of voices' elected to serve with Overbury at Westminster.¹¹ It was a notable triumph for the many over the few with Jones, like Atkins before him, in the role of demagogue. For Gloucester's older citizens, it must have seemed like the exciting days of 1555 and 1571 all over again!

Jones was so delighted with his triumph that he leaped from his chair in the hall, rushed up a nearby stairway and clambered upon the top of a 'wool house parcel' and 'there incited, provoked and encouraged them to cry out & shout in most outrageous manner with [the] throwing up of cloaks, hats and caps & where they so continued by the space of one quarter of an hour'. It was a memorable scene but one that, no doubt, had been witnessed before in the city's turbulent electoral past. Jones thoughtfully provided two barrels of strong beer for his happy followers who responded by ringing the bells of St Mary de Crypt, an event which Jones so enjoyed that he admitted later he wished that all the bells of Gloucester had been rung in honour of his election! There was, as well, a final humiliation for the city's leaders. Jones distributed money amongst a large group of townsmen 'upon condition that they should, at the very instant time when the said Mayor & Aldermen were to come forth of the said Boothall into the street Cry out & shout even to their very faces Jones, Jones for a Burgess', a condition which the mob fulfilled with great glee, much to the consternation and embarrassment of the departing aldermen, mayor and common councillors.¹²

The aggrieved Machen sought revenge in a Star Chamber suit against Jones. His election defeat was apparently the last straw in what may have been a festering personal quarrel between the two men. Machen claimed that Jones, backed by bishop Goldsborough, had been constantly threatening him. Jones had committed all kinds of corrupt practices as a clerical official and, if that were not enough, he was equally guilty of fraudulent activities when he had acted as a subsidy collector during the late queen's reign. He was guilty of extortion in his collection of fees for the probate of wills and marriage fees; he accepted bribes for spiritual pleas. It was a typical Star Chamber complaint, dredging up anything and everything imaginable that might show the antagonist in a bad light. Whether there was any truth to Machen's charges is impossible to say although the allegations had little effect on Jones's later career in Gloucester. He continued to serve as registrar of the diocese until his death in 1630 and was, in addition to being a justice of the peace for the city, chosen as its mayor twice more in 1618 and 1625.¹³

Jones, however, never served the city in parliament again but that may have been more because of his trouble over securing his wages and his own lack of interest in such service than any lingering bitterness over his electoral tactics. By 1606 the corporation already owed Jones and Overbury £100 in wages for their parliamentary service and had agreed to pay it although collecting it proved an altogether more difficult matter, so difficult, in fact, that the corporation was forced to order that any burgess or freeman who refused to pay his contribution toward the charges should be 'disfranchised and shall lose the freedom of a burgess within this city.'¹⁴ That threat, in Jones's case at least, was not enough; years later he was forced to secure a chancery writ to get his wages. The city's

11. P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25.

12. P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25.

13. P.R.O., St. Ch. 8/207/25; Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 192.

14. Glos. R. O., GBR 1376, ff. 221v, 232.

authorities, in trying to deny the validity of Jones's claims for payment, argued that he 'had not attended the parliament to which he had been elected, and therefore should not be paid', a claim that probably, better than anything else, explains why Jones never served at Westminster again.¹⁵

As for Machen, his hopes of parliamentary service were probably realized in 1614 although perhaps not without another contested election. Gloucester's corporation, after due deliberation and consultation, decided that 'Nicholas Overbury Esquire Recorder . . . & Christopher Caple one of the aldermen' were to be nominated its members of parliament.¹⁶ But Gloucester's members were Thomas Machen and alderman John Browne.¹⁷ No evidence survives to indicate what happened. It is possible that the corporation changed its mind and decided to back Machen and Browne; it is also just as possible that a contested election resulted and that Machen—did he perhaps copy Jones's tactics and rely on the commoners?—and Browne defeated the corporation's candidates. But that is speculation; all that can be said is that Machen and Browne were the city's members at Westminster in 1614.

Gloucester's subsequent elections to 1628 were conducted without apparent trouble. It repeatedly chose influential residents or, in one case, a candidate closely connected through marriage with some of Gloucester's leading aldermanic families. Browne, who was first returned in 1614, served again in five successive parliaments, from 1621 to 1628 and enjoyed a career typical of most of his fellow members. A Gloucester brewer of some means, Browne served as the city's sheriff in 1603 and was chosen mayor in 1610, 1621, 1634, and 1635. Some mystery, however, surrounds the election for the parliament of 1621.¹⁸

Browne was elected along with another alderman, Anthony Robinson, sheriff in 1616 and later, in 1629, Gloucester's mayor.¹⁹ However, in December 1620, at the urging of the corporation, Robinson 'made a public declaration that he is contented to resign . . . his place to Mr Gibb and that Mr Sheriff shall return Mr Gibb in his room as one of the burgesses of the parliament for the city'. The sheriffs were even promised that they would be saved 'harmless from any penalty or danger for the same.'²⁰ But Gibb never served; indeed, it is likely that the 'piece of plate . . . with the city arms' worth £20 and given him by the corporation in February 1621 was a gratuity for his proposed services since, on that same day, the corporation also agreed that the city's charter 'shall be renewed this next term and that Mr Alderman Browne, Mr Townclerk and Mr Robinson shall advise with counsel about it in London'. Robinson spoke on economic matters in the parliament of 1621 and was later paid £20 (Browne received only £10) for his attendance at parliament.²¹ The whole affair raises several questions: just who was Gibb and why did the corporation put him forward as one of Gloucester's members? One Henry Gibb was apparently interested in the city's affairs, at least in 1624 since, in late July, twenty shillings was authorized as a payment to a messenger who was delivering letters 'to Mr Henry Gibb (one of his majesty's bedchamber) from this city.'²² If the mysterious Mr Gibb of 1620–1 and Henry Gibb are one in the same, then his connections to Gloucester are intriguing, indeed.

Sir Thomas Overbury, murdered in the Tower in 1613 at the instigation of lady Frances Howard, then countess of Essex, was the son of Gloucester's recorder and M.P. in 1604, Nicholas Overbury, who later testified at Somerset's trial in 1616. Henry Gibb was a client and friend of Sir Thomas Overbury's patron, Robert Carr, viscount Rochester and later earl of Somerset, who took lady Frances Howard as his wife. Gibb gained his position in the king's household through Somerset's influence and served his patron loyally and well. However, Gibb and Sir Thomas Overbury were never, it seems, friendly; indeed, Sir Thomas chided Somerset openly for placing Gibb in the royal

15. Willcox, *Gloucestershire*, 32–3 & n. 38.

16. *Glos. R.O.*, GBR 1376, f. 253v.

17. Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 192–3.

18. *Ibid.*, Williams, 192–3.

19. *Ibid.*, Williams, 193.

20. *Glos. R.O.*, GBR 1376, f. 478v.

21. *Glos. R.O.*, GBR 1376, ff. 476v, 489; Willcox, *Gloucestershire*, 32 & n 37.

22. *Glos. R.O.*, GBR 1376, f. 499v.

household.²³ Gibb's choice, if Mr Gibb and Henry Gibb are one and the same, by the corporation remains inexplicable. Was Gibb the nominee of a patron too powerful for the corporation to resist or was there some connection with an influential member or members of the corporation which explained his choice? Given his unhappy memories, it is hardly plausible that Nicholas Overbury was responsible for Gibb's surprising appearance in Gloucester's politics. A final question may also be asked: why did Gibb fail to serve in parliament? Did opposition develop within the corporation which forced Gibb to withdraw? Gibb, according to Gloucester's ordinance, was a 'foreigner' and ineligible for election. Or did Browne, at Westminster, discover that parliament would not allow the corporation's action? No final answer can be given although it does seem safe to suggest that for a brief moment in late 1620, Gloucester's corporation asserted its authority over the selection of the city's members of parliament in a surprising and, as events proved, short-lived way.

Browne and Robinson were re-elected for the parliament of 1624 and found themselves deeply involved in a dispute between the county and city over the parliamentary franchise.²⁴ In the next two parliaments of 1625 and 1626, Browne was joined by another alderman, Christopher Capel, an unsuccessful nominee of the corporation in 1614. Capel, a mercer, had already served the city as sheriff in 1594 and mayor in 1598, 1619 and 1621. Capel may have been of the puritan or reformist persuasion; his son, Dr Richard Capel, certainly was: he lost his living at Eastington for his refusal to read the Book of Sports in 1633.²⁵ In 1628, Browne and John Hanbury of Feckenham, Worcestershire and Preston, Gloucestershire, were returned. Hanbury's election probably resulted from his marriage connections to leading aldermanic families: his first wife was Capel's daughter and his second wife linked him with the Rich and Machen families.²⁶ There is nothing to indicate any dispute over the choice of these leading citizens; Gloucester had, it seems, embarked upon a settled, tranquil and, from the point of view of patronage and influence, independent electoral course. It chose its own men, except Gibb who never served, while the city's leaders apparently kept a steady hand on the passions that had so often surfaced in its previous elections.

Between the abrupt dissolution of Charles I's third parliament in 1629 and the summoning of the parliaments of 1640, England was subjected to the king's 'Personal Rule.' Parliament, wherein the gentry in particular had found a forum for the expression of their views, had been silenced. During the years of 'Personal Rule', Charles's fiscal exactions—forest fines, knighthood fines and, most significant of all, ship money—coupled with his increasingly unpopular religious policy, combined gradually to create an atmosphere of distrust that nurtured a growing opposition to royal policies. Discontent was brought to a head by the Bishops' Wars with Scotland in 1639 and 1640 which caused the collapse of 'Personal Rule' and the summoning of the Short and Long Parliaments.

Gloucester's 1640 elections, like those of the county, reflected the growing division between the court and the country.²⁷ In the spring four men, Thomas Pury, William Singleton, Henry Brett and the city's recorder, William Lenthall of Oxfordshire, sought election. Only Singleton might not have tried again in the autumn. Lenthall was most eager to obtain a seat and in March, at the request of the corporation, willingly took 'the oath of a common burgess', perhaps in an attempt doubly to insure his eligibility for the forthcoming election.²⁸ Lenthall probably was the favourite choice of the city's leadership but in both elections it seems that Gloucester's traditional divisions

23. Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 192; W. McElwee, *The Murder of Sir Thomas Overbury*, (1952), 14-15, 27, 125-6, 162, 192, 249; J. Nichols, (ed.), *The Progress . . . of James I*, (1828), II, 411, III, 105-6, IV, 1005; N. E. McClure, (ed.), *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, (1939), I, 475, 609, 625-6; II, 421, 444, 445.

24. Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 193; *Glos. R.O.*, GBR 1376, ff. 497, 497v. 498, 498v, 504v.

25. Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 193.

26. *Ibid.*, Williams, 193.

27. J. K. Gruenfelder, 'The Elections to the Short Parliament, 1640', H. Reinmuth Jr., (ed.), *Early Stuart Studies*, (1970), 209, 211, 227-8; Keeler, *Long Parliament*, 46-7.

28. *Glos. R.O.*, GBR 1377, f. 145; Keeler, *Long Parliament*, 47, 115, 250, 316-17; Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 193-4.

in electoral matters, the contest between the few—the city's leaders—and the many surfaced again and led to Lenthall's downfall. Details of the elections are scanty but Lenthall saw one of his defeats in such terms for, in an undated letter written to a friend at Woodstock in 1640, he complained that the news from Gloucester was not good. Although he enjoyed 'the best assurance that may be from the Aldermen, yet the Corporation is so great and the pace of election so popular that I have no assurance of election there, it being with mighty hand and much power labored against me.' It made him doubly anxious to be sure of a Woodstock seat which, no doubt to his relief, he secured for both parliaments.²⁹ Lenthall, who was the speaker of the Long Parliament, was so bitter about his failure at Gloucester in the autumn that he appealed to the House of Commons over the results, alleging that his appeal for a poll was denied. Nothing further, however, was ever heard of the matter.³⁰

Lenthall's candidacy may have been hampered by the labours of a puritan faction in the city's elections. Two men were especially active, 'both strong and rank Puritans, Nelmes & Edwardes', who devoted all their energies to the return of Pury, the son of a clothier, who had been sheriff in 1626 and had served as an alderman since 1638. Of staunch nonconformist religious views, Pury had gained notoriety because of his struggle with the court of high commission in 1634 and 1635 over the stipend the city was paying a nonconformist preacher. He gained further attention, as one of his critics claimed, by 'his irreverence in God's house, sitting covered when all the rest sit bare'. And while his ties to Gloucester's religious reformers were evidently not enough to win him the spring election, Pury's autumn victory may be symptomatic of a slight shift in the city's sympathies. He served with considerable distinction in behalf of the parliamentary cause both in the Long Parliament and during the ensuing Civil War.³¹ William Singleton won a place in the spring. He was another member of Gloucester's corporation who had already served the city as sheriff in 1618 and mayor in 1637. Like Pury, he supported the parliamentary cause when war came.³² The only winner in both contests was Brett of Hatherley, Gloucestershire and Westminster, a cousin of the late George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, the great favourite of James I and Charles I. Brett owned property in Gloucester but can almost be described as an outsider in city affairs, preferring to spend most of his time at Westminster. However, his marriage connected him with two aldermanic families and in 1629 he had become a burgess of the city. His elections for Gloucester strongly suggest that the city's political attitude was, in 1640 at least, still undefined. Brett was an apparent moderate, perhaps even somewhat sympathetic to the early reforms of the Long Parliament, since he supported it through 1642 before finally joining the king at Oxford. He was not finally disabled by the Long Parliament until February 1644. It should be recalled, however, that of the city's four known candidates in 1640, Brett was the only one who eventually became a royalist.³³

As J. E. Neale succinctly suggested, the old tradition of resistance to authority was a factor that could not be ignored in any study of Gloucester's Elizabethan elections.³⁴ The contested elections that did occur in 1604 and 1640, and perhaps in 1614 and 1621 as well, were struggles between the few, the city's mayor and aldermen, and the many, its wide electorate. Jones, like Porter and Atkins before him, was a popular demagogue in 1604 while Lenthall's frustrations in 1640, he believed, were caused because 'the corporation is so great and the pace of election so popular that I have no assurance of election'.³⁵ Lenthall's gloomy forecast was correct; he failed in both 1640 elections. The same events might have occurred in 1614 and 1621 since it seems that the favoured candidates never served. It is noteworthy too, to recall that the only peer that certainly tried to intervene in the city's elections was Elizabeth's earl of Leicester; there is nothing to show that

29. Lenthall to Irons, n.d. 1640, Berkshire Record Office, D/EL 10.5/12, Lenthall family papers; Keeler, *Long Parliament*, 250.

30. J. Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State . . .*, (1659–1701), IV, 73.

31. Keeler, *Long Parliament*, 316–17; Allibond to Heylin, 24 March 1640, P.R.O., St. P. Dom. 16/448:79.

32. Williams, *Parl. Hist. Gloucestershire*, 193–4.

33. Keeler, *Long Parliament*, 115.

34. Neale, *Elizabethan House of Commons*, 274.

35. Lenthall to Irons, n.d. 1640, Berkshire Record Office, D/EL 10.5/12, Lenthall family papers.

any aristocrat tried to intervene between 1603 and 1640 and that, perhaps better than anything else, illustrates the major theme in Gloucester's electoral history: its sturdy independence.

Gloucester preferred to choose its own men for parliament. Its members, from Atkins and Pates to Garnons, Browne, Robinson, Capel, Pury and Singleton, were men known for their service to Gloucester as aldermen, sheriffs, mayors or recorders. Their local importance determined their election; for most of them, it was a final recognition of their city prestige and influence. Indeed, such remarks apply equally well to Hanbury and Brett, whose marriage ties with important Gloucester families explained their choice. Gloucester's determination to choose its own was behind Pollard's refusal in 1555, it may account for Gibb's apparent withdrawal in 1621 and it explains why Lenthall, although sworn a common burgess and the city's recorder, was rejected in 1640. He was, like Pollard before him, a 'foreigner', a resident of Oxfordshire. Gloucester's electoral history, unlike that of most early Stuart parliamentary boroughs which surrendered to the blandishments of pushing patrons, stands out as an example of a proud, sturdy and, at times, exciting electoral independence.

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