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**'Madd, Bedlam Madd': an Incident in Gloucester's 17th-century
Municipal History Reconsidered**

by A. R. Warmington
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‘Madd, Bedlam Madd’: an Incident in Gloucester’s 17th Century Municipal History reconsidered

By A.R. WARMINGTON

The period of the Civil War, Interregnum and Restoration was a turbulent one for England’s local communities, as the personnel of local government came and went with the many changes of régime. In the counties of Wales, the west and the north, which tended to support the king in the war, Parliament’s victory in 1646 brought major changes as the Royalist majorities were ejected from the Commissions of the Peace. No settlement was reached in the following years, and many in Parliament’s original heartland of the south-east grew alienated by military rule, sectarian radicalism and high taxes, until the county communities of Kent and Essex rose in rebellion in 1648. With the end of this Second Civil War and the execution of Charles I, many more who were lukewarm to the republican régime were removed from office or refused to serve. In most counties, including Gloucestershire, the ruling group of the 1650s bore little resemblance to its pre-war counterpart; most were of distinctly lower social origin, chosen for their political reliability. Then, after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, it all came full circle, and the county gentry, other than the very few among them who had committed themselves too fully to the Commonwealth or Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate, were restored to their pre-war dominance.

This process was no less visible in the many self-governing corporate boroughs. Those men who happened to preside over towns controlled by the Royalists in the Civil War, even if they themselves had had little choice in the matter (as in York), were usually removed soon after the town’s capture. Later, in the mid-1650s, Cromwell divided the country into eleven districts under Major-Generals, who purged the corporations of the lukewarm and ‘disaffected’. In 1662–3, the restored Crown began a major onslaught on the boroughs with the Act for the Well Governing and Regulation of Corporations. Under this, local commissioners drawn from the gentry were given authority during a specific period to call before them all the members of the boroughs’ governing bodies to tender them the oaths of supremacy and allegiance; any who refused were to be debarred from office and replaced by the commissioners’ nominees, and henceforth only communicating Anglicans were to be elected. In addition, the commissioners had wide powers to disqualify officials, even if they were ready to take the oaths, if it were deemed ‘expedient for the public safety’.

The result was a very rapid turnover of officials and consequent political instability in the boroughs throughout the period. Bristol was a prime example, suffering repeated purges and constant faction-fighting. Gloucester, however, was different, at least until the Restoration period. This essay seeks to examine her experience in the light of contemporary politics, with special reference to the conflict which erupted in 1671–2, and which presaged the collapse of Gloucester’s jealously-guarded independence. Although Gloucestershire was a centralized county, in that Gloucester was the sole county town and sessions were almost always held there, the city was, in fact, a county in her own right, exempt from the jurisdiction of the shire; even during the Civil War, county sheriffs needed special permission from Parliament to reside in

Gloucester. There was considerable bad feeling among the gentry about Gloucester's control of the 'inshire', two hundreds carved out of the county and placed under the city's control. Led by the Cooke and Guise families, the inshire gentry had fought long and unsuccessfully to overturn this, with claims of unfair taxation and oppressive rule.¹

Gloucester was ruled by a Common Council, consisting of twelve aldermen elected for life and serving up to twice, in rotation, as mayor; they were drawn from a pool of men who had served in the burdensome offices of steward and sheriff. There was also a wide range of specialist officials serving during pleasure, such as the town clerk and recorder. Largely arising from the severe crisis through which the city economy passed in the early 17th century, the corporation had become dominated by an increasingly oligarchic and puritanical aldermanic bench. The puritanism of the aldermen, as well as military circumstance, inclined Gloucester to support Parliament in the Civil War, during which the city withstood a fierce siege at one time led by Charles I in person. Many observers, including Bishop Goodman, regarded the Earl of Essex's relief of Gloucester in September 1643 as 'the turning of the wheel' in Parliament's favour.²

No doubt the city was not quite as selfless or heroic as some printed propaganda-sheets would have us believe. The Governor, Colonel Massey, probably considered defecting to the king; and both citizens and soldiers fled in droves. The Royalists drew up a list of no fewer than 104 sympathizers to be spared at the sack. Nonetheless, the enduring image (which was very useful to an impoverished town seeking compensation for its war damage in the 1650s) was that of godly Gloucester, 'the Ramoth-Gilead of the good', holding out against all the odds and down to the last few barrels of powder.³ Moreover, there was genuine unity of purpose and support for the parliamentary cause among the Gloucester élite. Of all the members of the Common Council, only Alderman James Powell was definitely a Royalist (though there were some unsubstantiated suspicions against Alderman William Capel); and Powell conveniently died before he could be ejected. Major-General Desborough removed four common councillors in 1655 for allegedly supporting the exiled Charles II, but they were quietly restored within two years – in contrast to Tewkesbury, where the nine leaders of one side in a long-running feud were all purged. Thus the Gloucester Common Council of the 1640s and 1650s was very unusual in that every single member had been duly and properly elected, and civic politics were stable. This stability was helped considerably by the fact that many of the aldermen were very long-lived; of those still alive in 1662, Capel, William and Laurence Singleton, Luke Nurse, Thomas Pury, James Stephens, Henry Cugley and Dennis Wise had all served as aldermen for upwards of fifteen years.⁴

Not surprisingly, then, the retribution under the Act for the Well Governing and Regulation of Corporations in 1662–3 was correspondingly severe against a corporation which had supported a succession of republican governments and sought to profit by gaining control over its cathedral and churches in the pursuit of puritan reformation. The local processes have already been covered in this journal by Roland Austin and I do not propose to repeat the details here, but some points need stressing. The depth of the purges of 1662–3, during which some three quarters of the members of the corporation were removed, was partly motivated by a desire for revenge among Lord Herbert and the commissioners, many of whom were old Royalists or inshire gentlemen bristling with resentment against Gloucester. Only three men gave the commissioners no choice by refusing the oaths; all the rest went because it was deemed 'expedient for the public safety'.⁵

The Table shows the extent of the purge. A wealth of experience disappeared with Nurse, Wise, the Singletons, Capel and Pury (who resigned in 1662, supposedly because of his age and prolonged absences, but who would certainly have been another victim). All of the five

1645	1648	1651	1654	1657	1660	1663	1666	1669	1672	
Laurence Singleton						Robert Fielding			Henry Norwood	
Dennis Wise						John Powell	William Bubb		William Cooke	
John Brewster	Anthony Edwards				Thomas Lugg	John Woodward	William Scudamore		Duncomb Colchester	
Luke Nurse						Thomas Yate		Toby Langford	Henry Brett	
Henry Cugley								William Hodges	William Selwyn	
William Singleton						William Russell				
Jasper Clutterbuck					Robert Payne	Thomas Price				
John Madocke				Robert Tyther	Thomas Pierce	John Wagstaffe				
William Capel					Nicholas Webb		Henry Fowler			
Thomas Hill		Edmund Collett			Toby Jordan		Henry Ockold		Robert Longden	John Gythens
Nicholas Webb	James Stephens								Thomas Aram	
Thomas Pury					William Clarke		Anthony Arnold			John Rogers

KEY

died

resigned

removed

TABLE: THE ALDERMANIC BENCH OF GLOUCESTER, 1645-1675

aldermen elected since 1658 were also removed – as, indeed, was Nicholas Webb, the commissioners' own initial choice to replace Capel. Only two aldermen survived: Cugley and Stephens. The latter was already a known enemy of the Rumper régime in February 1660, and was returned in April, with Massey (who had long since defected to the Stuarts) as an MP for Gloucester in the Convention Parliament which recalled the king.⁶ The yawning gaps which these purges created could not be filled by promoting from the Common Council in the usual way; the commissioners quite flagrantly violated the seniority principle in restructuring the corporation, most notably in advancing their particular favourites, Henry Ockold, John Wagstaffe and Henry Fowler, to be common councillors without first serving as stewards, then almost immediately to be aldermen without serving as sheriffs. A veteran Gloucester Royalist, Dr. Robert Fielding, served on the commission and was likewise installed as senior alderman.⁷

At much the same time, an Act of Parliament also removed Gloucester's control over the inshire; an expensive new charter had to be procured to confirm the fact; and the city walls were demolished by the king's orders.⁸ The end result of it all was that Gloucester's corporation was no longer equipped to govern. City government was thrust on to men who had neither the customary years of preparation through serving in lower offices, nor the independent wealth to sustain their status as aldermen. Whereas the pre-war bench had been dominated by merchants and drapers, Thomas Yate was an apothecary, Toby Langford a bookseller, and Richard Massinger a brewer. Meetings were few, and their proceedings inconsequential; in Yate's mayoralty in 1665–6, there were only six meetings all year. Office was increasingly viewed as a burden to be avoided: between 1666 and 1668, an alarming spate of nominees chose to pay a fine rather than serve as steward, sheriff or common councillor; and all the time, faction was rumbling just below the surface.⁹

The first mention of conflict in the corporation came on 3 September 1670, but there are hints that it stretched back beyond that, and was seriously hindering the business of city government. The events which followed have been reviewed in two theses by R.P. Robinson and Peter Ripley, but both tend to follow the sources rather uncritically, as is understandable because they are ample – far more so than those for 1662–3, for this conflict involved executive action at the highest level of government. However, the sources can also be misleading, because the four men whose letters to the Secretary of State, Sir Joseph Williamson, and to each other, form the bulk of them – Alderman Henry Fowler, the Recorder, Sir William Morton (a leading local Royalist in the Civil War), Bishop William Nicholson and Dean Thomas Vynor – all viewed events in a similar light. The views of their enemies have not survived on paper.¹⁰

Although Morton blamed the trouble on 'A Presbyterian Party headed by a discontented cavalier [Fielding]', both parties were, in fact, the product of the changes of 1662–3. The 'loyal party' leaders, Fowler and Wagstaffe, had been raised from the dust by the commissioners, but then so had their main enemies, Fielding and Anthony Arnold. Fowler and Fielding, the main protagonists, were similar in many ways. Both were doctors; indeed they were the only two of their profession so far to have become aldermen. Fowler had fought for Charles I and compounded for a tiny personal estate, while Fielding had conspired with Massey in the late 1650s and had been ready to open the gates of Gloucester to royalist rebels.¹¹ Both sides contained men who were common councillors before the Restoration and who had been advanced to alderman thereafter. It is notable, though, that all of those men advanced to the bench in the late 1660s – William Scudamore, William Hodges, William Bubb, Toby Langford and Robert Longden – were of the 'adverse party', as was Stephens, the only survivor from the 1662–3 purges. But, conversely, Scudamore and Langford, with two other aldermen of the 1660s, Massinger and Yate, were those ejected from the corporation by Major-General Desborough for opposing Cromwell's régime. Although there was evidence, as we shall see

later, of a religious dimension to the split, this was emphatically not a conflict between a Presbyterian rump and a few beleaguered Royalists. And although the 'loyal party' were a minority among the aldermen, neither side had an overall majority in the Common Council. The close votes recorded show that some members floated between the two sides and their votes had to be wooed in crucial debates.

What may have been the first open clash came on 2 November 1668, when the Common Council voted that Fielding had infringed city customs by taking a 'foreign' apothecary as an apprentice. As these rules were violated all the time, it can be assumed that he was already regarded as an enemy by some members of the corporation. It was surely no coincidence that this occurred early in the mayoralty of Henry Ockold, one of the Royalists most favoured by the commissioners in 1662–3. As mayor, Ockold cultivated close relations with the gentry, notably Sir John Wintour of Lydney, to whom a lease of city land was made; Sir Baynham Throckmorton of Clearwell, who was made a freeman *gratis*; and John Smyth of Nibley. All of these men had been active Royalists in the Civil War. However, Fielding was evidently still a man of influence in the corporation, for he was made mayor again for two months in 1669, after Ockold had died before his year was up.¹²

John Wagstaffe was elected mayor in October 1669 according to the order of seniority established by the commissioners. He was noted for his zeal in breaking up Quaker gatherings (with the help of aldermen of both factions, admittedly) and in informing the government of seditious talk.¹³ On 15 August 1670, however, Bubb was nominated to serve as mayor for the next year even though Fowler was due to be elected next. Morton went to Gloucester to sort out the dispute, and his letter to Williamson produced an order by the Privy Council to elect Fowler 'a loyal person, next in course to be chosen mayor'. The Council blamed the fracas on 'turbulent spirits . . . casting indignities on persons of known integrity and loyalty'. In point of fact, Bubb was not 'a junior alderman', as the order termed him, but was next in line after Fowler. However, Fowler was clearly in the right in this instance. After this sharp reproof and some intensive lobbying from Morton, the Common Council voted by 37 to 5 to obey the order. The dissenting voices were all aldermen.¹⁴

After Fowler, the line of succession ran as follows: Bubb, Scudamore, Langford, Hodges and Longden, before reverting to Fielding and Stephens, if no others had acceded in the interim. All of these men supported the 'adverse party', so one wonders why, with time so much on their side, they compromised their position by trying to block Fowler. His actions as mayor afford some clues. Fowler was the worst type of self-righteous, ostentatious loyalist who flourished in Restoration England. He was quite unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between his personal interests and those of the régime. Towards the end of his year he re-erected the long-defaced arms of the King and the Duke of York on the South Gate, and had the inscription erected after the siege 'A city assaulted by man but saved by God' taken down and replaced by a Latin inscription, to the effect that Henry Fowler esquire had removed this symbol of rebellion. More importantly, he and Morton were intriguing from the outset to procure changes in the city charter to remove his enemies. As Fowler explained on 2 August 1671, as his year drew to a close, if the King would that

it shall stande as it now doth, there will be an uninterrupted succession of froward and perverse people, for we must of necesitie yearley call into the Common Councill men of meane and lowe degree and of factious principles.¹⁵

He also referred to an 'expedient' proposed by Morton in order to root out the party he claimed was opposed to the Crown. This presumably referred to moves to bring in a local

gentleman and courtier, Henry Norwood of Leckhampton, as mayor. As a preliminary, Fowler had Norwood admitted as a burgess on 30 May 1671. Then, on 7 August, he struck. After a fierce debate, Fielding was removed from the bench and disenfranchised, by a vote of 19 to 16, for again infringing the liberties of the Company of Mercers and Grocers by employing a servant as an apothecary. Rather implausibly, Fowler portrayed this as a chance event arising out of a similar accusation against another man. Thus, as Vyner put it, the 'loyal party' threw 'the Jonas . . . overboard'.¹⁶

Fowler set the trap and his enemies sprang it by refusing to come to elect a replacement, while Fielding sought a *mandamus* in King's Bench for his reinstatement. With only eleven aldermen, Fowler claimed, it was impossible to elect next year's mayor at the customary meeting on 14 August. He walked out of the deadlocked meeting and wrote to Williamson that the corporation was now 'a lame and unperfect body', venturing that the King might take the opportunity to 'mould us into a better forme'. His enemies disagreed; and after he had left, Stephens, as senior alderman, convened another meeting to confirm the election of Bubb. Both sides journeyed to Kidlington to put their case to Morton. Predictably, Morton favoured Fowler's solution as the best means 'to preserve the Royall Interest' and 'by degrees to weed out those persons who are really factious'. On 25 September, Norwood was admitted to the Common Council in the state of having already served one shrievalty, with the intention that he should fine for the second and be elected senior alderman and mayor for the ensuing year. Thus the 'adverse party' were outflanked, for the King himself favoured this as a solution to heal the wounds, even though Fowler and Morton patently intended it as no such thing.¹⁷

Fowler, Morton, Vyner and Nicholson all concurred in deriding their opponents' nominee, Bubb 'or Bubble rather' as 'a symple man', 'a man of very weake intellects'. Vyner was at his sarcastic best later when Bubb was hauled up before the Privy Council, writing to Williamson

I pray be kind to Mr Bub, and let him be instructed how to address him selfe to his Ma[jes]tie, for feare he should ask his wor[shi]p how his wife does.

Fowler thought that the intention was for Bubb, who lived some distance from Gloucester in the countryside, to resign in favour of Scudamore, whilst Morton thought he was chosen as a puppet, who 'shall beare the name but this factious party shall beare the rule and sway'.¹⁸ But by all rights Bubb, not Norwood, should have been elected mayor in October 1671. The impasse remained. Despite what he had said before, Fowler did actually intend to hold an election on 2 October. His enemies pre-empted him. While Fowler's group was at a service in the cathedral, they hastily convened a meeting and elected Bubb. Arnold, according to Nicholson 'appeared in the head of [the]m & steard the business as Demetrius at Ephesus'. The bells of St. Michael's were rung to celebrate 'great joy *omni populo*' just as Fowler's party left the cathedral. 'Had they beene runge backwards, I suppose it had beene more proper'. There were angry scenes later as Fowler tried to convene an election, while his enemies shouted him down and tried to wrest the civic sword and mace from him. Blows were aimed at him and Wagstaffe, but they managed to escape with these symbols of corporate authority, while the 'mornings Electors' stayed behind to swear in the other officers. Next day, the Common Council met under Bubb. 'Wee are here all madd, Bedlam madd', lamented Nicholson. Again the Common Council was closely divided, 25 supporting Bubb's election, 19 protesting against it.¹⁹

An uneasy calm settled on the city. The Privy Council confirmed on 9 October that Fowler should remain mayor, and he continued to attempt to summon Common Council meetings, as presumably did Bubb, who also signed himself as mayor. No meetings, however, are recorded in the minute book. Fowler reported the city to be 'in quiett & peace but full of discontents'.

Most, as he himself admitted, regarded Bubb as mayor, and Arnold continued to express his contempt for some months by calling him 'Mr Fowler' to his face.²⁰ But Fowler had the advantage: the King and his Lord Lieutenant, the Marquess of Worcester, had kept a close watch on events throughout; and, as we have seen, the evidence reaching them was all one-sided. This was especially so after Wagstaffe was despatched to London to seek advice, although Fielding and Thomas Price did attempt to cultivate the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University in a vain attempt to win support at Court. On 3 November, the King determined that the charter should be surrendered, threatening a *quo warranto* and forfeiture if the Common Council did not comply. Gloucester was in no state to resist; Wagstaffe and John Gythens duly delivered it 'on humble knee' three weeks later. The government of the city was in abeyance for eight months while Worcester and the Privy Council thrashed out Gloucester's future in London.²¹

The interim was also used by Vyner to promote his concept of the interests of the Church, against '[th]e practices of our neighbours usurping upon our priviledges'. As we have seen, he and Nicholson had supported Fowler and Wagstaffe, both of them strong Anglicans. The 'adverse party' had ties with some Puritan clerics, most notably in the form of Help-on-High Fox, the curate of St. Nicholas's, whom Vyner referred to as Fielding's 'fox friend'. Fox was a famous radical in the early days of the Civil War, had been appointed to this living by the corporation in 1648, and survived the restoration of the Church of England by outward conformity. The Cathedral Clerk, Henry Lambe, mentions that Fowler went there on election day because he had already been 'disappointed of a sermon' elsewhere.²² The void in city government led to a breakdown of order in the close. By 27 November, Vyner found 'nobody left here but Jews and Samaritans', the cathedral was packed out by the destitute coming in search of warmth at night, so that 'neither voice nor organ can be heard during divine service', and this 'riotously prophane' behaviour even forced the chapter to alter the times of prayer.²³

While the new names for the Common Council were being discussed, Vyner agitated in favour of John Guise of Elmore as town clerk and against John Dorney, the town clerk during the Civil War, who had been removed in 1662 and restored under Arnold's mayoralty. Despite certificates from Fox, Thomas Woolmough, rector of St. Michael's and Richard Littleton of St. Mary de Crypt that Dorney conformed to the Church of England, Vyner managed to convince the government that this was merely a token conformity and that 'he flies fr[om] [th]e organ as fr[om] [th]e face of a serpent'.²⁴ Vyner, the sub-dean and the canons, were much less successful in trying to persuade Williamson and Lord Arlington to exempt the close from civil jurisdiction under the new charter, claiming that the dean and chapter were a distinct corporation and should be rated separately or by the county, act as JPs within the precincts of the college, and control the disposal of stalls in the cathedral. One can well imagine Charles II laughing at Vyner's (apparently serious) suggestion that he should inspect the civic sword to see if it was true that the arms of Richard III had been removed in favour of 'those given by Oliver for their Rebellions, vizt Balls or Bullets &c'! In any case, the ecclesiastical side of the dispute soon collapsed, for both Nicholson and Vyner were dead within a year, and Morton followed soon after.²⁵

Gloucester was re-incorporated with all her old privileges in April 1672. Nonetheless, the new charter was a fatal blow to her independence. Twenty members were removed, including eight aldermen. Of these, sixteen had supported Bubb's election, though two had opposed it and the other two were neutral. Most unusually, the new Common Council was named in the charter, with Norwood as mayor and four country gentlemen, of scant previous connection to the city, as aldermen.²⁶ William Cooke of Highnam was the son of Sir Robert Cooke, a leading Parliamentarian and Long Parliament MP for Tewkesbury. He had been sequestered as a

Royalist, but was later exonerated and was active in county government in the 1650s, though he turned against the Rump in 1660. Duncombe Colchester of Westbury-on-Severn was the son of a clerk in Chancery who had only just arrived in Gloucestershire on the eve of the Civil War. He was allegedly active in the Surrey rebellion of 1648, and his estate was guided through a maze of difficulties by his stepmother before he reached his majority in 1655. He was active in the early 1660s in breaking Gloucester's resistance to integration into the county militia. Henry Brett of Hatherley, a former courtier, had been a moderate Royalist and MP for Gloucester in both the Short and the Long Parliaments. William Selwyn of Matson had been the King's reluctant host during the siege and a not particularly energetic committeeman and sequestration commissioner in the Interregnum.²⁷ After Norwood, they served as mayor in that order, with the exception of Brett, who died in 1674. Gythens, Thomas Aram and John Rogers were promoted from the Common Council to make up the numbers, and a succession of wholly reliable mayors was ensured by again tampering with the seniority principle. The purge survivors, William Russell, Price, Wagstaffe and Fowler, were inserted above these three, even though they had each served one term as mayor already and should have waited until after the turn of the new men. It is notable that the new list followed the recommendations of a four-man commission of Worcester, the Lord Keeper, the Treasurer of the Household and the Archbishop of Canterbury, rather than those of Worcester himself, who would have removed only Bubb and Scudamore.²⁸

Thus Gloucester's long-cherished independence was thrown away. Her parliamentary elections thereafter were not tame, but the party heats which occurred were entirely within the context of gentry domination. The new order was exemplified as early as 1675, in a keenly contested by-election between Norwood and Cooke after the death of Massey.²⁹ Given the fact that two evenly-balanced factions were tearing each other apart and failing to rule the city properly, the logical solution was either to recall the old puritan mercantile élite, or to call in the gentry. After all, both factions were the work of a group of over-zealous gentlemen. In a way, Norwood and the other gentlemen now called in as aldermen were reaping what Herbert and his commissioners had sown in 1662–3. They were also, of course, reserving to themselves much of the power and prestige involved, most notably in terms of seats in Parliament for the borough, which had hitherto been almost wholly reserved for merchants and were henceforth almost wholly reserved for the gentry. To some extent, the conflict of 1671–2 was mere shadow-boxing, for the Crown and the gentry already had the power to emasculate Gloucester at will. The 'loyal party' won precisely because they were able to paint themselves as such. And although Fielding's group opened the hostilities, the real violators of Gloucester's traditions, integrity and independence were Henry Fowler and Sir William Morton, who ruthlessly exploited their Court contacts, promoted outsiders into the corporation, and deliberately provoked a rival group into acting in a way which must bring about their downfall.

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 27. Williams, *Parliamentary History*; S.P.16/448/79; *Commons Journals* iii 300, v 120; *C.S.P.D.*, 1659-60, 570; G.R.O., D36/A3, F18; G.B.R. B3/3, ff. 187-9, 255, 266, 282; W. Bazeley, 'Some Records of Matson . . . and of the Selwyns' *TBGAS* 2 (1877-8), 241-84.
 28. G.B.R. B3/3, f. 498; *VCH Gloucestershire*, iv 378; S.P.29/295/133-4.
 29. Robinson, 'Parliamentary Representation', 243-51 *et passim*; Brit. Lib. LR 305(a) 7(7), *The Case of Mr William Cooke*.