Kentish Politics and Public Opinion
1768 - 1832

by
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DEPOSITED THESIS
This thesis seeks to examine the increasing importance of national issues and popular consciousness in the politics of the county of Kent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Excise and Jew Bill crises indicate that public opinion and extra-parliamentary protest were by no means dormant under the early Hanoverians, but without effective leadership either at Westminster or in the provinces, without a coherent ideological basis, and without the encouragement of a well-oiled propaganda machine, reaction to national events tended to be unco-ordinated and short-lived. Not until after 1768, when men like Wilkes, Wyvill and John Reeves began to organise popular agitation, when Burke, Paine and Cartwright gave shape to conservative and radical ideas, and when better transport and the development of the press facilitated the easy diffusion of news and comment, did a new complexion come across the face of English affairs.

Clearly defined issues also appeared on the political stage and quickly cultivated a high level of public debate. Between 1768 and 1783 the Middlesex election dispute and the American War focused the attention of Kent's urban freemen and landed classes on calls for parliamentary and economical reform, and ensured that the county was in the van of those who joined Yorkshire in its campaign of lobbying and petitioning. After 1784 reform was eclipsed, first by the all-embracing struggle among the partisans of Pitt and Fox, and then by the dark menace of Jacobin and Napoleonic France, but in the context of public awareness and participation, the fall of the Coalition and the Regency crisis, together with the formation of Reevite committees, corresponding societies and the Volunteers, gave these turbulent
decades a lasting significance. The return to peace in 1815 brought fresh problems for Kentish gentlemen and labourers alike and acted as a spur to renewed agitation out-of-doors. When, however, ministers and the House of Commons proved deaf to the pleas of a distressed nation, and even went so far as to violate the much acclaimed Protestant Ascendancy, constitutional change seemed the only remaining remedy and by 1832 concerted popular enthusiasm had carried the Reform Bill over every obstacle thrown in its path.
To Sir Lewis Namier and his disciples, English politics during the middle decades of the eighteenth century could be defined and described within a very narrow compass. The party conflict of Anne's reign had, by a series of long-term social and economic trends coupled with the judicious use of patronage, been transformed into the high-summer of Walpolian and Pelhamite stability, and it was within a select company of whig ministers and office-holders that all aspects of foreign and domestic policy were drawn-up and debated. Yet, while the detailed examination of the actions and opinions of a handful of leading statesmen and their jostling bands of parliamentary retainers has added much to our understanding of the period, the Namierite approach is seriously limited by the relatively insignificant role in the governmental machine which it ascribes to the nation outside Westminster and the great country houses, and by its apparent reluctance to recognise the importance of public opinion. A survey of early-Hanoverian Kent based upon these assumptions has, for example, afforded very predictable results. Drawn from the papers of the first Duke of Dorset and other prominent whig politicians, the study reveals the traditional picture of behind-the-scenes negotiations, of widespread treating in county elections, and of a combination of ministerial, aristocratic and gentry influence in the eight borough constituencies. More recent research, and especially that undertaken on the Excise crisis of 1733 and the general election held in the following year, suggests, however, that the tranquil routine of political management could be violently shattered, and that even in the heyday of whig oligarchy the provinces might speak with a loud and irresistible voice. Only poor leadership, the absence of a permanent rallying cry, and the inadequacies of the communications and propaganda network, ham-
pered the growth and more frequent expression of popular opposition before 1768, and it is one of the principal objects of the present thesis to discover how extra-parliamentary agitation became better organised, and hence more effective, in subsequent decades.

The methodological approach to the analysis of a constantly developing public opinion is necessarily chronological, with each of the thesis' nine chapters addressing itself to the specific problems raised in the course of a well-defined period. Nevertheless, it is occasionally possible to step aside from the narrative in order to discuss particular aspects of Kentish life. Chapters 2 and 7, for instance, both seek to assess the state of the county's landed classes, while in Chapter 5 there is a brief attempt to examine the progress of industrialisation and urbanisation in the north-western hundreds. The Introduction contains a survey of the most important electoral interests in each of the constituencies and of the state of popular articulacy as they had evolved by 1768, and in Chapter 6 considerable space is devoted to the re-examination of both subjects after the passage of thirty formative years.

The period opened quietly enough in 1768 with the last of the old-style, gentry-dominated, uncontested elections, which passed off without the new Members being called upon to commit themselves beyond a general declaration of independence and good intentions. To those contented squires who allowed John Frederick Sackville and Sir Brook Bridges to walk over the course, the prospect of a change in the hallowed system of representation must have seemed idle and groundless speculation, yet such was indeed to be the case within just sixty-four years. In seeking to account for so striking an about-turn in the climate of Kentish politics, it becomes increasingly apparent that the conflagration which blazed with all-consuming ferocity after
1830 was not kindled upon a green and unresponsive pyre, and that it was not an infant public consciousness which so heartily partook of the strong meat of political controversy. Rather, the mighty and unquenchable inferno was built upon the still smouldering embers of countless smaller fires scattered across the recent decades, while Kentishmen had long since been weaned on to a rich and substantial diet of constitutional theory and polemic. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, statesmen like the elder Pitt and Charles Fox, and would-be demagogues such as Wilkes and Cartwright, began to appeal with ever mounting conviction beyond the moribund confines of Parliament to a wider and more volatile audience. As a result, Kentish freeholders and freemen acquired a degree of familiarity with the issues and practices of contemporary politics unknown since the reign of Queen Anne, and were moved on numerous occasions to participate in acts of protest on a scale and with a cohesion hardly credible in the days of Bolingbroke and Leicester House. The passing of the Reform Bill thus in many respects announced the coming-of-age of a provincial public opinion whose education had been painstakingly accomplished over the previous six decades.

The cultivation of this heightened awareness of national affairs was begun by John Wilkes, and those radicals and members of the parliamentary Opposition who saw in the Middlesex election a convenient constitutional cudgel with which to belabour the Grafton ministry. Professor Rudé and a host of biographers have greatly increased our understanding of Wilkes' character and his appeal among the inhabitants of the metropolis, but the influence of the Wilkite message in other parts of the country is less well documented. Dr. Brewer has shown that the imprisoned champion of liberty attracted expressions of support from a wide area, and much is to be learned about the prevailing
state of politics in the shires by an analysis of the reception accorded to Wilkite addresses and celebrations. In addition, it is clear that in populous boroughs like Canterbury, Maidstone, Rochester and Dover, the ideas being canvassed by the S.S.B.R. acted as a rallying point and a spur to independent interests in their bid to cast off the shackles of government and aristocratic management. By 1774, considerable progress had been made in these constituencies, and even among the freeholders of the county, the lead given by John Sawbridge and Lord Mahon had dispelled for ever the torpor of recent elections.

Investigation of the provincial dimension may also help to deepen our appreciation of the impact of the American War on English society. It is possible to discern a close link between public attitudes to the colonial struggle and the fluctuating fortunes of the domestic economy, and it is evident that in Kent a sharp depression in agricultural prices, coupled with the inflated cost of imported commodities, prompted a naturally conservative gentry to espouse the reform proposals of Christopher Wyvill. The organisation and achievements of the Yorkshire Association have received extensive attention, but the response made by other counties still remains to be fully described. The records of the Kent Committee and the correspondence of its chairman, Lord Mahon, thus go a considerable way towards filling this gap in our knowledge of the 1780-83 campaign, and illuminate the divisions and negotiations which attended the petitioning movement at both a national and a local level.

Historians have often remarked upon the demise of reform as a major political issue in the early phase of the younger Pitt's administration, and by examining the temper of electors in the provinces it is quickly possible to isolate the reason for this dramatic and perhaps unexpected occurrence. The
exploits of Wyvill and the collapse of North's government in 1782, had raised popular excitement to a new pitch of intensity and had given men an unfamiliar taste of personal involvement on the national stage. However in 1783 and 1784 this enthusiastic participation was diverted from its original object by the desperate contest which had developed between the King and the Fox-North Coalition. A spirit of party flourished in Kent throughout the 1784 parliament, and on numerous occasions M.P.s and well-known local politicians were reminded of their conduct at the time of the East India Bill and Pitt's controversial dissolution. The Westminster Scrutiny, the Irish resolutions, the Regency crisis and the proposed repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts all inspired conflict along rigid Foxite and Pittite lines, and in the epic county election of 1790, freeholders were still acrimoniously making over the injustices and misconduct of the preceding six years.

The out-break of the French Revolution brought very little diminution in Kentishmen's appetites for a share in active politics. After a lapse of thirty-four years, the county was contested in 1790, 1796, 1802 and 1806, and in the larger boroughs the electorate continued to argue the merits of rival domestic and foreign policies. Moreover, the decades of war and the Jacobin peril actually had the effect of acquainting new elements in the county community with contemporary issues and ideas. Loyalist associations and the Volunteers depended on the participation of men of all social ranks if order and property were to be preserved, while in Kent's north-western hundreds and the Medway Towns, the teachings of the London Corresponding Society and Paine's Rights of Man inspired working men to establish a network of radical clubs.

The return to peace raised many new problems for Kentishmen, but in so doing, it allowed no slackening in the ideological
momentum built up in an age of tension and constitutional debate. Agriculturists looked to protection and changes in the system of tithes and poor relief to reduce the distress of the landed interest, and there were others for whom economy and an end to unmerited pensions and sinecures appeared the logical panacea. Petitioning on all these topics became almost commonplace, and hence when Government failed to respond, public resentment in all quarters festered ominously. The parliamentary reform lobby had been steadily gathering strength since 1809, and by 1830 its ranks were swollen by the adherence of many from the traditionally conservative classes who had been angered by changes in the Corn Laws and the grant of Catholic Emancipation. Wellington's refusal to countenance any plan of reform, the example of events in France, and the destruction of property suffered in the protracted rioting of half-starved rural labourers, removed the last vestiges of hope that a tory ministry would institute the urgently needed remedies, and thus Kentishmen turned en masse to Grey and the Whigs.

At every stage in its development between 1768 and the triumphant passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, English politics had an important provincial dimension. Politicians at Westminster could not and did not act in isolation. An increasingly prosperous and sophisticated nation demanded an ever larger voice in decision-making, and as public opinion became better organised it assumed a status which ministers ignored at their peril. Consequently, the present study of the county of Kent is an attempt both to trace the evolution of a diverse community at a critical moment in its history, and to broaden our understanding of those extra-parliamentary forces which helped determine the course of national politics.
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Part One

| Chapter One: | John Wilkes and Popular Movements in the Kentish Constituencies, 1768-1774 | 26 |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chapter Two: | The American War and the Kentish Landed Classes, 1774-1780 | 59 |
| Chapter Three: | Kent and the County Association Movement, 1780-1783 | 83 |

#### Part Two

| Chapter Four: | Public Opinion and Party Politics, 1784-1790 | 114 |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Chapter Five: | Kentish Politics and the French Revolution, 1788-1802 | 156 |
| Chapter Six: | Kentish Electioneering, Public Opinion, and the Crisis of 1806-1807 | 196 |

#### Part Three

| Chapter Seven: | Kentish Society and the Problems of War and Peace, 1809-1822 | 238 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chapter Eight: | The Catholic Question and the Kent Brunswick Club, 1820-1829 | 276 |
| Chapter Nine:  | Public Opinion and the Reform Bill, 1830-1832 | 310 |
Appendix 1: Membership of the Committee of the County of Kent 350

Appendix 2: Kentish Knights of the Shire, 1768-1832 352

Appendix 3: Kentish Elections, 1768-1832 353

Bibliography 372
Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.O.</td>
<td>Archaeologia Cantiana: being the Transactions of the Kent Archaeological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.I.H.R.</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</td>
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<td>Con. Jour.</td>
<td>Journals of the House of Commons</td>
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<td>D.N.B.</td>
<td>Dictionary of National Biography</td>
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<td>Econ. Hist. Rev.</td>
<td>Economic History Review</td>
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<td>Enc. Hist. Rev.</td>
<td>English Historical Review</td>
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<td>Hist. Jour.</td>
<td>Historical Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>H.M.C.</td>
<td>Historical Manuscripts Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lords Jour.</td>
<td>Journal of the House of Lords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parl. Deb.</td>
<td>T. C. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.R.O.</td>
<td>Public Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.R.H.S.</td>
<td>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The influence of public opinion is a factor now only ignored by historians of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at their peril. Detailed research has revealed a 'rage of party' in the age of Anne, much ink has been spilled in analysing the extra-parliamentary movements of the reigns of George III and his sons, while in recent years it has become clear that even the growth of political stability was not accompanied by a total silencing of popular protest. The result has been a shift of emphasis away from the charmed circle of Westminster and the great country houses, and towards the study of ideology and attitudes in the provinces.

The county of Kent emerges from Edward Hasted's late-eighteenth-century History and Topographical Survey as a socially, economically, and geographically diverse community apparently quite unsuited to the development of a coherent political awareness. Its 1,248,000 acres encompassed the upland areas of the Weald and the North Downs, the fertile Stour and Medway valleys, the populous environs of London and the Medway Towns, and the flat expanses of Romney Marsh and the Isles of Sheppey and Thanet. Agriculture was naturally the principal source of wealth and employment, with hops, fruit, grain and livestock being produced for the metropolitan market, but there remained the last vestiges of the Medieval iron and textile industries, as well as brewing, fishing and the whole range of urban, rural, and maritime crafts. Most important of all, Hasted's gentry, while anxious to preserve their political dominance as a check against Commonwealth-style excesses, seem more preoccupied with genealogies, ancient property rights and rustic pleasures, than with the day-to-day policies

of Walpole and the Pelhams. Kentish politics under the early Hanoverians certainly did not escape the encroachment of oligarchy yet even a brief survey of the nine constituencies in the period before 1768 indicates the existence of an underlying and potentially explosive consciousness upon which Wilkes and Wyvill were later able to build.¹

Government influence was particularly strong in the Cinque Ports, four of whose number fell within Kent's borders. Dover, Sandwich, Hythe and New Romney, like their Sussex brethren, had risen to prominence on account of their proximity to the nation's continental enemies, and the Norman and Plantagenet kings' desire for security and allies. Exemption from taxation and trading privileges were a small price to pay for men, ships and safe harbours in time of war or civil commotion.² After the thirteenth century, however, the Crown's reliance on the Kentish fleet was rapidly diminished, while the operation of natural forces gradually deprived the Cinque Ports of their commerce and vitality. Romney's precious outlet to the sea was destroyed in 1281 when a tremendous storm altered the course of the Rother, long-shore currents choked the harbour at Hythe with sand and shingle³, while the sinking of a papal ship in the entrance of Sandwich's haven probably only hastened the accumulation of silt from the Stour.⁴ Desperate attempts were being made well into the nineteenth century to check or to circumvent these economic disasters⁵,

² For the boroughs in the late Middle Ages, see K. H. E. Murray, The Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports (Manchester, 1935), passim.
³ Hasted; viii. 234.
⁴ Hasted, vii. 159.
but only at Dover was lasting prosperity secured.¹ Hence there existed by the eighteenth century a group of decayed boroughs, peopled by ghosts and haunted by half-forgotten traditions, whose role in national life had long since departed. Only the increased importance of Parliament offered a temporary means of salvation, since the seats which the Cinque Ports possessed had become valuable assets for which would-be patrons and ministers were prepared to bid high.

Within the Cinque Ports, three separate interests had either to be satisfied or overwhelmed by anyone wishing to exert a dominant influence - the corporation, the general body of freemen and the neighbouring gentry. Control of the local administrative and political functions of the corporations was an essential prerequisite for the establishment of oligarchy. What the Mayors and Jurats demanded in exchange for these powers were such rewards as places, civic honours, and the possibility of advancement in the king's service. Forts, Admiralty installations, victualling yards, hospitals, and the customs-houses furnished Government with a wide range of appetising sinecures and financial allurements, while Sir Edward Dering bolstered his position at New Romney by renting out land at below market rates. The Derings were able to enjoy seventy years unchallenged supremacy at Romney because they held out to families like the Tookeys the best prospect of cutting a great figure in local affairs², and the same might be said of Sir George Oxenden at Sandwich and the Sackvilles at Hythe. A close

² For an account of the establishment of the Jerin interest at New Romney, see Namier and Brooke, i. 448-52.
acquaintance with a notable patron might be beneficial in forwarding private acts of parliament, such as those for restoring Sandwich's haven, and as a courtier and minister, the long-serving Lord Warden, the Duke of Dorset, could perhaps win favours in Cabinet and Closet. Finally, young men of Dover had before them the example of Philip Yorke who had risen to the dignity of Lord Chancellor\(^1\), and, on a slightly humbler note, of John Matson, who progressed from Town Clerk of Sandwich to Chief Justice of the Bahamas.\(^2\)

With the corporations rendered docile, the way was open for the choice of parliamentary candidates and the regulation of electorates. Early-Hanoverian England witnessed a general decline in the numbers of voters, and, in constituencies like the Cinque Ports at least, a reduction in political activity among those who remained. An increase in the cost of freedom at Sandwich from £5 to £20 between 1714 and 1773 helped to preserve the electorate at about 500, but at New Romney it fell from 50 to between 13 and 28, and, most dramatically, slumped at Dover from 350 to a mere 60 after the disfranchisement of the non-residents.\(^3\) Compared to the stagnant and moribund Cinque Port economies, government agencies offered employment and security to the freemen, and in return only required support at the poll-tables. So long as numbers remained manageable, all who so desired could be satisfactorily accommodated. However, as Dover and Sandwich were to demonstrate, as soon as populations began to grow and industries to diversify, old monopolies were sorely tested.

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1 P. C. Yorke, *The Life and correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain* (Cambridge, 1913), i. chaps. ii-v.
The principal threat to Government in the early eighteenth century was posed by those local gentlemen who could easily become rival founts of patronage or leaders of discontented minorities. The Duke of Dorset was quick to deal with the tory interest of the Botelers and Bouveries at Hythe, and at Dover places were liberally used to win over the Minets, Papillons and Fectors. Always staunch Whigs, Thomas Papillon and his sons Philip and David each held offices under Government, and sat as representatives of the borough in Parliament. Less conformable were the Oxendens of Deane Park who held one seat at Sandwich from 1715 to 1754. While a follower of Walpole, Sir George Oxenden merged his very substantial influence with that of Administration, but once in opposition after 1737 he showed his strength by capturing both seats in 1741. Thereafter, however, Oxenden stocks began to fall, and to all intents and purposes Admiralty controlled dealings from 1754 until 1790. A measure of Government's success in this vital third area of Cinque Port politics was that only at New Romney did the gentry maintain their pre-eminence. The Furneses, Fullers, Papillons and Austens regularly entered the lists, and as in 1734 wielded every financial and legal weapon available. Finally it was the Derings rather than the Treasury that made Romney a pocket borough, although fortunately Sir Edward was not unwilling to place his voters at the disposal of the King's ministers. Only in the last decades of the century did gentry groups re-emerge at Hythe and Sandwich in the cause of independence.

As Lord Warden, the Duke of Dorset was the man most closely involved in managing these many aspects of the government interest.

1 Sedgwick, i. 367-8; and F. W. Jessup, 'A New Romney Mayoral Dispute', A.C., lxii. (1950), 1-10.
Sandwich and New Romney had always stoutly resisted the Warden's claims, while in 1689 his constitutional powers were strictly defined. Under George I and George II, Dover and Hythe were, as Lord Egmont noted in about 1751, 'In the Government', but by the late 1760s questions were increasingly being asked about the extent of the Warden's personal and ministerial authority. At Hythe, Dorset had augmented local patronage, by the use of his own family and friends as candidates, and seems to have been held in high esteem. Neither Lord George Sackville nor subsequent Wardens could achieve the same fruitful blend.

Similarly at Dover, Dorset brought together all the resources of Walmer Castle and the other government departments to win some resounding victories, as in 1734. However as Lord North was to discover in 1774 and 1784, these were not lasting insurances against defeat, especially when placed in mutual opposition.

At the accession of George III, Government appeared well established at Rochester and Queenborough which Lord Egmont described as 'In the Admiralty'. A settlement had existed at Queenborough on the Isle of Sheppey since Edward III's reign, but had not been developed in succeeding centuries. By Defoe's day there remained merely 'a miserable, dirty, decayed, poor, pitiful fishing town', for in the absence of a deep-water harbour, Queenborough was better suited to oysters than to men-of-war. The poverty which Defoe observed and an electorate of sixty to eighty, made the borough a prime target for ministerial influence, and as early as Anne's reign the Boards of Admiralty and Ordnance figured strongly in elections. However, as

2 Ibid., 142.
Oldfield later noted, it was not until after 1727 that intruders were entirely excluded. The defeats of Sir Jeremy Sambrooke in the by-elections of 1728 and 1729 was followed by a decision of the Commons that the creation of new freemen should be reserved to the Mayor and Jurats alone. Thereafter, Capt. Richard Evans managed the interest with the help of subsidies and sinecures.

A French visitor to Rochester in 1697 was no more impressed with the scene than Defoe had been with the neighbouring constituency. He wrote of 'a long, straggling City, dirty and ill-built'; yet as a fellow countryman recorded with some admiration in 1725, the adjoining dockyards at Chatham had the capacity to fit out 'the greatest Fleet that ever any other power was able to keep'.

The docks, indeed, hold the key to Rochester politics, since they employed many of the 600 voters who, as Dr. Speck recalls, returned Members friendly to Government at every election in Anne's reign. Hasted has left us with a detailed picture of the constantly expanding wharfs and yards stocked with every commodity required by the navy of a leading European and colonial power. Shipwrights, clerks, labourers and half-pay officers thronged the city, and together with many tradesmen and contractors were kept under the constant eye of the resident Admiralty officials. One M.P. was traditionally an admiral, and for the first half of the eighteenth century at least, men like Ogle, Haddock and Hardy

1 T. H. B. Oldfield, An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal, of the Boroughs of Great Britain (London 1792), ii. 173.
2 Sedgwick, i. 267-8.
3 Sedgwick, ii. 18-19; Oldfield, History of the Boroughs, ii. 177-8; and E. and A. G. Porritt, The Unreformed House of Commons: parliamentary representation before 1832 (Cambridge 1903-4), i. 108.
4 J. Brenchley Rye, 'Visits to Rochester and Chatham made by Royal, Noble and Distinguished Personages, English and French, From the Year 1300 to 1788', A.C., vi. (1866), 77.
5 Ibid., 77-8.
7 Hasted, iv. 197-9.
were usually accompanied to Westminster by another ministerialist. However, as at Dover, there were signs by 1768 that a populous borough was fermenting revolt.

Lord Egmont's assessment of Maidstone was that there existed 'a perplexed interest' centred upon the noble families of Aylesford Romney, Fairfax and Darnley. All four aristocratic lines represented the borough under the early Hanoverians, but it was clear from the outset that a dominant position would only be achieved through an alliance with one of the contending parties among the urban freemen. The strongest of the peers were the Finch, Earls of Aylesford with their prestigious Hanoverian-Tory connections. A long-matured association with Kent and its county town was cemented by the first Earl in his marriage to the daughter of a local-born merchant, Sir John Banks, so that between 1726 and 1740 one of Maidstone's seats was constantly filled by a Finch. As invariable opponents of the Whig ministry, the owners of the Friars naturally gravitated towards the tory corporation, and with its support cornered both seats amidst the anti-Walpole feeling of 1741.

What prevented Maidstone from following many another eighteenth century borough along the path of oligarchy, was the existence of a sizeable popular interest among the tradesmen and dissenters of the town. Situated in the centre of a rich agricultural region, Maidstone derived much wealth from brewing and paper-milling, and carried on a flourishing commerce down the Medway to Rochester and the Thames. With prosperity came a desire to participate in borough politics, and to crown a lifetime of labour with civic honours. Such elements crystallised behind William Horsemorden Turner in his eventually triumphant campaign.

1 Newman (ed.), Leicester House Politics, 142.
to obtain a new charter which favoured the Common Council and the general body of freemen. This done, Heneage Finch found himself at the bottom of the poll in 1747 behind Robert Fairfax and the heroic Turner. By 1761 the picture had at last attained a sort of balance, although recent changes at Court conspired to confuse the allegiances of the Duke of Newcastle. The Finches now stood on the side of Bute and Administration, and benefited from whatever influence might be exerted on out-voters in the Medway docks. Rose Fuller drew his votes from the independent Whig interest, to which in the immediate future Lord Romney was to attach the energies of the Hote and its gentry adherents. Not until the crisis of the American War was this dichotomy seriously challenged.

The largest of the Kentish boroughs was Canterbury. Slumbering beneath the towering cathedral, Defoe found the city rather a museum of England's antiquity than a workshop of her industry. Without a navigable passage to the sea, and with a silk manufacture in general decline, the economy of early-eighteenth-century Canterbury depended heavily upon agriculture, and especially on the six thousand acres of nearby hop gardens. The electorate of about 1,000 was thus composed primarily of farmers and tradesmen of all descriptions.

Oldfield's assessment of Canterbury politics in 1792 may equally be applied to an earlier generation. 'This city,' he writes, 'is entirely independent in its election of members of parliament, and is neither under the influence or control of any patron or leading man.' Some small interests did of course exist. The corporation could always make its presence felt through the creation of freemen, but never assumed the importance

2 Defoe, Tour, pp. 133-5.
3 Oldfield, History of the Boroughs, ii. 155.
of its counterparts at Maidstone and in the Cinque Ports. The Hanoverian archbishops were little known in their see, and whatever assistance they might render the Court party was more than off-set by the tory sympathies of the close. The city boasted a long tradition of hospitality to persecuted religious minorities, and had thereby attracted a large and diverse dissenting community. After 1768 nonconformity marched in the van of reforming movements, and in 1761 was no doubt active in resisting the attempts of Dorset, Newcastle and Sondes to foist a 'stranger' upon the borough. All these groups, however, pale into insignificance beside the dominance exercised by the local gentry. The families of Hardres, Head, Hales, Milles, Knight Best, Oxenden and Robinson, though differing in allegiance, were the natural leaders of Canterbury's politics as of its social life, and within their manor-house oligarchy the representation was jealously guarded.

In August 1767 Lord Sondes wrote to Newcastle:

...the weight of Government, which is more considerable in this county, than any other, having so many churches, docks, hospitals, and custom houses almost in every town from Greenwich to Dover, and I believe no instance of any body losing the election, that stood upon the Government interest except in 1734 which was owing to the Excise.

But how extensive really was ministerial influence in Kent? The north-western hundreds of Bromley and Blackheath and Beckenham with their parishes of Deptford, Woolwich, Lee, Eltham and Greenwich contained numerous fashionable residential areas increasingly being preferred by courtiers and merchant contractors. Custom houses operated at Dover, Rochester, Faversham.

and Sandwich, and together with the docks and military depots of the Cinque Ports and along the Medway and Thames, provided employment for many freeholders. The Post Office was a useful means of collecting intelligence and distributing government propaganda. Hence, when a Tory challenge was feared at the 1760 county by-election, Newcastle told Lord Bessborough to 'give the usual directions, that the several post-masters in the county of Kent may know that they are to support Sir Wyndham Knatchbull's interest.' Finally there was the established Church with its 408 parishes and dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester. The electoral power of the Archbishop had long since evaporated and in no way resembled that of his brother prelate of Durham, while the Bishop of Rochester's promise of aid to Watson and Fairfax in 1754 was probably given in hope rather than expectation of great success. Parish livings and curacies were frequently in lay hands, and in such circumstances incumbents tended to share the Tory prejudices of their gentry patrons. At one election held under Anne, for example, Defoe claimed that of 318 Kentish parsons, 250 gave Tory plumpers, and the 'Church in Danger' long remained a popular refrain.

Though not overwhelming, these resources might be put to

7 Speck, Tory and Whig, p. 24.
good account by a capable manager. Kent, however, was not a county of vast estates and bands of loyal retainers and tenants around which to fashion a decisive interest. On the eve of the Civil Wars the Earl of Thanet was the sole peer of real stature, and in the early eighteenth century the Earls of Leicester, Romney, Rockingham and Westmorland all failed to achieve lasting influence. Perhaps the only aristocrat of the period to fulfil, even in part, the required managerial function was Lionel Cranfield Sackville, first Duke of Dorset. Knole near Sevenoaks was scarcely a Blenheim, a Woburn or a Chatsworth, but a prolonged tenure of household and efficient offices, together with the posts of Lord Lieutenant of Kent and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, gave Dorset a unique prominence in local affairs. He could interest himself in the careers of talented young men like Geoffrey Amherst and Sir Wyndham Knatchbull, he could make minor appointments and settle parochial disputes, and, as his correspondence on the contests of 1734 and 1754 amply illustrates, his acquaintance with Sir Thomas Hales, William Glanville, Sir Charles Farnaby and William James of Ightham kept him and his colleagues informed about the progress of the rival candidates.

The effectiveness of these powers must now be tested. Recent work on the Kent elections of 1713 and 1715 has suggested that Government might indeed determine the outcome of a poll. It appears that the great majority of those freeholders who switched their votes from Tory to Whig in 1715 came from Deptford, Gillingham, Chatham, Woolwich, Gravesend and Greenwich, and that similar shifts were only recorded at Dover, Deal, Hythe, Folkestone,

1 See infra, pp. 199-201.
3 On Dorset see D.N.B., l. 92-4.
4 Letters in Sackville MSS. U269/C148 and /C149.
Rochester and Queenborough where the ministerial writ ran no less easily. Difficulties begin to arise, however, when this evidence is compared with the comprehensive defeat suffered by the official Whigs in 1734, and the subsequent twenty-year tory monopoly of Kent's representation. It may of course be argued that the Excise election was a freak; that Lord Catherlough's defection to Opposition fatally weakened the Whigs even before the dissolution; that the absence of the Earl of Middlesex alienated many electors; and that the resulting rift between the Sackvilles and Sir George Oxenden prevented a Whig counter-attack in the next decades. These are all true, but in themselves they do not constitute a complete explanation of Walpole's celebrated reverse. Clearly other factors took a share in shaping the county's response.

In fact, it was the gentry and substantial yeoman freeholders who held the balance at election time, and resisted stoutly the allurements of Government, and patrons on the model of Sussex's Duke of Newcastle and Hampshire's Duke of Bolton. Hence, while recognising that in Kent, 'The duke of Dorset possesses the first individual interest', Oldfield was quick to acknowledge that 'the nobility and gentry are too numerous to suffer it to gain an ascendancy'. These were the well-to-do classes whom Defoe encountered in such abundance in the environs of Maidstone and Canterbury, and whose houses so constantly diverted four Cambridgeshire travellers on the fifteen mile journey from Tonbridge to Kent's county town.

1 Ibid., 565-6.
2 Oldfield, History of the Boroughs, ii. 144.
3 Defoe, Tour, pp. 132 and 135.
Land Tax commissioners, from pulpits and the hustings, and at hunt balls and the Canterbury races, they permeated every aspect of Kentish life and offered a lead which was eagerly followed. No less independent were the sturdy 'yeomen of Kent' whose pride and fair-minded determination was immortalised in literature from Chaucer to Sir Walter Scott. Defoe singled out the so-called 'grey coats' of the Weald, since they 'are so considerable, that who ever they vote for is always sure to carry it, and therefore the gentlemen are very careful to preserve their interest among them.'

In order to understand the preponderance of these groups, it is necessary to begin by examining the size of the electorate and the character of those who filled its ranks. Norma Landau has estimated that 7,990 freeholders voted in either or both the county polls of 1713 and 1715, and by 1832 the elective body was probably well in excess of 10,000. Thus on even the most conservative calculation, the Kentish total was more than double the 4,000 which Sir Lewis Namier advanced as the national average in 1760. Likewise, Kent's electorate easily out-stripped those of comparably sized counties in southern England. When set against Kent's 1,250,000 acres, it is found that Sussex and Devon with just over a million acres contained 4,000 and 5,000 voters respectively, while Devon's 1,500,000 acres could muster no more than 3,000. Many reasons might be given for this phenomenon. The 40/- freehold had been greatly devalued since the fifteenth century; much land had been released on to the market by the Tudors; and the county's proximity to London made it a popular area for the settlement of prestige-hungry merchants.

1 Defoe, Tour, pp. 131-2.
2 Landau, 'Independence, Deference and Voter participation', 564.
3 Namier, Structure of politics, p. 65.
A further contributory factor seems to have been that 'noble relique of Saxon institution, the gavel-law': by which, as Oldfield noted, lands descended to all the sons alike in equal proportions.\(^1\) The multiplication of freeholds in this way was no doubt important, although if the custom had operated unchecked since before the Conquest, its effects on the size of the electorale would surely have been much greater than they actually were by the eighteenth century. The discrepancy is explained, however, when it is remembered that Gavelkind was by no means as extensively practised in Kent as Oldfield and his contemporaries believed\(^2\), and that in the post-medieval period its provisions were widely annulled or circumvented by the gentry and yeomanry.\(^3\)

In other ways, too, Gavelkind assisted Kent's political development. During the Saxon and Norman eras, two-thirds of the county was composed of the so-called 'socage' lands where division of inherited property was required, and only the remaining third was 'allodial' land subject to knight service and primogeniture. As a result of this prevalence, the tenure helped foster the Kentishman's legendary independence. The manorial system was always weak in Kent, copyhold never became popular, and above all, the freedom from all feudal obligations granted to persons living under Gavelkind prevented the growth of a sense of deference to either King or baron. More significantly still, severe limitations were placed upon the accumulation of large estates, and their transmission intact from generation to generation. Not only does this account for Kent's

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1 Oldfield, *History of the Boroughs*, ii. 145
3 For disgavelling statutes see Hasted, i. 319-21; and for ways in which farmers by-passed the tenure R. Arnold, *A Yeoman of Kent: An Account of Richard Hayes (1725-1790) and of the Village of Cobham in which he Lived and Farmed* (London, 1949), pp.30-35.
lack of over-mighty subjects, but also for the fact that, while in 1640 the county's 800 to 1,000 gentlemen owned 1,000 of the 1,350 manors, the great majority only possessed one or two such units.\(^1\) Properties and farms thus tended to remain medium-sized, rather than to expand on a scale common in Bedfordshire, Sussex or Northamptonshire. Furthermore, since Gavelkind could still force the dismemberment of Thomas Rider's estate at Boughton Monchelsea as late as 1793\(^2\), it may suggest why Kent did not experience that movement towards oligarchy in the early eighteenth century along the lines observed elsewhere by Sir E. J. Habakkuk.\(^3\)

On the contrary, even the briefest survey of Kentish land ownership in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, shows that properties were constantly being built up, divided and sold, and that, as B. A. Holderness has found in Lincolnshire\(^4\), county society was regularly augmented by a stream of wealthy outsiders. County families, often with ancient pedigrees, like the Derings of Surrenden, the Darells of Calehill, the Tuftons, the Twysdens and the Knatchbulls, long constituted the apex of the social and political hierarchy. Beneath them, however, the world was less permanent. Kent offered an ideal residence for politicians, courtiers and officials. The Sackvilles settled at Knole under James I, and in the next century the Stanhopes came to Chevening and the Pitts to Hayes, while a place in the Elizabethan Court of Common Pleas enabled Robert Filmer to begin his estate at East Sutton.\(^5\) Merchants eager to purchase respectability were

\(^1\) Everitt, op. cit., pp. 33 and 38.
also frequently active in the land market. Among these may be mentioned Brook Bridges of Fulham, the Sandwich-born contractor, Henry Furness, James Best of the Chatham brewery, and Walpole's Suffolk friends, the Manns, who bought Linton Place near Maidstone in 1724. With their metropolitan and commercial links, the accession of such men into Kentish life represented an on-going renewal of the body politic, and did much to keep the older gentry mindful of its responsibilities.

Finally, we must consider the extent to which Kent's electorate was aware of, and responsive to, national events. Dr. A. N. Newman has concluded from a study of the county under the early Hanoverians that, 'Despite the proximity of London there were few local reflections of any of the issues disturbing Parliament'; and that 'Kent and Westminster were almost worlds and ages apart.' However, more recent research argues otherwise. In previous centuries, Kentishmen had participated fully in the hurly burly of English politics. Wat Tyler, Jack Cade and Wyatt were household names, while throughout Elizabeth's reign popular discontent simmered just beneath the surface, and occasionally erupted in riot and conspiracy. The Civil Wars and the Commonwealth had divided families and whole communities, and the issues raised had constantly spilled over into county and borough elections.

The Restoration brought a brief lull, but conflict broke out once more during the Exclusion Crisis between the newly styled

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1 Ibid., pp. 177, 163, 137. Cf. Everitt, op. cit., p. 37.
Whigs and Tories, with Kent being contested twice in 1679 before the former party triumphed in 1681.\(^1\) Reflecting on the political strife of Anne's reign, Dr. W. A. Speck has commented, '...it extended far beyond the confines of Parliament. It involved not merely the classes which provided the membership of the two Houses, but comprehended the electorate and even to some extent the unenfranchised.'\(^2\) Kent, Canterbury, Maidstone, Rochester and even the Cinque Ports regularly resorted to the polls, so that few electors could long have remained oblivious of the critical national questions.\(^3\) Of those championed by the Tories, the most potent was undoubtedly the 'Church in Danger', which came to prominence in 1709-10 with the sermon and trial of that high-Anglican zealot, Dr. Henry Sacheverell. Though his progress did not lead him through Kent, the public response was still vividly remembered in 1733.\(^4\) He inspired a wave of religious fervour sufficient to sweep Harley and St. John into office, and to bring their party electoral victories in 1710 and 1713.\(^5\) Finally, as has been seen, 1715 saw the Whigs once more at the helm; yet a tory rout was by no means inevitable at the dissolution. In the larger constituencies, at least, voters were probably moved as much by the 'Succession in Danger' and all that a Stuart restoration might imply for Church and Constitution, as by a desire to make a speedy peace with the new regime.\(^6\) After all, the pendulum had swung so often since the Revolution that few could have predicted the future with any certainty.

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2 Speck, *Tory and Whig*, p. 3.
That the opening decade of Whig rule, 'Bubble' and all, passed off relatively untroubled, was due more to the absence of a suitable issue upon which to focus popular hostility, than to the electorate having been secretly slipped some subtle Hanoverian opiate. By the 1730's, however, the Jacobite menace had receded enough to permit Bolingbroke's new non-party Country Opposition to take the offensive. The story of Walpole's ill-starred Excise scheme has been related elsewhere, and emphasises just how violently the country could still react. Sir Edward Dering was unopposed at a Kent by-election early in 1733 when he declared his aversion to the hated measure, while Rochester and Canterbury were among a group of towns to instruct their M.P.s against the proposals, in a campaign which has recently been described as 'among the most massive demonstrations of extra-parliamentary opposition in the entire century'. Though generally favourable to Government, the Kentish Post carried reports of instructions from Norwich, Reading and Leicester, and of the decision of London tobacconists to act with the committee of 'Citizens, Merchants, and Traders' against Walpole. Having survived his first ordeal in Parliament, the chief minister then watched helplessly as fellow Whigs were ejected from their seats. Canterbury removed its disobedient Member, Sir Thomas Hales, while in the county Oxenden and the Earl of Middlesex succumbed to Dering and Lord Vane. What is most striking about the result in Kent is the manner in which the country districts

2 Langford, The Excise Crisis, p. 69.
3 Ibid., App. A. and p. 47.
4 The Kentish Post, or Canterbury News Letter, 6-10 Jan. 1732/33.
seem to have tipped the scales on the side of Opposition. As in 1715, Chatham, Dover, Deptford and most other urban centres rallied to the ministerial cause; but in 1734 their influence was pushed aside by a combination of gentlemen and freeholders who feared a 'general Excise' and were thoroughly dissatisfied with the conduct of Walpole and his crew.\(^1\) When roused to battle, as in 1640 and 1710, these were the troops who dictated the course of Kentish politics, and until the defeat of Sir Edward Dering in 1754 their renown deterred all challengers.

Only with the improvement of the rural economy and the careful management of the Pelhams, was this 'country' wrath sufficiently assuaged to permit the election of ministerialists like Watson, Fairfax, Knatchbull and even a Sackville. Yet the mid-century calm was more a truce than a pax Britannica, and was frequently breached. Anti-catholic feeling and suspicion of the Bourbons, coupled with furious propaganda in the press and on the stage, compelled Walpole to declare war on Spain in 1739\(^2\), and it has been remarked that his colleague Newcastle 'feared unpopularity at home even more than he feared the enemy abroad'.\(^3\) Two years later, unhappiness with war strategy embroiled ministers in fresh troubles, and probably accounts for Oxenden's victory at Sandwich, Lord Aylesford's sweeping gains at Maidstone, and Thomas Best's defeat of the unlucky Hales at Canterbury.\(^4\) The Great Man par excellence was finally toppled in 1742\(^5\), but for his successors there was no respite. A public

\(^1\) Langford, The Excise Crisis, p. 170.
\(^4\) Foord, op. cit., pp. 201-4.
outcry greeted Henry Pelham's Jew Bill in 1753 and with an election impending, caution counselled its repeal. ¹ Jenny's loss of Minorca prompted an hiatus at Court in which flurries of addresses and gold boxes first ousted the ineffective Newcastle in November 1756, and then in the new year launched Pitt upon his empire-building career.² Sensitive national issues also continued to inflame the passions of the 'inferior sort'.³ The metropolitan anti-Irish disturbances of 1736 and the Porteous riots which erupted in Edinburgh a year later, were followed in 1752 by widespread protest at changes in the calendar, and then, in 1757, by active resistance to the re-organisation of the militia. Finally, like so many before him, Lord Bute fell foul of the City and the London mob, and as a Scot and a favourite, no less than the originator of the Cider Tax, incurred the lasting hatred of the provinces.⁴ Thus when in 1768 a Dover crowd hurled execrations in the wake of the departing evil-genius⁵, the message was unmistakably that Kentishmen had not slumbered through the decades of Whig oligarchy, and that when national leaders and issues again emerged, the clarior would not sound in vain.

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⁵ Ibid., 6.
Part One
Chapter One
John Wilkes and Popular Movements in the Kentish Constituencies, 1768 - 1774

In 1768, Kentish as well as national politics stood upon the threshold of a transition, which, after sixty-four years, was to culminate in the passing of the Great Reform Bill. To contemporaries, the prospect of immediate change must have seemed remote indeed, for, while public opinion and extra-parliamentary agitation had unmistakably revealed their potentialities long before the accession of George III, the tranquillity of the election presided over by the Duke of Grafton bore witness to the judicious management employed by the Pelhams and their successors since the fall of Walpole in 1742. No major issues existed to arouse the passions and prejudices of the electorate, and Opposition groups lacked both the resources and the inclination to mount a countrywide appeal. In short, as John Brooke has rightly observed, '...elections had little to do with politics, and almost nothing with party'. Yet, if the path to reform appeared uncertain, men were not wanting to point the way. Foremost among these was John Wilkes, and it is with the response which he and his Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights elicited, that this opening chapter will be concerned.

Part of the explanation for the success enjoyed by the Wilkites was their ability to fill the vacuum created by the late 1760's as a result of a crisis of political ideas and leadership. Throughout the early Hanoverian period it had proved impossible to harness for day-to-day purposes those popular forces before whose roar Walpole, Pelham and Newcastle had been compelled to bow the knee. Pulteney, Carteret and Bolingbroke might agree a marriage of convenience, but the union inspired scant confidence either within or outside the world of Westminster, and an acri-

monious separation always seemed likely. Too often the Country Party was divided on policy, and at the critical moment its principal adherents showed themselves more interested in the spoils of office than the nation's wellbeing. Hence no concerted platform could ever be advanced at election-time to rally provincial support along 1734 lines.¹ As the county of Algernon Sidney, Kent boasted a distinguished 'commonwealth' tradition, which was continued in 1747 and 1751 when Sir Francis Dashwood and Philip, second Earl Stanhope publicly associated themselves with the campaign to restore the Constitution to its 1689 splendour.² The place bills, shorter parliaments and militia schemes of the 'real' or 'true' Whigs were undoubtedly attractive to an independent-minded gentry whose every sinew mistrusted the 'Cabals of designing ministers'; yet their chief advocates were never practical politicians, and even in their heyday only tentative efforts were made to cultivate a wide following.

As to the tory interest which had monopolised the Kent county representation in the twenty years after the Excise crisis, a writer in the Kentish Gazette in 1774 described it as 'a race of beings who have not existed for many years, among the Protestant people of this kingdom'.³ In 1698 Sir Thomas Twisden had been prepared to cross the Channel to salute the exiled Stuart, and a Jacobite party probably lingered on to watch with sympathy the plans of Bishop Atterbury of Rochester. However the post-1714 proscription led inevitably to the fragmentation of Robert

³ Kentish Gazette, 1-5 Oct. 1774.
Harley's triumphant corps. Some, like Sir Edward Knatchbull, defected to Walpole, while the members of the so-called 'Loyal Brotherhood' were no less eager for a return to power. On the other hand, those, such as the Canterbury M.P. Thomas May and Sir Edward Dering, who subscribed to the Harley Board after 1727, preferred to stand aloof from factious disputings. In Kent, toryism posed an election threat in 1754 and 1760, but a shrewd observer like Sir George Oxenden recognised it as a spent force. Old alignments were shifting rapidly. George III and Lord Bute opened up offices to men of talent, irrespective of party, and to gentlemen for whom anti-ministerial suspicion was a creed in itself, Rockingham or Chatham offered more hope of fruitful opposition than the moribund practices of the Cocoa Tree. At Maidstone, for example, the Earl of Aylesford went over to the Court, but his fellow Tory neighbour, Lord Romney, pinned his desire for future influence on a non-government stance.

The atmosphere of stagnation and dislocation which pervaded Kentish politics in the 1760's was heightened by the absence of local leaders. Sir Lewis Namier has demonstrated how the first decade of George III's reign was transformed by the death of almost all of the men who had wielded any power under the old regime. The same process was at work in Kent. The Earl of Westmorland died in 1761 and was followed to the grave in 1765 by his old sparring partner the first Duke of Dorset. Neither

2 Ibid., App. 1B. p. 95.
were their respective successors any more effective than were Bute, Rockingham or Grafton on the national stage. Dashwood, who as Baron Le Despencer inherited Hereworth Castle from his uncle, had deserted his 'independency' to serve as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was thus clearly not the man to resurrect the old Fane interest. Similarly, the second and third Dukes of Dorset were much too wayward in their tastes and habits to be entrusted with the manipulation of government influence in the county or the Cinque Ports. The eclipse of once prominent gentry families was equally significant. The Derings transferred their attention to the calmer waters of Ken Romney, the Twysdens and Twisdens were under a financial cloud, and the death of Sir Wyndham Knatchbull in 1763 saw the Heresham baronetcy descend to a relative long resident in Ireland. At a time of acute uncertainty, the disappearance of the most prestigious names in Kentish politics since the Restoration only added to the confusion of the squirearchy.

As a result of these factors, the Kent election of 1768 was typical of the mid-eighteenth-century model so majestically depicted by Namier. No great issue was at stake; the American problem had not yet fully erupted, and the reduction of the Land Tax in 1757 removed a potential source of discontent among the landed classes. Ministers were therefore content, for the last time, to permit the Septennial Act to take its course.\(^1\) The candidates nominated at the county meeting in October 1767 were Sir Brook Bridges, a sitting Member, and John Frederick Sackville, the nephew and heir of the second Duke of Dorset. Neither man ventured beyond the safe platitudes of contemporary election

and such opposition as did arise sprang from purely personal motives. The unpopularity which had dogged the whole connection since the days of the Excise, probably accounts for the stirrings against his nephew noted by Lord George Sackville. 2 For a while Lord Romney was encouraged in his ambitions to see a Marsham as Knight of the Shire, and only withdrew to consolidate his claims at Maidstone. 3 Later on, a plan was hatched to put up Robert Fairfax for his old seat 4, but Namier's 'Parliamentary beggar' was not to be tempted back. 5 Nevertheless, Sackville had influential friends. He was related to the Duke of Bedford, and as well as receiving government assistance, enjoyed the support of Newcastle. 6 No contest materialised, and the peace of the county was preserved. Not until 1790 would Penenden Heath once more ring with the clamour of warring parties, but long before that date freeholders were given the opportunity to speak out.

The juggernaut of popular participation was given its initial impetus by John Wilkes. His case is well known and need only be briefly repeated. Having languished in exile on the Continent and piled up debts, the villain of the North Briton and the Essay on Woman returned home an outlaw in 1768 and was elected for Middlesex. Having surrendered himself to justice, Wilkes was repeatedly expelled from the Commons, and as often sent back by his constituents, until finally an exasperated House seated in his place Henry Luttrell. The radicals seized their chance, and with the Whig factions shouting from the wings, the Wilkite drama was begun.

1 For example, the return of thanks in Kentish Post, or Canterbury News Letter, 30 Mar. - 2 Apr. 1768.
2 HMC Stopford-Sackville, i. 124: Lord G. Sackville to Gen. Irvin, 4 Oct. 1767.
3 Namier and Brooke, iii. 112.
5 Namier, Structure of Politics, pp. 409-17.
6 HMC Dartmouth, i. 332-3: Mr. Barton Smythe to Dartmouth, 27 Aug. 1767.
What precisely was the Wilkite legacy, especially as it affected provincial politics? In the first place, although none of his ideas were original, he was able to use the legal and constitutional implications of his own struggle to emphasise its necessity and to popularise it among a new audience. As has been seen, 'Country' remedies had never achieved a wide circulation in Kent, yet the continued strength of independent feeling despite the waning of toryism promised an eager reception in some circles at least. Wilkes benefited too, from the debate which had been carried on in journals like the Monitor since the mid-1750's about the independence of M.P.s and the need to encourage public interest in parliamentary affairs, and by his advocacy of place bills, triennial or annual elections, and an extension of the franchise, profited from mounting fears of the influence of the Crown. Never had this latter phenomenon appeared more dangerous than in the months of the Middlesex elections and the massacre of St. George's Fields. As one newspaper correspondent warned: 'We have seen influence exerted and the dependents of G------t hiring armed ruffians to overturn the foundation of the constitution, the freedom of election, and to abuse, in the most outrageous manner, the peace officers and harmless freeholders peaceably gathered together to give their votes for a representative.'

'Wilkes and Liberty' was all things to all men, because, for better or for worse, it caught up every strand in recent political thought and united them in a single refrain.

In part, Wilkes began a ferment in the sluggish waters of local politics as he and his supporters were shrewd enough to

2 Kentish Gazette, 1-4 Feb. 1769.
dispense their new wine in familiar old bottles. In 1774 it was observed that the attributes of a decayed system were that '...all parties and especially their leaders and principals are alike'; that '...all without exception have their Price'; and that as a result, 'It is no matter what or whom you oppose or vote for', since the question was only really 'what knave or corrupter of the constitution you would wish to see your representative'. Although of course a gross exaggeration, there was sufficient substance in the remark to cause alarm. Without issues or parties to guide them, how could electors make a wise decision? One answer employed by the Wilkites was to revive the rhetoric of a former age. John Sawbridge, for instance, declared at a Kent county meeting in August 1774 that 'there are two sets of political principles in this country - Whiggism and Toryism'; and proceeded to define the former as 'a love of civil and religious liberty, and an attachment to equal and legal government'; and the latter as, 'intolerance with respect to religion, passive obedience and non-resistance with respect to civil government, principles the most favourable to despotism'. This was the language of Locke and Sacheverell, but it served its purpose in distinguishing between the hosts of candidates. In addition, the constant harping on the theme of 1689 and its virtues was crucial if present-day abuses were to be highlighted. The strategy was not slow to bear fruit, and in 1774 a perplexed correspondent in the Kentish Gazette was anxious that aspiring politicians should more closely define their commitment to 'revolution principles'.

More novel was the Wilkites' introduction of election pledges.

The need for some form of check on the conduct of ...P.s was

1 Canterbury Journal, 1-8 Nov. 1774.
2 Canterbury Journal, 16-23 Aug. 1774.
3 Kentish Gazette, 1-5 Oct. 1774.
discussed at length in the press.

It is without dispute a very great share of power, that we the freeholders of a county, and others the freemen of boroughs of this kingdom, delegate to those whom we depute to represent us in the great council of the nation. At the time we elect our members to assist in their own, and our name in the management of the great and important affairs of the nation, we make a kind of deposit in their hands of all our most precious rights and privileges, and in a great measure it is in their power for a certain time to betray or defend the invaluable pledges with which we have entrusted them. Our power, or at least the semblance of power, we reserve in ourselves - the power of instructing our deputies from time to time, in what manner according to our apprehension, they may most advantageously consult the true interests and good of their country."

As will be seen later, the subject of pledges caused great controversy in 1774, but in the longer term it was to give voters a far wider scope for enquiry and active participation.

In the past, organised opposition and movements for reform had been hampered by poor leadership and inadequate means of propaganda. - in both these areas the Wilkites made a positive contribution. In place of the deceased old-guard, the years 1768 to 1774 saw the emergence of John Galcraft, William Gordon, John Sawbridge, John Trevanion and Lord Mahon as central figures in county and borough affairs. Of these, undoubtedly the most influential was Charles, Viscount Mahon, afterwards third Earl Stanhope. Born into the Pitt-Stanhope-Grenville connection, he spent much of his youth in Geneva, where, as well as absorbing many of the moral and egalitarian tenets of the city of Calvin and Rousseau, he met and talked with John Wilkes, and then returned to England to contest Westminster as his avowed disciple in 1774. Though never a Kentish M.P., Mahon was at the heart of the county's politics for the next decade, and never lost the

1 Kentish Gazette, 15-18 Feb. 1769.
burning zeal of his Wilkite apprenticeship.

Professor Thomas has shown how the freedom of the press, and especially its ability to report the proceedings of parliament, developed hand-in-glove with the Middlesex election dispute and its aftermath.¹ Wilkes’ carefully-laid plot which saw Oliver and Crosby incarcerated in the Tower in 1771, secured to the public a new insight into the workings of government. The newly founded Kentish Gazette and Kentish Weekly Post/Canterbury Journal quickly responded to the opportunities thereby opened up, and together with Court and metropolitan news, printed accounts of debates.² That their readers were impressed with a re-envigorated awareness of their political responsibilities is revealed in the size and high quality of the correspondence columns, and throughout the next half century, the press, more than any other influence, was to stimulate the growth of public opinion.

Finally, if Wilkes helped engineer a deepening consciousness of national and local politics, he was also remarkable as the object of an unparalleled nationwide appeal, which sought to unite hitherto unconnected communities in a campaign of addresses on a single issue of current concern. Until recently, historians have too often neglected this aspect of the Wilkite programme, and only with the publication of Dr. Brewer’s enlightening study has the omission been partially rectified.³ Dangers of over-interpreting the evidence there are here in plenty, yet as the remainder of this chapter will endeavour to argue, Wilkite ideas should be regarded as having been vital to the political life of the

² On press see infra, pp. 217-19.
³ J. Brewer, Party Ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 171-8; and map on p. 175.
provinces as well as to that of the metropolis and St. Stephen's Chapel.

II

The Kent by-election of February 1769 again demonstrates the gentry's disinclination towards the heat of active politics. Sir John Shaw bluntly refused to oppose Sir Charles Farnaby as he feared 'an interruption of the peace of the County'; his fellows acquiesced, and settled the matter without further ado. However the press was already alive with the exploits of John Wilkes, and as the year progressed, counties and boroughs came under increasing pressure to address the King for relief and the speedy dissolution of the offending Parliament. As might be expected, there was considerable resistance in Kent among its leading inhabitants. Nevertheless on 27 November 1769 a meeting was requisitioned at Maidstone.

Writing in the *Kentish Gazette*, 'A Friend to Truth' related how the business of the day was opened by John Calcraft, who, in proposing an address, stressed the absolute necessity of obtaining a fresh Parliament. The eye-witness account then continued:

...this motion was backed and agreed by Mr. Sawbridge and Mr. Gordon, and by a show of hands was declared by the Chairman to be carried in favour of the petition, tho' it is believed by many of the Freeholders present that if the Chairman had permitted a poll to have been taken, that the majority of them would have been found to have been against it... but this was refused and a petition was produced and read, and by a show of hands was declared to be approved of.

Signatures were then collected, and on 18 April 1770 Calcraft presented the address to George III. However the testimony of contemporaries makes it plain that he did not do so with the unanimous approbation of his brother electors.

3 *Annual Register*, xiii. 90.
From what quarter did the opposition spring, and on what grounds was it sustained? Alexander Wedderburn told Rockingham: 'The Kent petition takes very much amongst the freeholders but not amongst the gentlemen'; while Calcraft himself informed the Earl of Chatham:

In spite of every desertion of gentlemen except Mr. Sawbridge, Mr. Gordon and myself, we have carried our petition with great spirit. The spirit of the freeholders is equal to your Lordship's expectation. There were at least 400 freeholders & they are signing away; hitherto every gentleman has kept back. But those who profess themselves friends to the Constitution must stir to get it sign'd.

The analysis undertaken by Professor Rude tends only to confirm the impression of a split along social lines. Not a single knight or baronet signed the address, neither did any clergyman or M.P., and only ten justices felt able to affix their names. Furthermore, the appearance of 168 marks strongly suggests that in order to justify their protest the Wilkites canvassed those Kentishmen who, had general opinion been more favourable, might well have been passed over.

Many gentlemen chose to register their protest by simply absenting themselves from Maidstone on 27 November. Their motives were mixed, but it does not seem from the newspaper reports that any attempt was made to argue a case on the basis of late constitutional and political events. While deploring the demand for a dissolution, Sir Thomas rider for one, did not feel compelled to elaborate his views. Admittedly the address had been carefully drafted, with Chatham's assistance, so as to disarm many of its likely critics, yet the gentry's silence is another

4 Ibid., pp. 142-3.
5 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Dec. 1769.
6 For address see *H.C. H.C. 55.3/2* and *Kentish Post and Canterbury Journal*, 5 Dec. 1769.
illustration of the low level of debate which still existed in provincial politics. Furthermore, the squires of Kent were far more concerned to retain their long-established dominace of county affairs, than to deliberate upon the niceties of the royal prerogative and the freedom of election; and in 1769 this precious asset was under challenge from outside and within. 'Lord Romney', noted Calcraft, 'is against my petition to the King about parliament, and does not choose a fresh election at Maidstone'.\(^1\) Others, like Sir John Filmer, objected 'that matters of such importance, as the Chairman opened in his speech, ought not to be determined by so inconsiderable a part of the Freeholders as were then present'.\(^2\) 'A Freeholder' estimated the crowd at a mere 270\(^3\), Calcraft spoke of 400, and the Annual Register believed the motion had been passed by 700 to 7.\(^4\) Whatever the exact figure, and it was clearly not large, the understandable fear was that Kent's independence would be surrendered to the selfish interests of Chatham, Rockingham or some popular demagogue.

In addition, the Kentish gentry had no desire to unleash the social anarchy which had beset their ancestors during the Interregnum. W. J. Shelton has shown how Kent had escaped rural disorders in the 1760's because the magistrates had acted to safeguard food supplies, and, by enforcing the display of prices had prevented attacks on middle-men suspected of profiteering.\(^5\) Having reaped the benefits of their paternalism, the county's ruling classes glimpsed in Wilkes the prospect of their neighbours and tenants imbibing the doctrines of metropolitan radicalism.

2 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Dec. 1769.
3 Kentish Gazette, 28 Nov. - 2 Dec. 1769.
4 Annual Register, xii. 156.
One reader of the Kentish Gazette was prompted early in 1763 to wonder whether all the religious persecutions of history could have 'engendered more discord, rancour and malice, than that Enthusiasm which is often inspired by the popular cry of liberty'; and counselled: 'We ought to distinguish between these illustrious defenders of liberty, and the designing miscreant who prostitutes that sacred name ... to sow dissension in the state, who takes all occasions of spreading sedition among the people, of alienating affection from government and of endeavouring to overturn the constitution of his country, while he is employing all the wiles of sophistry in pretending to support it.'

Incidents such as the circulation of an 'incendiary paper' near Tenterden in 1768, which had called on the 'poor people' to assemble in a 'mob' in order 'to force the farmers to sell their wheat to the millers or poor people at 10l. a load', thus assumed chilling proportions when Wilkes was raising the coal-heavers and watermen of London to tumult.

But if the gentry of Kent were hostile to Wilkes almost to a man, 2,825 of the lesser freeholders were not. 'The freeholders about Dartford grow more inclined', wrote Galcraft just before the Maidstone meeting, and it was to their kind that Wilkes' case made its appeal. Far from constituting the rabble, these were the substantial, property-owning counterparts of the Middlesex electors. Wilkes crystallised their fast emerging political aspirations, and was depicted as the champion of individual liberty struggling against an increasingly oppressive state. Perhaps for the first time since Anne's reign, a charismatic national figure had presented the Englishman's birthright in an attractive

1 Kentish Gazette, 21-25 Jan. 1769.
2 Catalogue of Home Office papers of the reign of George III 1760-1775, preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office (London, 1878-99), i. 342: Shelburne to the Secretary of War, 25 May 1768.
and coherent manner, which plucked at some inherited chord of decency and fair play, of equality before the law, and of representative government. The discussion at Maidstone, in the press, and in countless taverns, shops and work-places helped broaden men's vision of politics beyond the parish, and in addition began the demolition of mid-century inertia within the county. The voting of an address, however limited, ushered in a new era of direct protest, and in the decades before 1832, petitioning was to be resorted to with ever greater regularity.

III

When turning to the Kentish boroughs, a similar picture of popular agitation set against a backdrop of steady resistance on the part of well-entrenched interests is discernible. At New Romney, Queenborough and Sandwich, the patronage of the Derings, the Ordnance and the Admiralty remained strong enough in the period 1768-1774 either to discourage opposition altogether, or to ensure the easy ejection of unwelcome Members like Sir Piercy Brett and Viscount Conyngham. In the larger constituencies, however, groups may be isolated among the freemen that were likely to respond enthusiastically to the radical message. Thus for Dover, Rochester, and to some extent Canterbury and Maidstone, the importance of Wilkes lay in his ability to breathe new vigour and purpose into local campaigns against ministerial and private influence.

Before going on to examine Kent's more populous boroughs, something must be said of Hythe, since it well illustrates the difficulties facing politicians of liberal views in an essentially rural community. Under the early Hanoverians, the borough generally followed the wishes of the Duke of Dorset, who had, as Lord George Sackville asserted in 1763, 'always been indulged by the Lords of the Treasury in having his recommendations accepted of, for the
few offices in that port. The old warden's death left his family and the new master of Walmer Castle to dispute over the true source of his long supremacy. The Sackvilles were eager to retain Dorset's powers of nomination, whereas to Lord Holderness, Government rather than Knole was the principal object of Hythe's devotion. Hence, while William Amherst was chosen as a compromise candidate at the 1766 by-election, it was certain that a trial of strength would take place at the next dissolution.

Even before this date, the two parties had become entangled in the confused vortex of municipal affairs. Having carried the keenly contested mayoral election of 1767, Lord George Sackville commented significantly on his opponents' tactics:

Threats, promises, and money were used in their full extent. The contest was not fair, as I could pretend to have neither the means of rewarding or punishing and had nothing to set against present interest and future expectation but personal attachments or gratitude for past favour.

Government's warning that office holders would be dismissed if they voted for the opposition had temporarily alienated 'moderate people', but having learned his lesson, Holderness undoubtedly held most of the trump cards. No one could hope to live by loyalty alone in a borough the size of Hythe, and this applied equally to the Sackvilles and to a Wilkite. William Evelyn, the new ministerial nominee, had quickly deserted the interest which had so often returned his father, and in an age where place and honours took precedence over party and ideology, Chase Price was able to report that both seats might be captured.

2 HMC Stopford-Sackville, i. 67-8: Dorset to Grafton, nd. 1767.
3 HMC Stopford-Sackville, i. 68: Grafton to Dorset, 32 Jan. 1767; and ibid., i. 118: Lord G. Sackville to Gen. Irvin, 13 Feb. 1767.
4 HMC Stopford-Sackville, i. 118: Lord G. Sackville to Gen. Irvin, 13 Feb. 1767.
5 Namier and Brooke, i. 448: Chase Price to Grafton, nd. 1767.
Price believed that 'the independent votes are in opposition to Lord George'; and from the correspondence which has survived, it is clear that men such as William Deedes, Sir John Lilmer and Mr. Brockman were willing to support the Lord Warden in order to defeat the would-be patron.¹ As to who should partner Evelyn in this great work, Lord Holderness told Thomas Best in January 1767: 'I thought it right to advise Col. Amherst not to think of offering his services there at the next General Election, as he would have been under the painful dilemma of being lukewarm in support of an Administration that favours him, or of opposing the Interest of a Family to which he has personal Obligations'.² Sir John Lilmer, Mr. Rofey, Sir Edward Knatchbull and Mr. Hatton were all spoken of as possible replacements, but at length the choice fell upon John Sawbridge of Chantish near Wye, and together the pair triumphed over Sackville and Sir Charles Farnaby in 1768. However, it was not long before Holderness realised that in striving to swat an irritating fly, he had placed a poisonous scorpion in the very bosom of the state.

With property in Middlesex and links with the South Sea Company, Sawbridge, like his sister, Catherine Macaulay, was inspired by Wilkes. He spoke and acted on Wilkes' behalf in Parliament and the metropolis, and as has been seen, was among the originators of the Kentish address. He was a prominent member of the S.S.B.I., and with Richard Oliver worked hard to establish radical ideas as a permanent element in national policies. In 1774 he stood for the City pledged to the full Wilkite creed, and, as we shall see, preached upon the same text at the Kent county meeting.³

¹ J. Y. Wilks, The Barons of the Cinque Ports and the Parliamentary Representation of Hythe (Folkestone, 1892), pp. 102-4; Deedes to Evelyn, 5 Dec. 1766; ibid., pp. 102-3; Deedes to Thomas Best, 14 Dec. 1766; and ibid., p. 112-4; Lord Holderness to Deedes, 28 Jan. 1767.
² Wilks, op. cit., p. 106; Lord Holderness to Thomas Best, 17 Jan. 1767.
³ See infra, pp. 55-7.
However, when he simultaneously renewed his candidature at Hythe, Sawbridge discovered that the gentlemen of the Common Council were not disposed to entertain such doctrines, and was pushed to the foot of the poll.¹

The moral of the episode was plain enough. As Oldfield commented twenty years and two further defeats later: '...while the representation remains in its present debilitated form, such exertions, though they might succeed on a single occasion, can neither give permanency nor security to the freedom of election'.² Like the Sackvilles, Sawbridge possessed no patronage with which to reward faithful allies, and could hold out no prospect of advancement in local society. Anxious to rid themselves of aristocratic influence, gentry politicians bred in the old school nevertheless continued to look to the Warden, rather than to a reformer, for a lead.³ And even when the limitations of that ancient office were finally revealed under Lord North, it was none other than William Evelyn who built up his own interest on classic eighteenth-century principles of independence.

The constraints placed upon the Wilkites in a small and introspective borough were not so apparent at Maidstone and Canterbury, where significant numbers of urban tradesmen and dissenters increasingly rivalled the neighbouring farmers and gentlemen for municipal supremacy. Local issues retained their pre-eminence of former decades, but there are at least signs that within Kent's widest electorates the 'Wilkes and Liberty' campaign did not pass unheeded. Possessing little industry, Canterbury's thousand-strong elective body included many agricultural-based craftsmen - millers, maltsters, blacksmiths and the like -

¹ On Sawbridge see Namier and Brooke, iii. 409-10; and _..._ , i. 379-90.
² T. H. B. Oldfield, An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal, of the Boroughs of Great Britain (London, 1774), iii. 65.
together with the usual mixture of coopers, carpenters, shoemakers, barbers, bakers, goldsmiths, apothecaries and cordwainers. The poll-books do however record sizeable groups of labourers and weavers, as well as numerous Surrey, Middlesex, Essex, Westminster and City non-residents, and these frequently proved fertile pasture for the radical seed. A survey of Maidstone made under Elizabeth I revealed the existence of 294 houses, four landing places on the river, five ships and twenty-two men 'wholly occupied in the trade of merchandise'.¹ Subsequently, the borough's position at the heart of the Weald and its ease of communication with the Medway Towns and the Thames, had attracted a rich diversity of trades and manufactures. A potential electorate of 865 in 1768 contained men from all over Kent and the metropolis, while among the residents were numbers of those inn-keepers, paper-millers, brewers and riverside workers who were to form a zealous Jacobin cell after 1792.²

By the late eighteenth century, Hasted could write of Maidstone: 'the houses are now computed to be in number fifteen hundred, and the population of it is said to have increased at this time, to upwards of six thousand inhabitants, near one half of which are non-conformists to the established church, both Presbyterians and Anabaptists, both of whom have their respective meeting houses of worship in the town'.³ Similarly, Hasted noted in his description of Canterbury: 'There are in this city and its suburbs general meeting houses for religious worship for the inhabitants, who are of different persuasions; such as those of the Methodists, Anabaptists, Quakers, and Presbyterians, of all which, the followers, of the first especially, are not a few'.⁴

¹ Hasted, iv. 263.
² See infra, pp. 137-9 and 281-2.
³ Hasted, iv. 263.
⁴ Hasted, xi. 102.
Clearly the attitude of dissent was not a factor to be ignored in borough or county politics.

Many European Protestants had fled across the Channel to escape the persecutions of Alva and Louis XIV, and found refuge and new prosperity in the towns of Kent and the Weald. Their influence gave an added radical twist to the domestic tumult under the early Stuarts and the Commonwealth, and after 1660 percolated extensively through Kent's lower and mercantile classes, as families like the Papillons, Minets and Nouailles set an example of what might be accomplished. Worldly success and allegiance to the Whigs as the guardians of the Revolution Settlement, somewhat drew the fangs of nonconformity after 1715, but with the accession of George III, Hasted felt compelled to lament that at Maidstone: 'dissension in matters of religion unhappily extends to politics, and from the heat of parties, destroys much of that social intercourse and harmony which would otherwise unite the inhabitants of this flourishing town'.

Dissenters, and particularly those with some continental antecedence, brought to the radical cause a passionate concern for liberty. They were no strangers to political agitation for specific ends, and congregations like those of the Kentish Baptists had a long tradition of association for mutual strengthening. Most militant of all were the Unitarians, whose identity and principles were being rapidly shaped by the progress of the evangelical revival. Maidstone's Baptists split over the Trinity in the 1740's, and secessions from Presbyterian chapels were common. For the rump which espoused the more rational tenets, Price and Priestley, along with Blackburne, Lindsey and the Anglican converts, elaborated a revised catechism which plunged

1 Hasted, iv. 263.
2 F. Buffard, Kent and Sussex Baptist Associations (Faverham, 1963), passim.
them deep into the political controversies of the American and French wars.¹

Tradesmen and dissenters had spearheaded the campaign for Maidstone's reformed charter in the 1740's and had been rewarded with the partial crumbling of Lord Aylesford's monopoly. The battle between the interests was not yet over, however, and this probably explains why the popular party did not emerge as a separate entity in the borough until after 1780. Nevertheless the bone-of-contention between the Friars and the Hote, the Corporation and the freemen at large, was undoubtedly the freedom of election, and as such ran with the current of the times. Lord Romney scored a great victory for the independent party in 1768 when he had his son, Charles Harsham, returned top of the poll, and in 1774 was instrumental in the election of Sir Horace Mann.² For the Earl of Aylesford, on the other hand, the choice of suitable candidates was no easy matter, since, as an aspiring courtier, it was not certain with which faction the future lay. Hence in 1768, on the recommendation of Rockingham, he put up Robert Gregory³, and only dismissed him six years later when Lord North had risen unmistakably to the top of the pile.⁴ Yet even this rather surprising selection of a whig ex-nabob and Kentish landowner may reflect a desire to curry favour among Maidstone's merchants and gentry, and his rejection did not long precede the final collapse of aristocratic influence in the borough.

After the turmoil of the 1761 'No Scotch' election in Canterbury, the principal combatants in 1768 were far more in

² Romney MSS. U1300/C4/4: Sir H. Mann to Lord Romney, nd. 1784.
³ Narier and Brooke, ii. 537: Rockingham to Newcastle, 4 Mar. 1758.
⁴ Canterbury Journal, 4-11 Oct. 1774.
keeping with a constituency where the gentry called the tune. Richard Milles was the son of a former M.P., Thomas Best had united wealth from his family's Chatham brewery with the social prestige and wide connections of his aristocratic wife, and William Lynch had links with the resident clergy over whom his father had so long presided as dean. None of the published addresses ventured into national affairs, so that to personal considerations must be ascribed the victory of Milles and Lynch. However, a rather curious speech by Alderman Nye at the close of the poll, which concluded: 'God and our Country - King George for ever - No Trade Suppressors - No Poor Oppressors - Charity and all Free'; does indicate that popular feeling had been aroused. As early as 1763, Wilkes had told Earl Temple:

I was received at Canterbury and Dover with many marks of regard, and I found the true glory and stability of our country, the English sailors, no enemies to Wilkes and Liberty.

Thus it comes as no great surprise to learn that on 29 September 1769 calls were made for an address in support of Middlesex's deposed Knight of the Shire, and that the requested document was actually left for signature. That it was never presented argues both a lack of widespread interest and opposition among influential citizens. Yet the radical cause had made its first faltering steps and could only gain in confidence.

With these tentative stirrings of popular interest in mind, we may approach the contest of 1774. Milles and Lynch were again in the field, and were being challenged by William Mayne of 1761 fame. But much had altered since the days of Bute and Grafton.

4 Rudé, Wilkes and Liberty, p. 131 and n. 4.
wilkes had made voters more aware of the dangers of secret influence, and placemen had joined papists and the Scots in the national pantheon of suspicion. As Turin agent and a frequent absentee from Westminster, Lynch had more reason to fear the new climate of politics than his independent-minded colleague, and tumble indeed he did. His fall from grace was assisted however by Hayne's ability to capture the mood of the freemen. He declared that with 'unabated Ardor' he would

\[\text{exert my most zealous Endeavours, aided by the necessary Assistance of your Judgement and Advice, not only to support, but to repair every violation our most excellent Constitution may have sustained, by being perverted from its original Principles, the inviolable observance of which alone can secure the Birth-Rights of the People, and enable us to transmit to Posterity the sacred liberties of Englishmen.}\]

Although Hayne's conversion did not last, and may well have been nothing more than rhetoric, it touched a sensitive chord in 1774 and ensured his return.

IV

The impact of Wilkes was even more evident at Dover and Rochester where a keen intensity was given to long smouldering resentment at ministerial dictation. Government had always been strong in Rochester on account of the Admiralty's installations at Chatham, and it had been customary from an early date for one of the borough's seats to be filled by an admiral or a naval administrator, with the other being reserved for a member of the local gentry. However, for a decade after 1754, this equitable division was carelessly set aside by ministers who succeeded in capturing the whole representation. Such an encroachment was tolerated in a period of war and relative political tranquility; but with the commencement of a new reign, storm clouds quickly began to gather on the horizon.

In reality, of course, Government's influence at Rochester was not extensive enough to warrant its holding both seats. The electorate was far wider than those at Hythe and Dover; the economy had not stagnated as at Sandwich and Queenborough; and the borough cherished traditions of independent action in the age of Anne and the Excise Bill. The corporation, though conservative and quite ready to honour potential benefactors like the Earls of Berkeley and Sandwich, was not a completely closed oligarchy scrambling feverishly for any crumb that might fall from the table of administration. There existed, too, all the elements necessary for the formation of a popular interest. Not every freeman could be employed in the docks, nor every merchant and shopkeeper satisfied with contracts. The farmers and gentlemen of the surrounding parishes had no desire to see their franchises devalued or usurped, while in a sizeable body of non-residents and traders with metropolitan interests, the borough possessed an illuminating window on events at the nation's centre. It comes as little surprise therefore to find that in the midst of the electoral struggle in 1771, John Wilkes was granted the city's freedom and regally feasted by an admiring assembly.

The independent freemen went on to the offensive for the first time at the 1765 by-election, in which the new Rockingham ministry put up Grey Cooper to replace Admiral Townshend. John Calcraft helped organise the mutiny, and caused such a stir that several Admiralty officials were sent down to quiet the generally docile dockyard workers. Cooper scraped home by thirty votes in a poll of six hundred, but it was a pyrrhic victory. The popular party had caught the scent of a vulnerable foe, and as the Duke of Newcastle seems to have appreciated, administration's sled-
hammer tactics had only revealed the coercive face of influence. Consequently when the general election came on in 1768 expectations were high. Since Calcraft had accepted office under Chatham and now stood with Admiral Geary on a government ticket, leadership of the malcontents passed to William Gordon, a wine merchant, landowner and son of a former mayor. With such credentials, Gordon squeezed Geary to the foot of the poll, and trailed Calcraft by a mere five votes.

But although the initial breach had been forced, it still had to be consolidated, and there were even moments when the hard-won spoils appeared thrown away altogether. Calcraft, who had retired into opposition soon after 1768, died in 1772, while eighteen months earlier Gordon had succumbed to the temptation of a victualling office and vacated his seat. Yet if neither of the resulting by-elections returned anti-ministerial M.P.s, the period did witness a series of events which were greatly to assist the borough's future development. This was the controversy surrounding the proposal to rebuild parts of Rochester and Strood after a serious fire in December 1768. A petition and a bill to establish an improvement commission to supervise the paving and lighting of streets, brought from the corporation the strongest possible reaction. Objection was made to the cost of the proposed scheme, and delaying stratagems were employed which postponed the royal assent until 1771. Such resistance, though unavailing, left a legacy of social conflict, especially after it was repeated in 1775 when Chatham applied for similar relief. The corporation understandably feared the infringement of its local power and jurisdiction; but to the inhabitants and traders

1 Namier and Brooke, i. 314: Newcastle to Rockingham, 1 Dec. 1761.
2 Namier and Brooke, i. 315; and Canterbury Journal, 4-11 Oct. 1774.
of the area it must have seemed as if their interests were once more being wantonly disregarded. Thus, as was to happen so often elsewhere, the paving commission became a key focus of municipal life, acting quite independently of the older and increasingly unresponsive institution.

With memories of these disputes still fresh, Rochester approached the general election of 1774. A writer in the Kentish Gazette caught the mood of at least a section of the electorate.

On Friday night Admiral Pye arrived in this City, in consequence of a private letter, as it is said, he had for that purpose received the day before from Lord Sandwich, and brought us the joyful news of the Parliament’s being dissolved. I say joyful, because notwithstanding the curious measure of the ministry, it is generally believed that a Parliament more fatal to the liberties of the subject than the last, cannot possibly be returned.

Certainly the popular party had no reason to mourn the passing of the 1768 House of Commons, and freemen were quick to voice their disappointment, when, after a promising and high-sounding speech, the Recorder, Mr. Brooke, nominated the sitting Members. Both men were supporters of Government, and if George Finch Hatton could at least boast a Kentish estate, Admiral Pye, as Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, had no ties whatever with the city.

The reaction was swift and highly instructive.

An honest quaker, freeman of this city and citizen of London, was moved by the spirit to question the admiral whether he had not voted for sending his Friend and brother citizen, the Lord Mayor to the Tower for doing his duty. The admiral answered in the affirmative and said that he could (though he did not attempt to) justify his conduct on that head. Amindad saw through him and shaking his head sat down with an inward spiritual groan of disapprobation.

Pye had been judged on an unfamiliar and typically 'Wilkite' criterion, in which real political acts counted for much more than hazy references to 'revolution principles'. And having found their subject wanting, the admiral's interrogators had no hesitation in nominating Christopher Polhill as the candidate of the 'friends of the people'.

1 Kentish Gazette, 1-5 Oct. 1774.
Ill-health prevented Rolhill from standing the poll, and, as has been seen, he was replaced by Robert Gregory. Gregory's East India background and Rockinghamite principles recommended him to a substantial cross-section of Rochester voters, whom he represented faithfully for the next ten years, with Finch Hatton. Philip Stephens' verdict on his 1774 triumph was that the electors of the borough were 'a set of ungrateful rascals'; but to an observer less wedded to the traditions of eighteenth-century patronage, the defeat of Admiral Pye must appear the logical result of those forces unleashed in the late 1760's.

In a similar way, the period 1768-1774 also witnessed the securing of a partial freedom from ministerial control by the electors of Dover. For several decades the Lord Warden and the various government departments had carried all before them in electoral terms; but as Lord George Sackville noted in a letter to Newcastle as early as 1756: 'Your Grace knows that we have many voters in that borough who do not depend upon the Government, and who may not be sorry to stir up an opposition.' Careful management as much as weight of influence had kept Dover's representatives on the Whig benches, and only when ministers began to neglect the pride and sensitivity of the constituency did it release those latent forces of revolt.

That Dover took a course very different to those pursued by Sandwich, Hythe and New Romney was due to many factors, and not least to the continued buoyancy of its economy. Renovation and improvement carried out by John Smeaton and others, saved the borough's harbour from the worst ravages of the sea, and under the skilful management of Sir Henry Oxenden it developed as the

1 Namier and Brooke, iii. 345: Philip Stephens to Hardwicke, 7 Nov. 1774.
2 Namier and Brooke, i. 445: Lord G. Sackville to Newcastle, 17 Apr. 1756.
3 See comments in Namier, Structure of Politics, pp. 121-4.
corner-stone of local prosperity. Hence, while inhabitants of the other Cinque Ports scratched a meagre living as inshore fishermen or minor customs officers, Hasted found Dover 'exceeding wealthy' and in 'a perpetual hustle and hurry of business'. The banking and commercial quarter served as the meeting place for 'a great crowd, especially of sea-faring people, as well English as of other countries'; and offered every opportunity to reap the rewards of enterprise. Peter Fector, for example, joined the Dover firm of Isaac Hinet as a humble clerk, but soon after the proprietor's death in 1745 he became a partner and by 1767 owned half the stock. Trade with London and other British ports, as well as with those of France, Holland and the Baltic, filled the pockets of a rapidly expanding population, and thereby did much to dispel that poverty upon which government and private influence flourished.

Affluence brought with it greater leisure for contemplation and enquiry, and a willingness to challenge established authority. The diary of Thomas Pattenden, the draper and stocking seller, reveals a keen interest in national and local affairs, while the letter-books of Isaac Hinet contain numerous expressions of discontent with government policy. Hinet looked upon the official packet-boats as unfair rivals to his own cross-channel service, and actively conspired with Dover and Canterbury innkeepers to secure passengers. The press-gangs were a daily thorn in the flesh of a maritime community, and in 1736 and 1740 embargoes on all ships bound for foreign ports further disrupted business.

2 Hasted, ix. 516.
4 A. Macfie, 'The Pattenden Diaries, 1797-1819', A.C., xciv. (1979), 139-47.
The Lord Warden was made aware of local ill-feeling, and in 1738 an address to the throne embodied all the festering grievances of Minet and his fellows.\(^1\) A similar climate probably existed during the American war, but by then the borough had an independent M.P. to plead its cause.

The final spurs to concerted political opposition were the death of the Duke of Dorset and Lord Hardwicke, whose familiar presence had so often soothed inflamed passions, and the realisation widely shared by the late 1760's, that the borough's representation was being exploited to suit the convenience of ministers alone. Anger at the steady stream of lawyers and placemen who arrived at Dover to undergo the formality of a by-election without any regard to local preference, boiled over in 1768 when Grafton nominated his boon-companion, Viscount Villiers, Hugh Minet led a revolt at the hustings, and although defeated, set a precedent for others to follow. In this way the initiative passed to the Wilkite merchant of Austin Friars, John Trevanion, who was introduced to the electors of the town by the celebrated Mr. Churchill.\(^2\)

Trevanion did not have to wait long for a chance to test the strength of his party, and late in 1739 he announced:

> ...my utmost abilities shall be employed in the defence of our excellent constitution, in the support of civil and religious liberties, and the universal welfare of my country, and in promoting the particular prosperity of this Town and Port of Dover.\(^3\)

No specific mention was made of the Wilkes case then being agitated in the county, and it had probably been judged expedient not to do so if an appeal was to be made to moderate opinion. Government, however, had woken up to its peril and selected Thomas Pym Hales, a connection of Dorset's Bekesbourne allies. As a Kentish-

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1 W. Minet, 'Extracts from the Letter Book of a Dover Merchant, 1737-41', A.C., xxxii. (1917), 253-5.
2 Namier and Brooke, iii. 562; and Oldfield, History of the Boroughs, iii. 49.
3 Kentish Post, and Canterbury Journal, 14 Nov. 1739.
man, Hales came nearer than many of his predecessors in meeting the requirements of the freemen, and made great play with his votes against general warrants and for the Land Tax reduction of 1767, given while in opposition with Lord George Sackville. He posed as a typical independent gentleman, and went so far as to pledge himself to 'pay every regard and attention to any instructions my constituents shall favour me with...'. 1 Trevanion was too recently arrived to counter such advantages, and was beaten off.

Nevertheless the years prior to 1774 were not without profit either to Trevanion or the people of Dover. Government, though still in command, had become more receptive, and three contests in five years no doubt reawakened electors' interest in current politics. Trevanion was able to build up an interest of his own, and it was not long before his house became 'a centre of hospitality and political influence'. He promised to erect a school for the benefit of the freemen's children, and in various other ways made himself a respected and valued member of borough society. 2 Most important of all, the election petitions of 1770 had greatly increased the size of the electorate, since the House of Commons was moved to restore the franchise to the non-residents after fifty years. At the time, the decision was not of Trevanion's making, as he was claiming to be the chosen representative of a majority of Dover's residents. However in the longer term, the expansion of the elective body aided the independent cause, and marked the end of a government monopoly based on patronage. 3

Trevanion was defeated at another by-election in 1773, and when the time came round for a fresh general election Lord North

1 Kentish Post, and Canterbury Journal, 28 Nov. 1769.
2 J. B. Jones, Dover (Dover, 1907), pp. 156-7.
initially proposed to put up John Henniker and Sir Charles Whitworth. However, more experienced men like Sir Joseph Yorke recognised that Dover was not the pliant beast of a decade earlier, and prudence prevailed. A compromise was thus agreed by which Trevanion and Henniker were to split the representation. There is no evidence that a programme of radical reforms was openly canvassed in the borough, or that Trevanion was bound by a Wilkite-style pledge. He was content to declare in the press:

My conduct in Parliament will prove the sincerity of my professions to you; be assured it will be truly independent, that is the best return I can make for your noble and disinterested support.

Ten years later, when the Fox-North coalition had turned old alignments upside-down, he reflected at greater length on his achievement.

When I first offered myself to your Notice it was to give you an Opportunity of rescuing the Town and Port from that ministerial Tyranny to which you had been very long accustomed. A Treasury mandate always attended the Candidate whose name you scarcely knew before his Appearance. You felt the insult and you rejected it. I was honourably supported, although unsuccessfully. Time, however, the true test of every Thing, crowned your struggle with success. and I have the honour to boast of being the first representative of your Cinque Port to be elected without Ministerial Influence.

1774 was thus in every sense a watershed in the history of Dover. Beginning in 1778 a series of four Paving Acts transformed the town from a medieval maze of unlit courts and dirty back-streets, into the opulent Channel port of the nineteenth century. Politics, too, assumed a more progressive aspect quite unknown before. A Deal correspondent urged his

3 Kentish Gazette, 7-8 Oct. 1774.
unenfranchised brethren in animated language to remember their 'birthright as Englishmen' and their 'glorious ancestors' who 'even laid down their lives for posterity'. Pointing to events in Worcester, Newcastle and the City of London, and with an apparent allusion to Rochester, he exclaimed: 'You have begun to loosen your shackles; may you now rise up and hew 'em in pieces'.

V

The Kent county election of 1774 provided a fitting climax to the Wilkite period, drawing together as it did, all the major forces that had contended so continuously during the preceding six years. Present at the nomination meeting was the innate and unyielding conservatism which had hampered and striven to smother the address of 1769. By its side, and equally proud and unrepentant, was the legion of reform, fresh from its triumphs in the larger boroughs. Dr. O'Gorman has argued that for the nation as a whole, the prevailing temper was one of business as usual; and in the north-western counties, for example, such public debate as did occur was focused on local issues. In Kent the freeholders were challenged to go further, and despite stiff resistance, a pair of able advocates ensured that the radical case was heard and understood.

John Sawbridge opened the proceedings at Maidstone on 14 August by counselling his audience on the need to think well and wisely before choosing their representatives; and then attempted to illustrate his warnings by defining the stark, if out-dated and superficial, distinctions between Whigs and Tories, of which mention has already been made. The single blemish on the Whig escutcheon was, to Sawbridge, the Septennial Act, 'that source of corruption, the canker-worm which is destroying the Constitution'. For its

1 Canterbury Journal, 4-11 Oct. 1774.
originators it had been a 'political mistake' rather than a 'crime', but now in the reign of George III it was used by the Tories to bolster their destructive system. Parliament had done nothing to regain the confidence of the people since 1769, but on the contrary had gone so far as to propose the introduction of popery into North America. Faced with such a threat to the public good, Sawbridge thus suggested that men who sought a future seat at Westminster should conform to a fourfold test. They should be Whigs, and should be committed to shorter parliaments, to the expunging of the Middlesex resolutions from the journals of the House of Commons, and to the repeal of the Quebec Act.

When compared with the unquestioning mood of 1768, the voicing of so many contentious questions at a single county assembly was a significant advance in itself. Unfortunately, the two hopeful candidates showed no inclination to follow suit, and would certainly have escaped without further trouble had not Lord Mahon made another effort to examine their beliefs. During his campaign in Westminster, Mahon stood committed to the remedy of the full list of Wilkite grievances, and had already won many friends in Kent. He quite approved of Charles Harsham whom he knew and respected. As to Thomas Knight, he had not made his acquaintance, but since he had been spoken of as 'a man of dangerous principles', some specific statement ought to be made. An affronted Knight retorted with some heat that he 'did not come there to be catechised'; and the day closed with some hollow appeals to 'revolution principles'.

Nevertheless freeholders left Maidstone with a host of ideas fresh in their minds. Lord Mahon had called for measures 'for striking off the rotten and corrupt boroughs which at present

return more members to Parliament than all the counties together';
or for 'the admission of two members more for each county, to
balance, in some measure, the number returned for those Boroughs'.

The debate was carried on in the press over the next two months,
and by election day on October 19, many might have been found like
Mayor Spice of Rochester who were willing to vote for Lord Mahon.¹

However expense deterred even a token opposition, and Wilkites
in the county had to be content with what had been achieved earlier.
Perhaps for the first time since 1734, national issues had played
a substantial part in a Kent election, and if Wilkes had failed
to convince a majority of the gentry of the need for reform, the
nation stood upon the brink of a war that would change the heart
of many a fearful and penniless squire.

The problem of America had been steadily gathering momentum since 1763, when the successful termination of the Seven Years' War freed the colonists from the menace of an ambitious French neighbour. However, throughout the first decade of its history, the search for a solution to the almost unanswerable riddle of sovereignty and sound financial government was generally confined within the narrow bounds of Westminster and Whitehall. George Grenville's Stamp Act of 1765, the Rockinghams' Declaratory Act of the following year, and the Townshend duties of 1767, had as much to do with the inter-factional scramble for power as with colonial management, and in the days before 'Wilkes and Liberty' neither was the stuff of which national controversy was made. It was not until 1774, therefore, that imperial affairs were placed squarely before the provincial electorate, and even then only as part of a far wider programme. Coming from such tentative beginnings, the transformation accomplished during the next parliament was truly remarkable, and was crucial in the development of public consciousness. Humiliation at defeats on the battlefield, and the awful spectre of a Bourbon fleet poised to invade, combined with economic distress to rekindle the anger and suspicion of the old Country interest, and prompted a national petitioning movement in which Kent was a leading participant.

I

We may commence by examining attitudes towards America as they evolved between 1774 and the crisis of mid-summer 1779. Events had progressed a good distance on the road to rebellion and war when Lord North went to the country in the early autumn of 1774, and there can be little doubt that he did so in order to forestall criticism, and to secure a majority before the inevitable parliamentary tussle began. His calculations were generally rewarded;
but on the Quebec Government Act he could not escape censure altogether, since it had been made an essential plank in the Wilkite platform. At the Kent county meeting, John Sawbridge heaped execration upon the measure:

by which the popish religion and a despotic government are established in part of the British dominions more extensive than all the Protestant countries in the world.¹

To the Wilkites, the act was further proof that Parliament had not abandoned those arbitrary tendencies exhibited over the Middlesex election, and for this reason, Lord Mahon pressed Thomas Knight hard for a declaration on its repeal. Yet the resort to anti-catholicism indicates that the radicals were still casting about uncertainly for support, and it was not until they substituted it with the drive against corruption and inefficiency that demands for reform rang out in the constituencies.

For the majority of Englishmen in 1774, however, the proposed administration of Canada was not sufficient grounds on which to depart from allegiance to the King's chosen ministers. Hence, while a writer in the Canterbury Journal could list seventeen 'Queries' on the details of the scheme, his tone was moderate and conciliatory. He asked:

Whether as these and like apprehensions, reasonings and deductions have so universally possessed and disquieted the minds of multitudes of the most serious and valuable parts of the British Possessions of this Kingdom, it would not be doing a much greater service to the public; be a better proof of our loyalty and a more certain demonstration of the good sense and integrity of our own hearts, to endeavour to silence those objections and calm the fears of our fellow subjects than to waste our time and their attention in the defence of ministerial hirelings or in malignant and reiterated insults, on the character and conduct of individuals whose names are an honour to the community.

Though naive, it was clearly believed that after a decade and a half of factious in-fighting and personal innuendo, the moment had arrived to bring an air of sobriety and rational debate to

¹ Canterbury Journal, 16-23 Aug. 1774.
the settlement of imperial issues. Since 1770, Lord North had shown himself to be a capable administrator, and might therefore be expected to respond favourably to popular concerns when presented in a constructive spirit.

During the next two years, the same division of opinion persisted on American problems, with all the Opposition groups swimming desperately against the prevailing current. The Chathamite and Rockingham Whigs had each taken an interest in the future of the colonies when in office, and long continued to trumpet loudly the merits of their respective panaceas. Yet the distinction between the revenue-gathering and trade-regulating functions of taxation was scarcely the basis for a workable policy, while the Declaratory Act was simply constitutional hypocrisy of the first rank; and both only gained credit in the eyes of posterity because they were never put to the test. The blatant assault on property rights implicit in the Boston tea-party made it nearly impossible for Whigs or radicals to offer outright opposition to the coercive legislation of 1774 and 1775. And by October 1776, when the rejection of the Olive Branch petition and the Declaration of Independence had finally estranged George III from his erring subjects, the Earl of Radnor was still labouring to dispel the odious charge of republicanism.

The charge of republicanism was never even attempted to be made against any but the northern colonies, and there he believed with great injustice; and the charge of disobedience was still worse founded; for he believed, if the history of the colonies was impartially considered and fairly decided on, from their first establishment, it would be found, that no subjects had ever exhibited stronger proofs of duty, attachment, obedience, and affection for the parent body.

The taint of association with rebels and levellers was potentially disastrous for Radnor and his friends, and it thus became imperative to interpret their actions in terms more acceptable to conservative electors. Hence he went on:

If, indeed, the same spirit which compelled the first settlers to fly from the ecclesiastical and civil
persecution and oppression of a tyrant, was a spirit of republicanism, he trusted that spirit would never be extinct either there or here; for if it should, then despotism would triumph, and nothing would be left for the prince on the throne, but to possess himself of the liberties of the people thus deserted and surrendered.

In spite of this special pleading, however, Sir George Savile might have been speaking for the whole of Opposition when he told Rockingham in January 1777: 'We are not only patriots out of place, but patriots out of the opinion of the public'.  

The fact was, that although not far-sighted, Lord North's policies were regarded as well-suited to remedy what was generally expected to be a short-lived crisis. A typical reaction was that voiced by Sir William Hayne in early 1775 during a debate on the New England disturbances. Like his Canterbury constituents, he prided himself that his vote was 'free from the smallest tincture of that prejudice which has undoubtedly been inculcated into the minds of the Americans from this side of the water'; and at this period in his career, at least, he may be taken as representing their sentiments. Any justice of the peace might have lamented that:

...so very violent has been, and still is, the conduct of the Americans, that there is scarce any opening left for British justice and British humanity to interfere for their relief, or to give protection to those loyal and faithful subjects, of which I trust many are yet to be found in that continent.

He felt unable to consider the proceedings of the Continental Congress without feelings of 'amazement, compassion, and indignation; amazement at the act, compassion for the delusion, and indignation at the insult offered to their mother country'.

That the colonists should employ the 'immutable laws of nature' to set aside 'the principles of English constitution, and the

1 *Parl. Hist.*, rviii. 1376.
several charters and compacts', Mayne held to be 'subversive of, and destructive to, every fundamental principle which either constitutes or supports our most excellent constitution'.

Mayne accepted that the Americans possessed 'all the rights, liberties and immunities of free and natural born subjects of the realm of England'; but argued that these should be accompanied by obedience. The colonies were thus, in his opinion, in a state of 'the most flagrant rebellion'; and he could only conclude:

...I sincerely wish every moderate and constitutional method to be taken to bring back these unhappy and deluded people to a sense of their duty. But if, after all, conciliating measures shall fail, this country has no alternative left, but to make use of that power they enjoy, under heaven, for the protection of the whole empire; and to show the Americans that as our ancestors deluged this country with their blood, to gain this constitution for us, we, like men, in defiance of faction at home, or rebellion abroad, are determined, in glorious emulation of their example, to transmit it perfect, and unimpaired to posterity, or perish in the attempt.

But if such an uncompromising attitude held the field in 1775 and 1776, only a very few months were required to bring a distinct change in the temper of public opinion. The growth of a new sympathy towards the Americans may be discerned behind the increased freedom with which Opposition championed their cause. In March 1778, for example, the Earl of Radnor began a speech on the American Conciliatory Bill:

this country was wrong in the outset, and [has] hitherto continued obstinately to persevere in impolicy and injustice ...We had no right to tax unrepresented America. The idea was no less absurd and unjust, than the event has hitherto proved disgraceful and unprosperous. Englishmen, as they carried their rights with them, on their first migration, so they retained the spirit, resolution, and firmness of Englishmen, in bravely asserting and maintaining those rights. The Constitution declared, in so many words, that no Englishman can be taxed but by his own consent. It has been the language of all ages, since the first foundation of the monarchy. 2

The old concept may have assumed a fresh relevance for those

1 *Parl. Hist.*, xviii. 244-5 and 247.
over-burdened tax-payers of Kent who still saw their M.P.s nominated by aristocratic or government interests. Furthermore, the frequent references to shared privileges and consanguinity could not fail to breed some response among gentry families, many of whom had relatives or property in the New World. Opposition thus found ever more encouragement to elaborate upon the fears of despotism and secret influence voiced by Burke and Wilkes in the 1760's, and as a result, it became possible to depict the Americans as partners in a crusade against arbitrary power, rather than as ungrateful traitors.

One explanation of this transformation in the late 1770's was the defeat of British arms at Saratoga in 1777 and the declaration of war by France in 1778 and Spain in the following year. Humiliated by a militia of colonial farmers, and bereft of allies in Europe, it was easy to attribute all the nation's misfortunes to ministerial incompetence, to corruption or to more sinister causes. On 8 March 1779, Sir Horace Mann, the independent M.P. for Maidstone, announced that he would be voting with Fox on the state of the nation at the outbreak of war with France, because the motion contained 'matter of public notoriety, as well known without this House as within; as well known to all Europe, I am sorry to say it, as to the British Parliament'. With the critical eye common among back-bench economists since before the Revolution, he went on:

...the real subject matter of this debate depends upon something more than vague premises and loose assertions, made in either this house or the other. What have been the sums granted? What has been the state of preparation? Has our navy been adequate to the services ministers were bound to provide for? Here lies the true issue; what ministers have done, not what they promised; what they were bound to perform, not what they said they would do.

Mann was convinced that Lord North had woefully neglected his

1 Parl. Hist., xx. 223.
responsibilities, and especially those respecting the navy. If the source of Britain's greatness and commerce was permitted to decline, the country would rapidly lose its consequence in the eyes of Europe, and the only beneficiary would be France.

By mid-summer 1779, Sir Horace Mann's prophecy seemed about to be fulfilled. A combined Bourbon fleet was known to be mustering for an attack on southern England, and yet serious doubts surrounded the preparedness of home defences. Recruiting bills had failed to swell the numbers of volunteers, so that Lord North had to rely upon the localities to raise and equip their own companies of militia. Kent was in a particularly vulnerable position, and the people of Dover not surprisingly led the way by enrolling six troops. The Grand Jury was also alive to its responsibilities, and in conformity with the dominant mood of independence and self-help, issued the following resolution at the Assizes on 24 July:

That in this Time of imminent Danger when our Coasts are daily threatened with invasion from France, and our Fleets with the attack of the combined Force of the House of Bourbon, it behoves every true friend and Well-wisher to this Country (when the Salvation of it is at stake) to Unite in the general Cause of its Defence and Security; in order therefore to promote this desirable End, We, the Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff and others, whose names are hereafter written, have subscribed the respective sums after our names set, which it is proposed shall be transmitted to the marine society to be expended as soon as may be, for the immediate carrying into Execution the laudable Proposals, and for the strengthening the principal bulwark of the nation, the Navy of Great Britain, a measure which we most earnestly recommend to the serious consideration of every Person of Property in this County, and cordially wish it may meet with Concurrence and Support. 1

The Kentish gentry had lost none of its old enthusiasm for a 'blue-water policy', and can only have been dismayed by the spectacle of a navy beset with political dissension, and a Channel fleet confined to Portsmouth at the critical moment.

The besieged county closed ranks in a spirit of patriotic determination. Gentlemen donated generously, and the press brimmed

1 Kentish Gazette, 21-5 Aug, 1779.
with loyal poetry. One article in the Kentish Gazette entitled 'Britons united may defeat the world' began by recalling the struggle with Philip II and the rout of the Armada, and went on:

I draw this picture only to show what English courage and unanimity have done, we must hope they will do the same again.

To ensure success, unanimity alone is necessary; whether the Majority or the Minority are in the right, my countrymen, at present concerns not us, our business (as Drake told his sailors) is not to enquire who administers the government of England, but to beat her enemies. And though avarice and ambition may have nearly banished public spirit from amongst the great, yet it remains in many an English breast, and I doubt not that the unjust and cruel design of our base and treacherous enemies will send forward the generous fire till it rises in one great and united flame and overwheels all that oppresses it.

We began with an unfermented war, disapproved of by one part of the nation, and unhappily persevered in by the other. But the question is not now about the dependence or independence of America, it is, whether Great Britain shall exist, whether we are to enjoy our properties, liberties and religions or submit to the mercies of French dragoons and Spanish inquisitions.

While all eyes searched the horizon for the expected sails, and men trembled for the safety of their families, political divisions might be sacrificed to the national interest. However, the jealousies and rancour alluded to in the above quotation were never wholly lost sight of, and re-emerged with redoubled vigour and bitterness as the peril subsided. Trade embargoes and the closure of the Dover packet had bred resentment since the days of Isaac Hinet, while the presence of a large body of militia and regular troops in the county inevitably disrupted the daily life of the community. A dispute also arose in the Cinque Ports during 1779 which displays both personal hostility to Lord North and profound distrust of the motives underpinning his actions. As one newspaper correspondent put it:

The question at present agitated in the Cinque Ports seems to lay in a very narrow compass. The Lord Jarden

1 Kentish Gazette, 6-10 July 1779.
2 A. Temple-Patterson, The Other Armada: the Franco-Spanish attempt to invade Britain in 1779 (Manchester, 1930), p. 128.
has requested their assistance to raise a certain number of men: for what purpose?; to fulfil a voluntary personal offer he made to the King of raising a regiment; not to fulfil the legal obligation the Cinque Ports may be under of doing it. In consequence their compliance will be a compliment to the Lord Warden, not a security against future demands. The point then to be considered is whether the present Lord Warden, the ostensible author of all our misfortunes, deserves such an exertion, or whether, if the exertion is necessary, the offer should not be made to the King as the executive power, rather than to the minister of that power, who has so grossly misapplied it. Besides, so long as the Cinque Ports adhere to their constitutional mode of raising men, the Lord Warden would not be able to send them beyond the bounds prescribed by the law of the Cinque Ports: in the capacity of volunteers they may be sent anywhere. In short, if the Cinque Ports think it necessary to exert themselves at this crisis, how much more eligible, how much more to their honour would it be to raise real volunteers independent of the Lord Warden.

When Pitt called for a similar effort in 1794 he was not answered with a volley of abuse and recrimination. For Lord North, however, 1779 set the seal upon the alienation of public confidence observable since Saratoga. Opposition was revitalised, and it would be surprising if the gentlemen assembled on Coxheath near Maidstone did not spend part of the summer debating the causes and remedies of the national malaise.

II

The evident mismanagement of the war in the late 1770's was the more keenly resented by the gentry and freeholders of Kent, because they had been required to finance its prosecution at a time when heavy calls were already being made upon their purses, and when the rewards of agriculture could easily be eliminated by temporary political or commercial uncertainty. It is therefore impossible to understand the alteration in public attitudes towards America, or the petitioning movement which resulted from it, without knowing something of the economic plight of the landed interest.

A prominent item in the budgets of the upper classes was that arising from their passionate craze for building and

1 Kentish Gazette, 31 July - 4 Aug. 1779.
improvement. A Duke of Dorset, an earl of Darnley and even a James Best of Chatham, with substantial income from Court and diplomatic posts, an Irish estate, and a lucrative brewing business, might renovate an entire mansion and adorn it with rich furnishings and classical works of art, without much heed to the overall expense. However, for less well endowed gentlemen, the desire to ape their betters necessitated great sacrifices and sometimes proved fatal. Some idea of the sums involved may be gained from the example of Sir Edward Knatchbull, whose income averaged £3,000 a year between 1763 and 1789. Although by no means a poor man, the seventh baronet noted that his outlay in 1766 of £2,649 13s. 9d. had, 'considerably exceeded what it ought to be, for, considering the great charges I am at in building, I cannot afford to spend more than £2,000 a year, and hardly that, without running into inconvenience'.¹ When the shell of his new house at Mersham Hatch had been completed in 1765, Knatchbull paid out £2,908, and then resolved not to spend £1,000 in any single year on decorations. Bills from craftsmen like Chippendale continued to be presented throughout the next decade, and by 1779 the final account stood at £20,526. Large by any standards, the figure included £16,525 for the edifice itself, sums of £902 and £595 for furniture, carpets, silks, china and bedding, as well as £560 to the silversmith, and represented at least a third of the family's annual expenditure over a lengthy period.²

No one can read the pages of Jane Austen without becoming acutely aware of the central role played by strict settlements, entail and portions in the lives of the gentry. Widely employed by the aristocracy since the late seventeenth century, these devices had been adopted by all men of property as a mark of

² Ibid., p. 129.
social prestige. However this gentility was only secured by laying heavy burdens on the resources of an estate, and, as the Miss Dashwoods discover in the opening chapters of Sense and Sensibility, parents were often quite unable to provide adequately for dependent relatives. The already tottering finances of the Twysdens of Aysdon Hall near East Reckham were helped further down the slippery slope by the will of the sixth baronet, which bequeathed a jointure of £500 to his wife, and appointed £300 as the annual income of his three younger children on coming of age.¹ Disputes at law were common on matters of inheritance, and in the early nineteenth century, the widowed Lady Honywood even went into print in the hope of wringing a sufficient jointure from her reluctant son.² A strictly settled estate left little ready money with which to meet unexpected demands, especially after due provision had been made for dowries and portions. With debts of £40 - £50,000 in the 1790's, Sir John Honywood contemplated putting his Evington property in trust in order to liquidate some of his assets³, while for others there was the desperate remedy of barring the entail.

Pleasures, too, had to be paid for. Electioneering, even in the boroughs, was not cheap, and after 1790 the Knatchbulls, Honywoods and Gearys expended vast sums in a series of county contests.⁴ Professor Mingay has observed that in the eighteenth century: "The most likely cause of a family's downfall was now not a change of government, penal confiscation or burdensome taxation, but extravagance."⁵ Nowhere is this reflection better illustrated than in the decline of the Twysdens. Sir William

² Memorial of the Honourable Lady Honywood written for the use of her referees (London, 1814), passim.
³ Ibid., p. 3.
⁴ See infra, pp. 204-7.
Twysden inherited a well-managed estate in 1751, but by 1754 he found himself compelled to sell property in London and to raise a mortgage of £12,000. Most of his wife's £8,000 dowry was used to pay off his mounting debts, and when an apoplectic fit cut short his prodigality in 1767, the value of his patrimony had been reduced by £16,000. Coming of age in May 1781, Sir William Jarvis Twysden waited only until June before barring the entail, and by 1787 the army of creditors had become so clamorous that the young baronet fled abroad, and only returned to England on the understanding that two-thirds of Roydon's precious acres would be disposed of. The ravages of gambling and feasting might be repaired by speculation or an advantageous marriage, but for the Twysdens, the Woodgates of Summerhill Park and many others, no such salvation was at hand.

With so many domestic drains on available funds, any increase in government or local impositions would be keenly resented. Numerous must have been those gentlemen who echoed Peter Pounce's lamentation in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* that:

> the greatest fault in our constitution is the provision made for the poor, except that perhaps made for some others. Sir, I have not an estate which doth not contribute almost as much again to the poor as to the land-tax, and I do assure you I expect to come myself to the parish in the end.

The cheese-paring attitude of the landed classes towards the poor has become legendary, and, if open to exaggeration and ridicule, was a widely shared response to a growing social problem. A contemporary Kentish view was set forth in a joint-workhouse agreement between the parishes of Barent and Horton Kirby in 1774.

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whereas it hath been found by long experience that the rates and charges for relieving the poor people in the said parishes have for many years past been very much increased, by the great burthen and uneasiness of those who contribute thereto, that the poorer sort of people have been less industrious and careful in providing means of subsisting themselves and their families under the expectation of being maintained by the relief of the inhabitants of the parishes to which they belong and that the children of such poor people are frequently brought up in idleness to the destruction of their morals, from whence many bad things and ill consequences often proceed and the poor themselves become very insolent to those who maintain them, all which evils and many other inconveniences are supposed chiefly to arise from the system of relieving the poor with money which is too frequently perverted to bad uses...

A whole range of expedients were suggested to combat the worst effects of rural unemployment when it became acute in the 1790's and after 1815. But to the Kentish gentry in the decades before Gilbert's Act and the Speenhamland system, it must have seemed that in spite of poor rates which varied between six pence and six shillings in the pound, no solution was in sight.

No less inequitable and unpopular was the Land Tax, which had been grossly distorted since its inception under William III.

An anonymous pamphleteer summed up its anomalies thus:

the Land Tax on the foot it now stands is the most unequal Tax that was ever imposed in any Age upon any Nation. When it is at four Shillings, a Man perhaps in Kent or Essex shall pay the full, or sometimes more; in Norfolk or Lancashire, he shall pay three Shillings; in Staffordshire or Shropshire two; in Devonshire or Yorkshire Fifteenpence; in Cornwall, Cumberland or Wales Ninepence.

As the original assessments had always been adhered to, taxes were being demanded in the late eighteenth century at levels which in no way took account of changes in a country's ability to pay. Kent was no longer a centre of iron and textile manufacture, but as John Boys and Hasted commented, its inhabitants still contributed a twenty-fourth part of the entire national total.

1 E. Melling (ed.), Kentish Sources IV: The Poor (Kent County Council, 1964), p. 82.
2 See infra, pp. 170-1 and 253-5.
3 Kingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century, p. 82.
4 J. Boys, A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Kent with the Means of its Improvement (London, 1796), p. 2; and Hasted, i. 303.
The disproportionate character of the Land Tax was particularly apparent in wartime, when its maximum rate of four shillings in the pound coincided with other extraordinary devices for revenue gathering. In 1776 Lord North placed taxes on carriages and stage-coaches, in 1779 he taxed auctions and male servants, in 1780 legacies and the import and production of alcohol, while in 1781 and 1782 duties were levied on salt and sugar. In all cases, the wealthier classes, and especially the landed interest,shouldered the heaviest burden, and this made them the more sensitive to the details of government expenditure. The collection of the Land Tax was open to all manner of corruption, and complaints were regularly voiced in Parliament about the long delays in the transmission of balances to the Treasury. Hence, as Walpole and Lord North both found to their cost, when military strategy failed to compensate for fiscal stringency, swift retribution could be expected from the back-benches and the provinces.

The other side of the financial equation was, of course, the profitability of those types of agriculture from which Kentish gentlemen and freeholders derived their incomes. Undoubtedly the greatest influence on Kentish farming was the proximity of the ever-expanding London market. Since an early date, Kentish farmers had been conscious of the need for efficiency, and had thus generally adopted the practice of enclosure by the end of the sixteenth century. New techniques were eagerly adopted, and a type of seed-drill was being used long before Tull's pioneering work. The needs of the metropolis also determined the sort of crops that were grown. Charles Seymour catalogued many of them in 1776:

The county abounds in fish and fowl of all sorts; innumerable herds of cattle, and flocks of sheep feed in Romney and Weldand marshes; it supplies London and its environs with excellent fruit; the bowels of the earth are well stored with fullers' earth; great plenty of grain grows in the north and east parts of Kent, and the Weald produces timber for the royal navy, and wood for the iron furnaces in abundance.

Wheat, oats, barley, peas and beans were grown in the arable lands of Boys' eastern division, while travellers like Defoe were struck by the orchards of apples and cherries about Maidstone. In addition, Kent was famed for its hop gardens, which grew steadily in acreage throughout the eighteenth century.

So close a relationship did have its dangers. Fruit, and especially hops, required sizeable initial capital outlays and constant attention throughout the growing season, but until the harvest was finally gathered in, there was always the possibility of its being destroyed by pests or the weather. Since the late-seventeenth-century depression in grain, meat and wool prices, cash crops, along with dye-stuffs and millet-seed, had been intensely cultivated to maintain the profitability of essentially arable enterprises. Thus, if they failed, if tastes changed, or if a glut elsewhere flooded the London market, farmers faced temporary distress or perhaps bankruptcy. In general, however, rents and prices in the Home Counties were higher than the national average between 1690 and 1750, and showed few signs of declining in the next decades. Kent was spared the traumas of enclosure in the late eighteenth century, and contemporary descriptions of the yeoman class suggest a life of solid prosperity rather than wholesale annihilation in the quest for ever larger properties.

4 Linstead, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.50-1
5 Linstead, *R. 300-1."
The only notable exception to this overall pattern came during the late 1770's, and perhaps because of its very unfamiliarity it was the more severely felt and resented. The diary of Richard Hayes, the well-to-do yeoman of Cobham, reveals that from an early date the farming community had been aware of the impact of the American War on the markets. On 21 September 1776 he wrote:

Dartford Market. I was not there, by having amusement enough at home, neither does it seemingly (at present) require my immediate attendance, although I have old corn to dispose of. There being a great demand for corn abroad, on act of ye nation's Wise Heads (or worse Heads) in irritating ye Americans so that they will not suffer any of their plentiful country provisions, corn etc., to be sent to any of our Plantation islands & if they would our shipping are so stationed to prevent it, by making Prizes of them. So that this war may effectively be called an Unnatural war. Unnatural.

By 1 February 1778, Hayes' sympathy with the colonists had evidently hardened. He noted:

The Parliament being soon to meet (this week) to make enquiry into ye state of ye Nation, relating to this unnatural war, that has been carried on for some time against our best allies or friends the Americans.

And on 27 February 1778 he recorded:

A general Fast. But we now begin to find we must restore peace to the Americans. I was not at Church. I do not like this war.

Fellow feeling with the oppressed farmers of America may well have coloured Hayes' attitude, but with the entry of France and Spain into the war, the disruption of commerce probably left his old corn mouldering in its barns for want of buyers.

That the plight of the agricultural interest was an unhappy one for a number of reasons is testified by two letters which appeared in the Kentish Gazette early in 1780. The first, from 'A Country Gentleman', ran thus:

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The pursuit of this unfortunate war, has been, by some people, laid at the door of the country gentlemen; it is high time they should convince the world of the falsehood of such insinuations, and by their conduct demonstrate that it has not been patronised by them. Give me leave to ask a few questions. What has the country gentleman got by this war? At the beginning of it the lands of England sold for thirty to thirty-three years purchase; fix it at thirty-one; and suppose their annual produce twenty millions - they were then worth 620 millions. - What are they worth now? sunk to twenty-five years purchase and lower - they are not now worth 500 millions; the difference, 120 millions, added to the thirty-six millions already expended (making in all 156 millions) is the loss this country has already sustained in five years pursuit of this blessed war. Are the country gentlemen the better for this? what are the advantages they have obtained? - an additional price on all necessary foreign commodities, increase of taxes, difficulty in obtaining their present rent, the future prospect of their tenants breaking around them. Corn, within these two years, has fallen thirty, nay forty, per cent. hay much the same; hops, the great staple commodity, of this county, has this year been sold for a song.

A few weeks later 'A Kentish Yeoman', having outlined the conduct of the war, observed:

Now, you will ask perhaps, what is all this to us? Why I'll tell you, a great deal. For had it not been for these things, hops would never have been sold at 30 to 40s. a hundred, wheats at 71. 10s. a load, this year; nor would you have paid nine pence and ten pence for your sugar - why every load of wheat, barley or malt, every hundred of hops, every bale of cloth, every ton of lead or tin, every branch of linen, woollen, toy, and hardware manufacture, sent out of this country, is by these means loaded with an additional and heavy tax for want of shipping; and re-taxed again by a heavy insurance which as they raise the price in foreign markets, both lessen the demand for the commodity, and diminish the value of it at home to the loss of the farmer and manufacturer: and every pound of tea, sugar, currants, raisins, rice, and indigo, every ounce of spices, every hundred of deals, and every ton of hemp and iron imported, nay the glass of wine you may happen to be drinking and the pipe of tobacco you may now be smoking over this paper, cost you, my friend, as well as the nation from 20 to 30, nay, in some articles, 501. in the hundred, more than they would have done had it not been for this war.

Low farm prices, the falling value of land and rent-rolls, the dislocation of trade, and the inflated cost of the essentials of life, coming as they did on top of high rates and taxes, could

1 Kentish Gazette, 19-22 Jan. 1780.
2 Kentish Gazette, 29-26 Feb. 1780.
not be ignored in a rural community where the last remnants of iron and textile industries still struggled on. Neither could it be longer doubted that government bore the overwhelming share of responsibility.

III

In 1769 the Kentish gentry had not been disposed to believe Wilkes' tales of secret influence and corruption. By 1780, defeat in war and economic distress had taught many of them to think differently. On the opposition benches Burke and Shelburne sensed that the change was mirrored right across the nation, and launched their long-meditated offensive for economical reform. The influence of the crown was too extensive, both inside Parliament and without. The national debt was too high, and threatened to bestow on succeeding generations the burdensome legacy of a profligate and designing minority.¹ Contracts and honours, together with exemption from the Land-Tax, were fundamentally altering the balance between the landed and commercial interests. All these were potent arguments in a county such as Kent where merchants and fund-holders had long been acquiring the estates of stricken gentlemen,² and where ministerial power was openly exerted at election time. However, the militant upsurge of 1779-80 was not inspired or harnessed by opposition. It was rather the unpredictable and confused reflex-action of stunned and disillusioned men lashing out wildly at half-imagined phantoms, and from the dust tossed up by its wilful independence, the association movement was fashioned.

At a Yorkshire county meeting on 30 December 1779, the Rev. Christopher Wyvill and a number of prominent North Riding gentle-

men secured a petition requesting relief, and then formed themselves into a committee of correspondence in order to make contact with like-minded groups. The way having been pointed, other counties followed suit, and with the adherence of Middlesex the full weight of the wilkite tradition was thrown behind the snowballing campaign. The York assembly and the text of its address were reported in the *Canterbury Journal* in January 1780, but for some weeks no positive response was forthcoming. One writer in the *Kentish Gazette* urged:

> At a time when many counties of England intend to apply to Parliament for an enquiry into the public expenditure, and for a reduction of the enormous salaries paid to individuals, it is hoped that you will not be the last to join in such fair and reasonable requests. It seems indeed unnatural to suppose that any landed man of whatever condition or party, (if uninfluenced by place or views of preferment) should withhold his assent from proposals so just and reasonable.  

Lord Mahon also seems to have detected a lingering hesitation in his home county, for on 17 January he wrote to Shelburne: 'I wish to know from your Lordship whether I can be of any service in Buckinghamshire where we have an estate; as I hope extremely that such things will be set on foot there at any rate.'

That this reluctance should have persisted in spite of everything that had recently happened was due to the fears entertained about the propriety of associations, and to the activities of the resident friends of Government. The strength of the former is indicated by the insertion in the *Canterbury Journal* of letters to and from Wyvill refuting the charge of illegality and disloyalty, while there is evidence that as Lord Lieutenant the Duke of Dorset used his prestige to dissuade men from a repetition of the York resolutions. He solicited Henry Streatfield's backing for a

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1 *Canterbury Journal*, 4-11 Jan. 1780.
3 Stanhope MSS, U1590/150: Mahon to Shelburne, 17 January 1780.
moderate petition\(^1\), and closely questioned Lord Mahon as to the intentions of the leading Kentish reformers. Mahon was not to be over-awed, however, and replied by restating his commitment to the fullest possible public debate and participation.\(^2\) In the next days Mahon laboured with energy and boundless enthusiasm to clear away every obstacle, and as a result of his zeal a Freeholder was eventually able to write:

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Courage brother Freeholders - Kent will not be dishonoured. We shall meet in our collective capacity like the rest of the Counties upon the Coast, and by far the majority of the inland Counties. It is a measure so dreaded by the friends of corruption, and national profusion that it is no wonder they throw every possible obstacle in the way of these constitutional assemblies. It is the strongest argument upon earth of their certain efficacy. If however there can be such a monster in reason, as a really independent man, and yet an enemy to Reform in the expenditure of the nation's money, and a rigid and exact economy, let him come boldly forward at the meeting, and give his reasons; he will be listened to with candour, and replied to with temper.\(^3\)
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Thus while opposition was determined, popular excitement and involvement had reached a far higher pitch than in 1774 when Mahon last addressed the county.

The meeting at the Court House in Maidstone on 4 March was one of the most eventful and dramatic ever held in Kent, and easily surpassed anything staged since 1701.\(^4\) Called on the requisition of a respectable body of men, no one doubted that the real object of the day's proceedings was 'to consider of the most probable means to relieve the country from the heavy burden under which it labours.' Interest was intense, with aristocrats, gentry, clergy and freeholders all present in large numbers, and from the opening dispute over the chair until the final division the contending parties argued, blustered, cheered and complained with great vigour and passion.

\(^1\) Streatfield MSS. U908/013/1: Dorset to Streatfield. nd. 1780.
\(^2\) Stanhope MSS. U1590/248: Mahon to Dorset. nd. 1780.
\(^3\) Kentish Gazette, 6-9 Feb. 1780.
\(^4\) Kentish Gazette, 4-8 Mar. 1780.
Few can have disagreed with Lord Shafton, when in a few words he showed the right of the subject to assemble and petition parliament under any and every grievance with which they were oppressed. However with this piece of 1689 doctrine all unity abruptly ceased, since at least two addresses were to be submitted. The first was brought forward by Filmer Honywood, who asserted the necessity there was for the kingdom at large to enquire into the enormous expense of government, retrench the undue influence that prevailed, and abolish those places which are burdensome and useless. He believed his petition was 'moderate and respectful', and informed his audience that it had the cheerful acquiescence of his distinguished father, Sir John Honywood. The Earl of Radnor was warm in his applause and approbation, and declared 'his motives to be wholly intended to retrench the enormous abuse of public money'. He said that, 'formerly we had for our money, glory, prosperity and commerce, but now no advantages do we know of but to placemen, pensioners and contractors'; and concluded: 'I know no reason why they should grow fat as we grow thin, and in the same proportions'.

This petition having been read aloud, a second was strenuously advocated by Sir Horace Mann. Maidstone's staunchly independent M.P. argued that he rose 'to oppose not petitioning, but to object to Committees, as improper and unjust'. He believed 'debates in Parliament should be held sacred'; and therefore condemned 'any tribunal constituted by dictatorial authority, to censor their proceedings'. Hence, while he was a friend to Burke's Establishment Bill, and quite assured of Honywood's integrity, Sir Horace warned that 'the consequences of associations might carry him far beyond what he intended.' The alternative address thus differed from that first proposed, only in omitting all mention of a committee of correspondence formed to agitate for the desired reforms.
A number of influential individuals seemed to share Sir Horace Mann's misgivings. The Duke of Dorset 'would ever stand up for the freedom of the subject'; but informed the meeting that 'he knew of no undue influence', and that 'even the King did not make use of that influence which was in his power, as six only out of twelve Lords of the Bedchamber were in Parliament'. The Lord Lieutenant supported the second petition because in his opinion associations were 'extremely dangerous'; and advised 'unity, as the proper and true means for an Englishman to assure success'. Sir Edward Dering echoed Dorset's sentiments by counselling: 'Let us not dictate, but unanimously conquer'. Even the patron of New Romney had to admit some abuses in a system where M.P.s were 'bought and sold like ginger-bread men'. Yet as a life-long friend of Government, Dering urged the then still plausible belief that Lord North could be relied upon to check the decline in standards, and suggested that the alarmist cries of the popular party had been fomented in the hope of making gains at the next election. At heart, however, Dering and Dorset had no sympathy with the reforming aspirations of Hyndwood or Mann, and it is impossible to escape the conclusion that they had espoused the latter's petition simply because it offered the best prospect of frustrating the radical campaign in Kent.

In the long-run, such a policy only increased political divisions, since Lord North's failure to make voluntary concessions and his sledge-hammer destruction of the Rockingham's programme, spoke volumes upon the untrustworthy character of ministerialists, and pushed the reformers into more extreme paths. On 4 March, however, the choice before the freeholders appeared straightforward enough. Lord Hannon made a last bid to quiet the audience's fears:

The important business has been moved and objected to on
the whole, but nothing objected to in part; nothing can be objected to. Can men object to the abolition of sinecures, places, unmerited pensions or exorbitant contracts? Not an objection is made; but another petition is produced... There is no association proposed, tho' Lord Camden says they are perfectly legal, Mr. Dunning says the same thing, and the Crown lawyers themselves have declared it also. The King's Attorney General says that associations and committees are perfectly legal. His interest is otherwise and his principles are hostile to the cause of freedom; yet he allows it. But it stands on a still firmer basis; for by the Constitution itself neither committees nor associations are illegal. But at present none are proposed.

Recent experience of associations in America and Ireland sounded the alarm in some Kentish breasts. Yet dissenters had frequently combined for their mutual benefit, and the collapse of the 1769 addresses without tangible results argued strongly the case for coordination and planning. Thomas Townshend may finally have tipped the scales on Honywood's side when he declared: 'No correspondence or association was intended, but a committee appointed for the purpose of conducting the petition'. This gesture towards local independence involved a retreat from the Yorkshire and metropolitan position, but for Kent it was essential if economical reform was not to be lost sight of in a jungle of constitutional disputations.

Still unconvinced, Sir Horace Mann urged that both petitions should be circulated throughout the county in order to obtain a fairer expression of opinion than could be gathered at a meeting of only one eighth of the freeholders. Viscount Dudley thought likewise: '...as to a majority of the present company,' he pointed out, 'that cannot be the sense of the county for they are not all freeholders, and how can their names be taken?' These were little more than delaying tactics, and provoked great confusion. Sir Edward Dering called on the adherents of the second petition to leave the hall and thereby reveal the true strength of their opponents. Mr. Borritt advised both parties to retire together as a mark of unity, and William Deedes suggested two lists be
left for signature. All were impracticable and a series of votes ensued. The need for a petition of some sort was generally agreed, but when Honywood's formula emerged victorious the day's events concluded amid frenzied scenes.

The stage had thus been set for Kent's participation in a unique experiment in extra-parliamentary protest. However we must not fall into the trap cunningly laid by the county's anti-reformers, and concentrate on the details of the two petitions, to the neglect of their shared aims. Despite all other disagreements, Sir Horace Mann was as committed as Lord Mahon and Wilmer Honywood to the fundamental tenets of the Opposition and Yorkshire campaigns. These were expressed to the House of Commons in the following manner.

\begin{quote}
<i>

that your Petitioners cannot view the expensive War, in which this Country is engaged with the Combined Powers of France and Spain, the rapid decline of the British Empire, the great loss of dominion, the decrease of English Manufacturers, the annihilation of a large portion of the National Commerce, the alarming magnitude of the Public Debt, the present and undue influence of the Crown, the enormous load of burdensome taxes yearly increasing, the diminished resources of the Nation, and the distressed state of the Landed Property of this Kingdom, without calling upon this Honourable House, by every tie of honour, interest, duty, to take the most speedy and effectual means to avert the ruin of this lately flourishing and happy country, by a due exertion of those powers which the Constitution has vested in this Honourable House.\end{quote}

The petition then went on to advise 'that an immediate examination be made into the expenditure of public money, into the manner of making all public contracts, and into the mode of keeping and passing all public accounts.' Furthermore the House was asked to investigate ways of reducing 'exorbitant emoluments and pensions'.

Here at last the pent-up anger and frustration of the late 1770's had found full release, and over the next three years Lord Mahon and the Kent Committee were to toil as arduously as any other reformers to secure their relief.

1 Quoted in Stanhope MSS. v1590/253: 'Resolves of the Committee of the County of Kent', f. 1.
2 Ibid., ff. 1-3.
Chapter Three

Kent and the County Association Movement 1780 - 1782

To Professor Christie, the Yorkshire Association was 'the first effective extension of modern political radicalism, in Great Britain from the metropolitan region into the provinces'. Never before had an attempt been made to organise public protest on such a scale, but in 1780 this seemed essential if the impetus gained in the previous year was not to be misdirected and lost. Thus, while the Kent county meeting was a highly significant achievement in itself, the efforts of Lord Mahon and a number of like-minded men to superintend the reform cause during the next few years represents an entirely new phase in the development of local public opinion. The surviving evidence on the Kentish movement is much less extensive than that available for Yorkshire, yet it is still possible to show how the county participated in, and sometimes even led, Wyvill's national campaign.

On 4 March, the county's deliberations had centred upon the rights and wrongs of formal association, and it had been at length agreed to establish nothing more than an independent committee, 'effectually to promote the petition'. In conformity with this resolution, a meeting was assembled in the evening at Maidstone's Star Inn, where the membership and rules of the new body were determined, and Lord Mahon appointed as its chairman. The records of the Kent Committee's subsequent proceedings shed invaluable light on provincial agitation for economical and parliamentary reform in 1780 and 1782. However before moving on to consider

2 Kentish Gazette, 4-8 Mar. 1780; and Stanhope MSS. U1590/53: 'Resolves of the Committee of the County of Kent', f. 4.
these events more fully, much may be learned about the compelling forces at work in county politics from an examination of those men nominated to serve on the committee.

It will be recalled that at the height of the 1779 invasion scare, the Grand Jury opened a subscription and published a list of the most distinguished contributors. Among the 32 men present at the Assizes on 24 July were four peers or sons of peers, five knights or baronets and six clergymen, as well as four sitting and two former Kentish M.P.s. Of the additional 41 names given in the advertisement, eight were peers or sons of peers, three were baronets or knights, eight were clergymen (including the Archbishop and Dean of Canterbury) and there were another three sitting and four former M.P.s. Here, with only a very few exceptions, we have the principal representatives of Kent's landed wealth and prestige, and it cannot be doubted that their influence and respectability would have ensured them a seat on the committee. Yet we find that only eight of the 73 subscribers (Sir R. Betenson, Rev. L. Marshall, Rev. A. D. Brockman, J. Sawbridge, A. H. Shove, Lord Romney, J. Coke and T. Townshend) chose to act alongside Lord Mahon. The conclusion must therefore be that conservatism still predominated in the top-most ranks of the social hierarchy. More than half of the 1779 list absented themselves from Maidstone on 4 March, and 26 of those who did attend failed to join the committee. Scruples about associations may have deterred some, but for the majority the military and financial chaos of recent times had evidently not been sufficient to snap the fetters of Court honours and old allegiance.

Who then were the 100 men who made up the original Kent Committee? Fourteen of them were peers or their sons, most of whom

1 See infra, App. 1 (a).
2 Compare infra, App. 1 (b).
3 See list at end of report in Kentish Gazette, 4th Mar. 1780.
had family or property ties with the county. One such was Sir William Sackville of Afton, eighth Earl of Thanet, whose ancestors had been resident at Rainham in the Late Middle Ages and purchased their Hothfield estate in 1542. By 1780 Thanet had acquired a long Whig pedigree and electoral interest in Cumberland and Westmorland; but his Kentish connections remained strong especially after his union with the daughter of Lord John Philip Sackville. The seventeenth Baron Abergavenny possessed an ancient title and lands in Kent as well as at Edenbridge, while the second Earl of Radnor and his half-brother William Henry Bouverie had property near Folkestone. Radnor was a vocal opponent of Lord North, and all the named aristocrats could probably be counted members of the parliamentary Opposition.

Especially potent seems to have been the influence of the Chathamite group. In 1769 the Great Commoner had guided John Calcraft, and in 1780 his non-party dictum, his views on reform, and especially memories of his glorious victories in India, Canada and on the Rhine, continued to give inspiration. Links between Hayes and Chevening had existed throughout the eighteenth century, and were reaffirmed when Lord Mahon married Lady Hester Pitt. Earl Stanhope, his son, and the second Earl of Chatham were all on the Kent Committee, and on 26 April 1780 the young William Pitt wrote thanking his brother-in-law for the good opinion expressed over a petition which he had recently drafted. He then went on:

The great object of the petition, the reduction of the increased influence of the Crown and the applying of some regulations to the dispersion of public money, which have by degrees brought us to this alarming crisis, is too interesting at this time not to call forth the People,

1 F. M. Hull, Guide to the Kent County Archives Office (Kent County Council, 1950), p. 156; and J. E. Doyle, The Official Baronage of England Showing the Succession, Dignities and Offices of Every Peer from 1066 to 1885 (London, 1888), iii. 524.
2 For example, 'A Country Gentleman' in Kentish Gazette, 19-22 Jan. 1780.
Both Grahame and Pitt found a political mentor in Lord Shelburne, and with so many shared principles and assumptions it was not surprising that in October 1780, the future Prime Minister was co-opted on to the Kent Committee. 2

At Cambridge, Pitt had been the moving spirit in an undergraduate circle which included Viscount Althorp, Edward James Eliot and John Jeffreys Pratt, and the same men were active in the reformist Goostree's Club during 1780. 3 Youthful friendship spilled over into daily politics, and each of Pitt's fellows was chosen at the Star Inn on March. Althorp and his father, the first Earl Spencer, were typical Whig aristocrats; Pratt was the son of Chatham's Lord Chancellor; and Eliot (who was later to marry one of Pitt's sisters) came of a West-country borough-owning family which in 1780 had placed its seats at the disposal of Opposition. 6 Finally in this group we must mention Thomas Townshend, a Whig, who was to hold office under Rockingham and Shelburne. In 1783 Townshend's sister married the second Earl of Chatham, and as Lord Sydney he himself became Pitt's Home Secretary. 7 A close-knit core of this type gave the Kent Committee many advantages which kept it together when others in Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire were falling by the way-side, while the magic of Chatham continued to rally the gentry to renewed struggles.

Among the remaining members were a number of politicians, such as John Crosby of Chislehurst, the former Whig Lord Mayor of London, Thomas Coke of Norfolk, and Philip Lonywood, an

1 Stanhope MSS. U1590/248: Pitt to Grahame, 26 Apr. 1780.
2 'Resolves', f. 24.
4 Namier and Brooke, iii. 459-60.
5 Namier and Brooke, iii. 324.
6 Namier and Brooke, ii. 390.
7 Namier and Brooke, iii. 574-5.
Appleby M.P., whose primary interests lay outside the county. However, the majority of the rank and file was drawn from within the Kentish gentry. Sir John Honywood and Sir Richard Betenson were among the eight recorded baronets or knights, but, as would be expected, it was the lesser, untitled families who figured most prominently. The Arnolds of West Court, Willingham, the Cobbs of Ightham Rectory and the Dalisons of Hamptons, the Polhills, the Lokes, the Milners of Aylesford, the Scotts of Scotts Hall and the Norlands of Lamberhurst, were gentlemen of the middling sort, and were just those for whom the war had meant sacrifices. Some could boast generations of landed forbears, but others, like the James family, the Chapmans and the Streetfields, had risen more recently from merchant or yeoman stock. They laboured under fewer prejudices than the established county families, were aware of the opportunities for a progressive society, and felt themselves entitled to a share in political decision-making.

A final group that demands some mention is that formed by the fourteen clergymen. There existed during the late eighteenth century, a desire among some Cambridge educated clerics to reform the Thirty-Nine Articles in order to avoid the restraints of ritual and to permit the free interpretation of scripture. Dissatisfaction surfaced in the Confessional of Francis Blackburne, and in the Feathers' Tavern petition of 1772, and involved men such as Dr. John Jebb and John himself. The Kentish clergy had long been active in politics, and it seems likely that some of those who participated in the 1780 movement entertained the sympathies of the liberal Anglican party. The Rev. Dr. Richard

Rycroft, rector of Penshurst from 1773-1785, entered St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, in 1754 and can hardly have escaped the influence of Blackburne or the Rev. Thomas Edwards.¹ The Rev. Samuel Preston took his M.A. at Queen's (where Wyvill also studied) in 1774, and then served as rector of Chevening until 1805.² The Rev. Frederick Dodsworth was at Christ's in the late 1750's, and between 1767 and 1782 was vicar of Calne and chaplain to Shelburne³, while his brother Francis, though not a Cambridge man, held a living at Bodington near Faversham, and was engaged in the confused exchange between Wyvill and the master of Bowood in 1782.⁴ A critical attitude towards the established Church and an acquaintance with petitioning and associations was ideal preparation for would-be reformers, and it may well be that in some parts of Kent the pulpit was effectively employed in spreading the radical gospel.

II

By the time the freeholders of Kent met at Maidstone, Sir George Savile had already presented the petition of his constituents, and with the national campaign thus far advanced, it was amongst the earliest duties of the newly constituted committee to elect Lord Mahon, Thomas Streatfield and the Rev. Richard Rycroft 'to confer with the Deputies from other Committees, at the St. Alban's Tavern'.⁵ Almost from its opening on 13 March, the first meeting of deputies was torn by disagreement. The Westminster delegation argued that only the economical reforms of the Rockinghamites should be demanded, while Wyvill pressed equally vehemently for the inclusion of constitutional changes in the programme, and

² Ibid., v. 189.
³ Ibid., ii. 315.
⁴ Hull, Guide, p. 173; and Rev. C. Wyvill, *Political papers, chiefly respecting the attempt of the County of York, and other considerable districts, commenced in 1779, and continued in several subsequent years, to effect a reformation of the Parliament of Great Britain* (York, 1794-1806), iv. 336-7.
⁵ "Resolves", f. 4.
was supported by deputies from Essex, Kent and the other metropolitan districts. A compromise was eventually patched up, by which the proposed shortening of parliaments was to be shelved, but this really satisfied nobody.

With characteristic optimism, Lord Mahon told Wyvill that in his opinion, the scheme, if properly handled, would produce all the good effects that could be expected, from a general union of independent men, and mutual confidence. I admire the wisdom of the Person who drew up that clause so unanimously approved of in our Committee and I find every hour more and more reason, if possible, for being of the opinion, that the question of annual parliaments, or of shortening the duration of parliaments, ought to be quite left out of sight for the present, and ought not to be mentioned on any account whatever. - If that question is started, & not stopped by the excellent letter of Mr. Wyvill's, the cause of the people is, for ever, gone; because opposition will be absolutely knocked to pieces. - If it is not started at all, I have the strongest reason ... to be thoroughly persuaded that our great and good friends will be quite satisfied.

Not for the last time, Mahon had shown himself willing to sacrifice part of the Wilkite inheritance in the pursuit of unity. However, he had misjudged the mood of the radical party, the Rockinghams, and even his own committee, and as the tussle at Westminster developed, all his hoped-for moderation evaporated.

The events of the spring and early summer of 1780 have been often related, and will be touched on here, only where they illuminate the behaviour of the Kent Committee and the county's eighteen ... P.s. On 23 March, Lord Mahon was requested by his committee to return thanks to Edmund Burke, Sir George Savile, Isaac Barré, John Dunning and Philip Jennings Clerke for the several motions made, or bills brought in, by them, to Parliament this session. Public recognition of notable achievements was designed to emphasise the solidarity among reformers, and on this occasion particular mention was made of Lord Shelburne's support for 'the cause of the people'; and John Crewe's proposal to disfranchise revenue officers. Chathamites and Rockinghamites

1 Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 21 Mar. 1780.
2 'Resolves', f. 6.
3 'Resolves', ff. 5-6.
were apparently striving towards a common goal, and there was every indication that Lord North's ejection would not be long delayed.

When the Kent Committee next met, on 22 April, the political climate had radically altered, although not before ministers had been given a severe fright. On 6 April, Charles Harsham had presented the official Kent petition with its 3,120 signatures, and on the same day Sir Horace Mann laid before the House his counter-petition on behalf of a further 1,830 freeholders. Taken together, the two petitions announced that well over half the Kentish electorate was in favour of economical reform, and marked a major advance in popular participation since the wilkite address of 1769. They were also significant in a wider context, since their appearance was made at a crucial moment, and helped set the tone of the ensuing debate. Faced with fresh evidence of the nation's discontent, independent M.P.s deserted the Government and approved Dunning's celebrated motion that 'the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished'. Opposition was jubilant, but as Fox told the Kent Committee:

... in one of the fullest Houses that we have ever known, a complete approbation has been given to the Sentiments of the petitions, with a promise to attend to their Prayers. How that promise will be performed, it is our duty to watch. If we persevere in our exertions I think there is little or no doubt of obtaining our objects; but if we are lulled into Security by success, it is but too probable that the Representatives of the People may relapse into their former inattention to their Constituents.

Dunning's momentous resolution was the zenith of the reform campaign and won universal acclaim. In reality, however, it was an empty gesture and fostered hope that could never be fulfilled. When it came to translating their votes into concrete acts, M.P.s hesitated, and thereby allowed a reprieved administration to strangle each of Opposition's faltering schemes. Philip Jennins:

1 For petitions see Com. Jour., xxxvii. 71-2.
2 'Resolves', f. 12.
Clerke, for example, lamented the loss of his contractors' bill in the Lords:

The House of Peers have done that for the minister which he was ashamed or afraid to do himself, and rendered my feeble endeavours to serve my country ineffectual. A bad presage of their future intentions, when reforms of greater Consideration may come before them. Nothing but a firm union of the friends of freedom and the Constitution can preserve our sinking liberties; I trust that will prevail against that corrupt Influence which has so long operated to the disgrace & ruin of this Country.

Far from donning the mantle of reform, as Sir Edward Dering had once predicted, Lord North had proved himself inimical to its very principle and quite deaf to the repeated pleas of numerous signed and respectable petitions. For the Kent Committee, as for Wyvill and many others, the immediate course was to adopt a more radical course.

When Lord Mahon and his fellow deputies made their report on 23 March it had been declared that a 'General Union' of petitioning counties was 'essentially necessary in the present situation of public affairs'; while on 22 April the committee departed still further from the plan of 4 March by adopting the following resolutions in favour of:

1st. The economical reform requested by the petitions of the People; that plan of strict and rigid frugality now indispensably necessary in every department of the state; that most important regulation for reducing the unconstitutional Influence of the Crown.

2nd. The Proposition for obtaining a more equal representation in Parliament, by the addition of at least One Hundred Members, to be chosen, in a due proportion, by the several Counties of Great Britain.

3rd. The Proposition for Members of the House of Commons to be elected to serve in Parliament for a term not exceeding three years.

Gone, for the moment at least, was the spirit of moderation that had pervaded Kent's county meeting and the conference of deputies.

1 'Resolves', f. 10.
2 'Resolves', f. 5.
3 'Resolves', f. 18.
Lord Haio stood up at Maidstone on 3 July and called upon freeholders to endorse the very same clause, which, three and a half months earlier, he had praised Wyvill for setting aside, and the meeting responded with an overwhelming vote of confidence in the conduct of its committee.¹

In spite of this popular enthusiasm, however, reform had become a dead-letter in parliamentary terms by the beginning of July. Dismay among Opposition groups at the series of reverses after 6 April, changed, rapidly into an open breach between the more conservative followers of Burke and Rockingham, and those who shared Shelburne and Wyvill's desire to pursue electoral modifications as well as the original whig package. This division was widened yet further in early June, when, for almost a week, London was convulsed and terrorised by the Gordon Riots, and tentative negotiations took place between Lord North and the Rockinghams.² Recognising the danger to the popular cause, John Sawbridge lost no time in using the July county meeting to repair some of the damage.³ He reminded freeholders straight away that 'your petitions have not been regarded'; and, while acknowledging that 'some late riots might perhaps have thrown a damp on these measures', asserted vigorously that the destruction was due to 'an indiscriminate body of people... of the very dregs of the people... of no principle, of no religion, who had assembled themselves only to do mischief'. Such a distinction, and many soothing words were required if the concept of associations and the techniques of public protest were to be extracted from the mire into which they had been plunged by the folly and excess of the Protestant Association. The restoration of law and order and the detailed investigation of the tumults gradually

¹ Report in Kentish Gazette, 5-6 July 1780.
³ Kentish Gazette, 5-6 July, 1780.
replaced panic with more sober reflections; but an atmosphere in which men openly canvassed the right to bear arms, was scarcely suited to the revival of a newly radical reform movement.

III

The Gordon Riots having brought down the curtain on the first act of Wyvill's dramatic experiment in national agitation, it was not surprising that ministers should seek to capitalise upon their opponents' disarray. News from America was also more encouraging, and thus, with reports of the victory at Charlestown circulating in the press, the King agreed to an autumn dissolution. As in 1774, Opposition was caught slightly unprepared; but, as Professor Christie has written, national politics still managed to play 'an appreciable part in this general election'. Much may therefore be learned about the awareness of Kentish public opinion by examining in turn the events in each of the county's constituencies.

The four boroughs in which ministerial or private influence was dominant, may be swiftly dealt with, since 1780 merely confirmed the status quo. Sir Edward Dering was not challenged at New Romney, neither was the Admiralty-Ordnance monopoly at Queenborough where Sir Charles Frederick and Sir Walter Rawlinson were returned unopposed. Contests did however take place at Sandwich and Hythe. Having gone over to opposition with Admiral Howe in 1779, Charles Brett could not expect to retain his seat at Sandwich after the dissolution. Nevertheless in a government stronghold he attracted more than three hundred votes and came within sixty-four votes of his chosen successor Sir Richard Sutton. Brett had divided alongside Dunning, while Sutton had spoken out publicly against petitioning, so that, in the light of the

1 'Description of Charlestown' in Kentish Gazette, 1-5 July 1780.
3 Parl. Hist., xxi. 108.
borough's past and future anti-ministerial exploits, it seems unlikely that such considerations were wholly ignored. A similar situation may be inferred at Hythe where Richard James of the Kent Committee and John Stevenson appeared on the interest of Alderman Sawbridge, but were beaten off by the sitting Members.

The pattern of Dover's representation also remained unaltered from that established in 1774. In his 'State' of the constituencies, John Robinson wrote of the borough:

> Mr. Trelavanion uniformly and consistently votes against, and merits an opposition. Whether it will be right to give him one others must judge and determine, but no one deserves it more.

However, when candidates were put in nomination, only John Henniker was sent down with a Treasury mandate in his pocket to share the spoils with the former Wilkite. The expense of a pitched battle was likely to be excessive, and with corrupt influence a topic of widespread concern, there was always the possibility that another safe seat might be undermined.

The prospect of fresh ministerial defeats became even more of a reality at Rochester. With his usual disregard of current public feeling, Robinson had looked forward to the election with confidence.

> The interest of Government stands so favourably here that it is hoped with management and attention, and a sudden declaration at the moment, all being prepared, that Sir George Rodney might be carried with Mr. Hatton. Mr. Gregory is always against.\(^2\)

Other observers, with first-hand experience of the mood among the freemen, knew better, and were not slow to predict electoral difficulties.\(^3\) Rochester was to be alone among the Kentish borough to petition Parliament in the spring of 1783 for the adoption of remedies to re-establish the 'true principles' of the

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1 Namier and Brooke, iii. 562.
2 Namier and Brooke, i. 315.
Constitution; and in the autumn of 1780 many of those inhabi­
tants who would subscribe to the view that 'the House of Commons
does not sufficiently speak the Voice of the People', had decided
to support Nathaniel Smith as well as Robert Gregory. Gregory
had long sailed in the Rockinghamite squadron, but Smith was a
reformer cast in a more radical mould. His published address
proclaimed:

Should I be so happy as to succeed, you may rely upon my
constant Endeavours to shorten the Duration of Parliament,
to obtain a more equal Representation of the People and
a reduction of the unnecessary expenditure of Public
Money, at this Time so properly demanded.  

Smith received 270 votes, and although encouraging, this was
not enough to upset the re-election of Gregory and Finch Hatton.

Since the early eighteenth century the need for economy had
been a principal issue in the conflict between Maidstone's cor­
poration and independent parties. Strict limits had frequently
been placed upon the cost of civic celebrations, and had as often
been ignored, - especially during the charter interregnum of the
1740's. By 1780, therefore, the borough had accumulated consider­
able debts and freemen could hardly fail to see their own plight
as symptomat of a national disease.

With local feeling running high in favour of reform, neither
the candidate of the Earl of Aylesford, nor Sir Horace Mann,
could feel safe in their seats. Aylesford was an avid place­
seeker, and his brother, Charles Finch, had only narrowly defeated
Lord Mahon in a by-election in May 1777. Mann had not gone so
far as Finch and opposed Dunning's motion, but his detestation
of associations and dissension from Honywood's popular petition
were common knowledge. Even Robinson could not over-look the
significance of such contentious views when compiling his survey:

Sir Horace Mann is canvassed against because on the
popular questions he has gone against, but he is often

1 Com Jour., xxxix. 281.
for, and inclines to support Government and the present constitution.

Thus the time seemed ripe for Maidstone's population of tradesmen and dissenters to step aside boldly from the protection of Lord Romney and assert their undoubted electoral muscle. Clement Taylor, a Medway paper-miller, was their champion, and at his first attempt he destroyed for ever the Finch interest. Henceforward, the politics of Kent's county town would be determined, free from all aristocratic interference, between this increasingly radical party and a solidly conservative corporation. Sir Horace Mann survived in 1780, but in 1784 this polarisation helped to hasten his retirement.

On 5 September 1780 the *Canterbury Journal* carried the following paragraph on the Canterbury election:

Known and respected as Mr. Robinson and Mr. Gipps are among you for their amiable characters, and long experienced integrity, they are certainly more worthy your support than any stranger, but they are doubly worthy when standing opposed to a stranger who has forfeited every claim to your good opinion, by the barefaced breach of the most solemn promise, who, on the first day on which he sat in the House of Commons, voted in direct opposition to all he had professed on the day of his election; who, raised by your independent support to the honour of representing you, notoriously sold his own seat to a stoop of the ministry, and by bringing his brother into Parliament procured for him a lucrative Government contract - which he tells you, and probably with truth, he has to share himself. Spurn then with contempt such a candidate, return honest citizens who have always lived among you with credit and reputation, and scorn to give Lord Newhaven another opportunity of enriching himself at the expense of your honour, and independence. Then you chose him first, it did you credit, because you thought him honest. You now know what he is. If you rechoose him, you share his infamy.

To Baron Newhaven (the former Sir William Mayne) it must have seemed as if the wheel had come full circle, and that the frenzied scenes of 1761 were being reenacted with unabated ferocity. On this occasion his crime was that in the late 1770's he had not abandoned his abhorrence of the American rebellion, but had thrown

1 Hamier and Brooke, iii. 100.
in his lot with Lord North and enjoyed riches at his hands.

Nevertheless, Newhaven resolved to brazen out the accusations daily heaped at his door, and joined with his nephew Sir Henry Dashwood in order 'to take off the second votes'.

Ranged against him were Charles Robinson, the city's recorder and a prominent member of the Kent Committee, and the local hop merchant, George Gipps; and after an eight hour poll the ministerialists found 'the spirit and virtue of the citizens irresistible'.

Even more than in 1774, fear and contempt for placemen and the whole mechanism of influence motivated a large body of freemen, and events in the late parliament had taught them to select their M.P.s wisely. Robinson and Gipps were men of proven qualities, and were to vote for reform until it ceased to be a major issue in 1785.

When attempting to assess Government's prospects in the county of Kent, John Robinson constantly ran up against the problem of discovering a suitable candidate. At one moment he focused upon Lewis Thomas Watson, the heir of Lord Sondes, noting: 'He is not very averse to Government, and it is hoped he will succeed, as he is the most moderate and in time may not be averse'. Later he sounded out Privy Seal Dartmouth's son, Lord Lewisham, only to conclude a fruitless search at the end of August by lamenting to Jenkinson:

Kent I find every day would do was there but a good man. But we have no ardour amongst our friends.

This reticence on the part of Kentish ministerialists was not wholly surprising, since when men gathered on 3 July to make nominations, their thoughts still ouzed with the triumphs and

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1 Canterbury Journal, 5-12 Sept. 1780.
2 Ibid.
3 Hamilier and Brooke, i. 312-13.
4 Christie, The End of North's Ministry, 1780-1782, p. 75; Robinson to Jenkinson, 21, 22, 23 Aug. 1780.
betrayals of recent months. The guiding presence of the Kent Committee was also much in evidence. Lord Hannon took a leading role, while the day's proceedings were recorded in the 'Resolves' and a copy sent to Wyvill. 1 Charles Harsham, who had delivered the county's petition, was proposed for a second term of office by Sir Horace Mann, and 'unanimously received with every mark of approbation by the freeholders'. His new colleague was to be John Honywood, whose name had been inextricably linked with reform ever since 4 March. To Matthew Robinson Norris, Honywood's family wealth had 'not arisen from plunder abroad or at home; but from residence on their own estates with economy'; neither had his father 'danced attendance upon a Court'. These qualities, coupled with practical demonstrations of attachment to sound principles, carried the day, and ensured that when the dissolution came no one would have to venture a contest.

As the nominations closed, the freeholders listened to a heart-felt warning from the Rev. R. D. Brockman:

"...the times are critical, and unless the general election brings an independent Parliament this kingdom is undone. On the virtue of the people depends the salvation of our country. For five years there has been no representation of the people, if there had, could Parliament say the petitions of the people ought to be attended to, yet, when propositions were offered, deserted every one of them that could afford the people relief.

To what extent did the overall result in Kent reflect a conscious attempt to rectify this supposed evil? In the vote of 6 April, eleven Kentish K.P.s divided against Dunning and the remaining seven with him. 2 All of the former group sought reelection in 1780 and two (Newhaven and Finch) were defeated; while of the latter, five stood again with only Brett being predictably beaten. Thus when the new House assembled, ten Kentishmen joined the adherents of Lord North, and eight ranged themselves on the

1 'Resolves', ff. 19-20. For report see Kentish Gazette, 5-3 July 1780.
opposition benches. But if the changes in personnel were not
dramatic, it is worth pointing out that three of the four new
M.P.s were members of the Kent Committee, and that in seven of
the nine constituencies reform was raised as an issue.

IV

No sooner had the hustings been dismantled, than the leaders
of the county movement were seeking to resurrect and modify their
plan of reform, and to regain the essential acquiescence of the
bulk of opposition. During the next year, however, public affairs
passed through a relatively tranquil phase, and the 'Friends of
the People' had to be content with behind-the-scenes negotiations
and planning in place of action without-doors. In this period of
consolidation, Lord Bathurst was an important figure, and, as C. Whale
seems to have realised many years ago, there was a very real sense
in which the Kent Committee was used to test the acceptability
of new ideas and to encourage others to resume the fight.¹

On 29 September 1780 Wyvill informed Lord Bathurst of the
proposed course to be pursued in the forthcoming session.

I am authorised by Sir George Cavile to assure you, that
he has no objection to take the lead in moving the great
question, for meliorating the Parliamentary Representation,
by the addition of one hundred knights. But at the same
time, he desires it may be well understood, he thinks it
highly improper to agitate that question in the next
Session of Parliament, unless a rational and feasible plan
can be first prepared; and unless it shall appear, such
[a] prudent plan will be supported by the bulk of the
minority in Parliament. The first condition Sir George
considers as absolutely and indisputably necessary; the
other condition, will admit a less strict and rigorous
interpretation.

Wyvill was sanguine that these stipulations could be satisfied
without retarding the overall programme. There was certainly time
to put together a 'rational and well considered plan', while the
'popular candidates' had been by no means disgraced in the late

¹ C. Whale, 'The Influence of the Industrial Revolution (1760-
1790) on the Demand for Parliamentary Reform', T.H.,
4th Ser. v. (1922), 104.
elections.1

In his reply Mahon declared that, 'I should have a very contemptible Idea of our Negligence, and of the question itself', if the former condition could not be met; but with characteristic impatience he deprecated delay. 'I most heartily wish a united support', he asserted, 'but at all events the question shall be started some time this next session.'2 Wyvill admitted to Savile that such a response was 'not quite what I could have wished it to be'; nevertheless there was no reason to believe that Mahon would in any way injure the cause by an impetuous act.

On the contrary, while these preliminary discussions were going ahead, Mahon was labouring in the Kent Committee to hammer out a coherent policy of reform. A meeting on 19 October expressed its intention to co-operate with Yorkshire and Sir George Savile in 'restoring purity to Parliament'; and went on to recommend Mahon and all other members with a seat at Westminster 'to support to the utmost, ...the motion for adding to Parliament, at least One Hundred members to be chosen in due proportion by the several Counties of Great Britain'. Mahon was probably also instrumental in procuring the resolution:

that the obtaining of a law for taking the suffrage of the people in such a mode as to prevent both Expense in elections, and the operation of undue Influence therein, is necessary towards ensuring the Freedom of Parliament; and that in County Elections, the taking of the roll in the several Hundreds, or in similar districts, would be highly convenient to the electors, and would tend, in an exceeding great degree to prevent both undue Influence, and Expense.

In the middle and late 1780's Mahon was to conduct an almost single-handed campaign to secure these alterations, which many radicals felt would increase the effectiveness of new Knights.

In 1780 the scheme was just part of a package for which Lord Mahon

1 Wyvill, Political Papers, iii. 263-4: Wyvill to Mahon, 29 Sept. 1780.
2 Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 5 Oct. 1780.
3 Wyvill, Political Papers, iii. 265: Wyvill to Savile, 14 Oct. 1780.
hoped to win the consent of Opposition.¹

When sending a copy of the Kentish resolutions to Shelburne on 23 October, Mahon stated his belief that when M.P.s reassembled, the Yorkshire movement would be supported by well over two hundred of them. Disagreements were to be expected, but he was convinced that 'firmness' to the principle of augmenting the county representation was the best way of winning over the hesitant.² Wyvill, for his part, acknowledged that the proposals were 'better adapted to conciliate and unite all real friends of the public in the common cause; on the grounds, presumably, that they achieved the most controversial reforms.'³ However he does not appear to have reciprocated Mahon's confidence in the future allegiance of the Rockinghams. The last few months had taught Wyvill to cherish the independence of his association, and had seen him try unsuccessfully to exclude all K.P.s from the meeting of deputies.⁴ Nevertheless, with public interest apparently on the wane, it was not easy to resist Mahon's efforts to concentrate upon an all-embracing parliamentary strategy. Opposition might prove fickle, yet without their assistance nothing could ever be achieved.

But would Burke and like-minded Whigs participate at all. On 6 July, Mahon forwarded to Shelburne a copy of a letter lately arrived from Wyvill which reported the rumour that '...Lord Rockingham is on the point of joining us'. Mahon was sceptical, although he could not help remarking: '...for the sake of the public I sincerely wish the news of the intended conversion may be true'.⁵ Reformers were clearly on the alert for any sign of a reconciliation, and despite the sounding of a false alarm on this occasion, employed every possible means of persuasion. In August Mahon suggested that pressure might be put on the Cavendishes, either through Sir George

¹ 'Resolves', ff. 22 - 25.
³ Wyvill, Political Papers, iii. 276-7: Wyvill to Mahon, 27 Oct.
⁴ Wyvill, Political Papers, iii. 170-9 and 190-1: Wyvill to J. Fox, 15 Feb. and Wyvill to Mahon, 28 Feb. 1780.
⁵ Stanhope MSS. U1590/250: Mahon to Shelburne, 6 July 1780.
Savile, or by forming Lord John Cavendish's York constituents into an association. And finally in October he made a direct appeal to the Marquis himself.

I take the liberty of sending your lordship herewith, the Unanimous Resolutions of the Committee of the County of Kent, sincerely hoping and trusting, that the important objects of Constitutional Reformation, mentioned in the said Resolutions, will meet with your lordship's approbation, decided concurrence and support.

Your lordship will, no doubt, take notice, that the Committee of the County of Kent have not mentioned, the final Resolution, the Proposition for shortening the Duration of Parliaments.

From the example of the Kent Committee, Rockingham would hopefully derive a clearer knowledge of his would-be allies, and after a winter of contemplation give his assent to a union.

While Lord Mahon awaited the fruit of his endeavours, the attention of the reformers was switched in March and April 1781 to a second meeting of deputies. Mahon was accompanied by the Rev. Edmund Marshall and the Rev. Richard Wyndham, and as usual was in the thick of the debate. In many respects the conference was an unqualified disaster, for, having alienated a number of moderate delegations with talk of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, Dr. Jebb and the extreme radicals were themselves incensed by the lukewarmness of the petition finally agreed upon. Probably with an eye on the response of Opposition, it was decided to do nothing more than repeat the 1780 grievances and to remind M.P.s of their 6 April commitment to afford relief. The Kentish party could have no quarrel with such small beer, but the constitutional implications of signing the joint address raised many a complex issue. As the three told Wyvill:

As the important question will probably be agitated in the Meeting of Deputies, *Whether the Petition to be presented to Parliament should be presented by us on behalf of our-

1 Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 15 Aug. 1780.
selves, or should be presented by us as agents and delegates"; we think it necessary to inform you (and through you the Meeting) that we neither can, nor will join in any petition to Parliament, presented by us in the name of other Electors of England.

Mahon and his colleagues felt they had no authority to act in any other capacity than as individuals, while in the back of their minds may have been the fear that an injudicious signature might trigger-off in Kent a renewed outcry against associations and all their attendant evils. For others, like Wyvill, who had no such local factors to contend with, Dunning's assurances on the legal position, and the need to impress Parliament with at least a suggestion of popular support, were the over-riding considerations and thus the petition went ahead. 2

The need for reformers to join ranks at a critical moment eventually led Rycroft and Marshall to set aside their scruples and sign. However as the Commons' debate on the petition progressed through 8 May, Lord Mahon must have felt justified in his continued aloofness. Filmer Honywood recalled in his speech, how Kent had sent up two petitions in 1780, but was at great pains to stress their unity on the demand for economy, rather than to emphasise their divergence over committees of correspondence. 3

Sir Horace Mann, on the other hand, was not nearly so eager to forget the past for the sake of the present. Having refreshed the House's memory as to his late constitutional objections, he turned to the concern of the day.

It was true, indeed, that the names subscribed to the petition then before the House, were set down simply as the names of individuals in their own private capacity; but still every one knew, that however respectable they were in that capacity, they were nevertheless the delegates of the counties in which they were freeholders; and therefore as he could not separate in the present instance the idea of the delegate from that of the individual, he was determined to oppose the motion made by the hon. baronet, though he would be ready to second him in any proposition he should make of himself...

1 Wyvill, Political Papers, iv. 139: Rycroft, Marshall and Mahon to Wyvill, 15 Mar. 1781.
And concluded:

Every scheme for reformation should originate in that House, which contained the only true delegates of the people. The petition before them came in a very questionable shape. He was for reprobating it, and treating it with the contempt it deserved. He exhorted them to maintain the dignity of the House with firmness.

The subsequent loss of the motion by 212 votes to 132 boded ill for reform in Parliament, while Sir Horace Mann's unyielding tone gave notice that the Kent Committee could expect fierce opposition when next they assembled the county.

By this juncture also, it was becoming plain that very little was to be expected from the Rockingham Whigs. Wyvill probably drew this conclusion when a plan to abolish some of the nation's most corrupt boroughs was rejected at a Yorkshire meeting on 9 May, although both he and Lord Mahon persisted for some months in a belief that a voluntary scheme and the payment of compensation might yet bring about a change of heart. They were not long deceived, however, for a letter from Lord Effingham of 22 July unmistakably revealed that even opposition peers were loath to part with boroughs which returned men of substance and talent to Westminster. Effingham argued that government-dominated constituencies were the real 'dead weight against the people'; and until these abuses were attended to, it was, to say the least, unlikely that private magnates would vote away their own property. Lord Mahon detected the same intransigent attitude at a national level. On 24 July he told Wyvill:

Lord Rockingham does not yet seem to meet us. He is still of opinion that the country at large does not care for those kinds of object.

Yet, after a year of frustration and delay, the pendulum was about to swing back with disconcerting rapidity.

1 Parl. Hist., xxii. 144.
2 Wyvill, Political Papers, iv. 249-300 and 311-12: Wyvill to Effingham, 15 July and Mahon to Wyvill, 24 July 1781.
3 Wyvill, Political Papers, iv. 302-3: Effingham to Wyvill, 22 July 1781.
4 Wyvill, Political Papers, iv. 311-12: Mahon to Wyvill, 24 July 1781.
As rumours of Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown swelled into fact, 'Britannicus' was emboldened to thunder his bitter denunciations from the Kentish Gazette.

There never was a time as yet recorded in the annals of history, when this kingdom either laboured under such a multiplicity of misfortunes, or was promised with such a weight of calamity in future; nor is it possible for any rational or intelligent being to feel the one and consider the other, without reflecting on the cause or dreading the effect.

Thus with 1782 dawned Lord North's gravest crisis, and for the reformers a precious second chance to redeem past errors and to grasp the elusive prizes of 1780.

Some newspaper correspondents in the early months of the year sought to appeal once more to the self-interest of a still depressed rural community. 'Foresight', for example, bewailed the ruin of England's farmers, and contrasted their plight most unfavourably with what he conceived to be the flourishing state of Irish agriculture. However, by 1782 the emphasis of the reform campaign had unmistakably shifted from economical to constitutional change, with the result that much greater stress was laid upon political rights and grievances. 'Britannicus' reminded his readers of their liberties of debate, conscience and election, without which 'the possession of life would be a burthen, the possession of riches not secure...'. But were Britons really free, or had their birthright been cruelly neglected? 'Britannicus', for one, had no doubts:

At the last general election we had great reason to hope, from the exertions made by the friends of freedom, that we should have been able, once more, to recover the dying embers of liberty, and restore to this kingdom all the privileges and blessings it formerly possessed. But alas! our hopes proved but ideal, the public money was employed to ruin the public; contracts were given, pensions and sinecures granted, and men perjured and Britons deceived. A majority and a tremendous one is still preserved, our

1 Kentish Gazette, 12-16 Feb. 1782.
money expended, our honour as a nation lost, and we are called upon to grant another supply to carry on a war with our fathers, brothers and relatives.

'But, my countrymen,' he concluded, 'you may redress these wrongs. In you is the legal power. Heaven grant you may use it, and prove to the world BRITONS WILL BE FREE.'

Before Kentishmen had girded on their armour, however, the county's b.P.s had been called upon to act. In the crucial series of votes between 20 February and Kous' motion of no confidence of 15 March, the familiar phalanx of ten ministerialists kept close behind Lord North, while their eight colleagues as regularly lined up with his foes. The decisive group were, of course, the country gentlemen, and among them Sir Horace Mann's sentiments were now paramount.

...from principle he had supported the American War, under the idea that it was just and practicable: expense, however, had convinced him, that the object we had set out with, was unattainable: his eyes were now open, and he saw that it would be madness to pursue it any longer: it was the best thing that could be done, in our present situation, to put an end to a war, as speedily as possible, which, if not soon terminated, would put an end to our political existence.

To the independent Charles Marsham: 'The honour of the country had been tarnished in the hands of the present administration,' and this was 'sufficient reason for him to wish to have the present ministers removed.' The House concurred, and at last Lord North's nightmare was over.

Relief mingled with new hope as men acclaimed their deliverance.

Yes, fellow citizens, I will be bold to affirm, the people of England had never greater reason to rejoice than they have at the passing moment. They may once more take pride, honest pride, in the appellation of Briton.

And again:

Joy to you, fellow citizens - Thrice heartily do I bid you joy. A ministry which have involved their country in ruin and dishonour, have at length given way.

1 Kentish Gazette, 12-16 Feb. 1782.
3 Earl. List., xxii. 1075.
4 Earl. List., xxii. 1181.
5 Kentish Gazette, 13-16 Mar. 1782.
After twelve unhappy years, fresh counsellors were about the King, and it was for the people to aid them in banishing waste and storming the citadel of influence.

The Kent Committee duly reassembled on 17 May after an adjournment of eighteen months, and having approved the decisions of the second meeting of deputies, resolved to summon a county meeting for the purpose of:

proposing an Address of Thanks to his Majesty for having graciously been pleased to appoint to the administration of Affairs, such persons as have the confidence of the Nation, and for having, with a paternal regard for the situation of this Country, recommended those means of Economy in the article of Public expenditure, which have been so strongly requested by the Petition of this County to the last House of Commons.

The day appointed was 8 June, and with the guidance of John Sawbridge from the chair, the freeholders enshrined their committee's attitude in the following document:

We entertain the most grateful sense of your Majesty's benign intentions to alleviate the burdens of your People, by a Reform your Civil Establishment, and by your recommendation to Parliament of an effectual plan of economy through every branch of the public expenditure; and we feel the most perfect satisfaction, that your Majesty has no reserves with your People - such a declaration cannot fail to produce in a loyal people, an emulation to convince your Majesty, that your reliance on their affections for the true honour of your Crown and government, is not misplaced.

However the great majority of freeholders exhibited no desire to let ministers rest upon their laurels. On 7 May Pitt had only narrowly failed to obtain a Commons committee to examine the state of the representation, and it therefore seemed an opportune moment to petition Parliament on the same subject. It was declared:

That your Petitioners, sensible of the excellency of that Constitution under which they have the happiness to live, most ardently wish to have it maintained upon the true principles on which it is founded.

That your Petitioners further show that it is necessary to the welfare of the people, that the Commons House of Parliament should have a common interest with the Nation, and that in the present state of the representation of the people in Parliament, the House of Commons

1 'Resolves', f. 32.
2 For meeting and text of address and petition, see 'Resolves', ff. 32-5, and Kentish Gazette, 8-12 June 1782.
do not sufficiently speak the voice of the people. Your Petitioners therefore humbly pray this honourable House to take into their most serious consideration, the present inadequate state of the representation... and to apply such remedy to this great Constitutional Evil, as to this honourable House may seem meet.

The language was moderate, and no specific remedy was mentioned. Nevertheless the petition did not go unchallenged.

As in 1780, the loudest opposition came from Sir Horace Mann. Although acknowledging that there 'undoubtedly was room for a reform', Mann had deplored Pitt's motion of 7 May, because in his opinion 'it was property and other interests, rather than simply people', that Parliament was designed to represent.¹ Measures such as the abolition of rotten boroughs were 'speculative' and 'theoretic', and likely to spread dissension through the state. He was also alarmed that dangerous innovations were being foisted upon an unwary county by a minority of over-zealous enthusiasts, and voiced his fears at Maidstone and subsequently in the press.² The available evidence certainly does confirm that the petition was somewhat unexpected, but if Lord Mahon and 'An East Kent Freeholder' are to be believed, its appearance was due to the 'excellent disposition' of the meeting, rather than to a long-meditated stratagem.³ Whatever its origins, however, the petition was adopted, and together with the detailed analysis of the constitution's defects circulated by Matthew Robinson Morris in response to Mann's criticisms⁴, symbolised the coming of age of reform as an issue in Kentish politics.

VI

The Kent petition and others like it were intended ultimately to coincide with a second reform motion to be made by Pitt in the following year. In the meantime, the precise nature of the

¹ Parl. Hist., xxii. 1430.
² Kentish Gazette, 8-12 June 1782.
³ Compare Wyvill Mss: Mahon to Wyvill, 15 June 1782 and Kentish Gazette, 26-29 June 1782.
⁴ Copy in Wyvill, Political Letters, iv. 169-85: Matthew Robinson Morris to Wyvill, 3 July 1782.
application had to be determined, and it is interesting to note how its final character was shaped by a particularly fluid political environment.

After only a few months in office, the Rockingham Whigs had quite exhausted their meagre store of economical palliatives, and when Burke, Fox and the rest resigned shortly after their leader's death, Mahon told Wyvill:

I am happy they are gone... because I am convinced that, by a firm, manly, and at the same time, a cautious conduct, we shall obtain more now, than we could ever have done before.

Mahon's reliance upon the convictions of the new Prime minister, Lord Shelburne, was not altogether shared by his correspondent. Wyvill still hankered after a united 'popular party', since in the present situation there was always the danger that reform would become entangled in the disputes over peace terms, or that George III might recall his former ministers in order to stave off the hated changes. The sole remaining safeguard was thus, in his opinion, 'an immediate declaration' on the part of administration, and a widespread agitation in the provinces in favour of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's scheme.¹

But how ambitious should the reformers be in their demands? Mahon approved the reduction of new M.P.s to sixty, as being a realistic concession to the feelings of the House. However his belief that politicians were gradually being converted to the idea of reform, led him to counsel against seeking the abolition of thirty corrupt seats. A modest addition to the representation, coupled with his own polling bill, might well prove acceptable, but would assuredly be jeopardised by the premature introduction of more radical concepts.³ Wyvill and the Yorkshire Committee chose to disregard the advice, and on this question of tactics

¹ Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 18 Sept. 1782.
³ Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 18 Sept. 1782.
the Chevening-Northallerton axis was fatally dislocated.

The Kent petition, from which such great things had been expected, seems to have met with a reasonable response in the county. Perhaps because it eschewed concrete proposals, Ashon had been able to inform Wyvill in October 1782 that: 'Many sign it who were against it before.' It was presented on 7 May 1783, and on the same day Marsham, Honywood, Sipps, Robinson, Trevorion and Taylor were among the 149 M.P.s to divide with Pitt. However 293 other M.P.s tramped through the lobbies to quash the motion in a decisive fashion. It was, indeed, a fatal blow for reform as an issue in both local and national politics, although not a wholly unexpected one. As Wyvill had predicted, the question had been up-staged by the negotiations with France and America, and by May 1783 the alliance between Fox and North had already captured the attention of the public. In Kent, Lord Mahon had stepped aside from the main-stream of the Yorkshire movement, and no-one was found to replace his energetic leadership. The 'Resolves' record no further meetings of the county's committee after May 1782, and as will be seen later, in 1785 no attempt was made to assist Pitt's final effort.

In terms of legislative enactments, therefore, the association movement had entirely failed to secure any alterations in the basic fabric of British politics. However it would be wrong to pass on without mentioning a number of ways in which the events of 1780 to 1783 did very considerably impress themselves on Kentish society. For the first time, Kent had participated in an organised national campaign, and had done so through an organ quite independent of the county's traditional administrative and representative structure. As a result, the task of leadership had fallen upon a class of men not normally considered for the most

1 Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 29 Oct. 1782.
2 Wyvill, Political Papers, ii. 255-5. For petition see Com. Jour.
prestigious offices. Experience in political decision-making bred a new confidence in the ranks of the lesser gentry, and thereby helped hasten the retreat from oligarchy begun earlier by Wilkes.

County meetings, petitions and addresses acquainted many freeholders with the issues of current importance, but public opinion could only be mobilised on a wide enough scale and over many months by constant and painstaking attention. Hence while policy was still determined within a relatively small circle, Wyvill and Mahon devoted much thought and effort to propaganda. All resolutions of the Kent Committee, as well as communications to and from distinguished figures, were ordered to be printed, and accounts of the deputies' meetings of 1780 and 1781 were widely circulated. In January 1781 Lord Mahon asked Wyvill for copies of the Yorkshire petition, which he wished 'to send to the Gentlemen of our County'; and on 5 November he readily accepted an offer of 250 to 300 reproductions of a second address. Extensive use was also made of the press to transmit reports of debates at Maidstone and to answer criticisms at length. Mahon was keenly aware of the potential of what was still a relatively new phenomenon. He advised Wyvill late in 1781:

![Unquestionably, the most effectual way of giving a Piece of this particular Nature, the most general & universal circulation amongst those for whom it is principally calculated, is to get it inserted in all the Public Papers, both in Town and Country, Morning, Evening, Dayly & Weekly, as well as in those which come out three times per Week. The number of Papers is considerable in London, & therefore, in point of Expense, not perfectly calculated for a Communication, to the Public, of a less interesting & important nature, than the Present. But, as each Paper, is read by ten or twenty Thousand Persons upon an average, every day; it is evident, that, in comparison & proportion to the Public Extent of Circulation they occasion, the Expense is very Small, when compared to any other kind of circulation.]

1 Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 29 Jan. and 5 Nov. 1781.
2 Wyvill MSS: Mahon to Wyvill, 5 Nov. 1781.
none of these devices had been utilised with such skill in the
days of Wilkes, and it was undoubtedly the prolonged awareness
of public affairs which they made possible, that fitted Kentish-
men to join in the 'race of party' of Pitt's early years.
Part Two
Chapter Four
Public Opinion and Party Politics

The dissolution of 15 March 1784 brought to a close a protracted constitutional crisis whose details have been often related. The fall of Lord North was followed by a series of short-lived ministries, each lacking the internal cohesion, the unity of purpose, the inspired leadership and the command of patronage necessary to secure the confidence of Parliament and the public, and it was not until the King appointed the youthful William Pitt that a firm hand once more grasped the tiller of state. However, while making possible a further period of political stability, the Coalition's dismissal fundamentally altered the structure and atmosphere of English politics at a national and a local level. Since late 1779, opposition to Government had concentrated upon reform, be it economical or parliamentary, but after December 1783 such a strategy was no longer appropriate. Pitt constantly endeavoured to extend Burke's administrative reforms, while on the question of the representation, he and Fox found themselves in the same lobby. Reform very soon found itself displaced by a fresh set of issues which reflected differing interpretations of recent events and of the Constitution. Consequently in the years immediately prior to the French Revolution, men thought and acted more in terms of 'party' than at any other time between 1714 and the Reform Bill of 1832.

I

The division of the electorate into Foxite and Pittite parties was well advanced by the time of the 1784 general election, when the majority of voters in the open constituencies showed themselves far less concerned with reform than with the personalities of the central protagonists and the past and future allegiance of their nominees. Any discussion of this shift of interest inevitably raises the much debated role played by public opinion in the

election, and thereby provides an excellent opportunity both to assess the expansion of political awareness since 1780, and to add new material to what has been a long and fruitful historical controversy.

Nineteenth-century writers had no doubt that Pitt was swept home on a tide of popular enthusiasm. Yet for W. T. Laprade the notion that 'corruption for once became quite unnecessary' was wholly unacceptable, as it rested on the 'illogical view' that the outcome 'was decided by a force which... had not been the dominant factor in previous elections and did not become such for a long time afterwards.' Pitt's failure to go straight to the country argued a degree of uncertainty in the minds of ministers, while the evidence of behind-the-scenes manipulation afforded by John Robinson's papers seemed to prove that, 'When Pitt finally dissolved parliament... the membership of the new House of Commons was no longer a matter of doubt.' Not until the former Secretary to the Treasury's predictions were compared with the results at the polls was Laprade's error detected, and a more realistic via media attained. The transformation of politics since 1780 naturally meant that Government and private patrons would use their influence to eject unfriendly members, but, as recent studies of Yorkshire and some eastern counties have demonstrated, hostility to the Whigs and Korthites could turn upside-down traditional loyalties. In both these respects, Kent was no exception.

We may begin with the four Kentish boroughs classified as 'Friendly, Close or Under Decisive Influence', where established interests suggested future adherence to Government. Robinson noted against Sandwich:

This is a borough of contests. Government has a pretty strong interest there and succeeded, at the last fight, the opposite party, but there may be another contest. Mr. Stephens is probably safe, but Sir Richard Sutton is not so sure, particularly if he should not be supported by government. Mr. Brett stood there last.

In December 1783 both sitting Members were described as 'con', but Robinson predicted that a fresh election would alter this to 'pro' and 'hopeful'. Philip Stephens was a typical eighteenth-century civil servant, who detested faction, and who could be relied upon to support the King's chosen ministers as a matter of principle. Sutton, on the other hand, who had voted against the peace preliminaries and for the East India Bill, remained loyal to North in 1784 and hence did not attempt to contest Sandwich. The way was thus open for Charles Brett to resume his representation of the borough, and his seat at the Admiralty Board under the patronage of Lord Howe.

Turning to Queenborough, Robinson wrote that it was: 'Under the arrangement of government to bring in two members'. He was proved quite correct, for, despite service of ten and thirty years respectively, neither of the Northite Members, Rawlinson and Frederick, felt able to seek re-election. In the contest which did materialise, an Ordnance official and a naval officer were returned top of the poll. The only possible danger to the continuance of Government's monopoly in boroughs such as Queenborough in 1784 seemed to lie in the operation of Crewe's Act. However the evidence of surviving lists of freemen and poll books suggests that this was not so far-reaching as many contemporaries

1 Laprade (ed.), Parliamentary papers, op. 50-1.
2 Ibid., p. 87.
believed. From a collection of admittedly rather obscure lists, the Queenborough electorate may be estimated at about 133 in 1761, 150 in 1768, 117 in 1774 and 139 on the eve of reform in 1780.\(^1\) Although the 1784 poll book is not extant, approximately 100 men appear to have voted, while in 1790, 112 freemen attended at the hustings.\(^2\) Clearly the effects of the Whigs' bill were only slight and easily bypassed, with the result that Queenborough remained among the safest ministerial seats until the mid-1820's.

Hythe was another of the boroughs where a substantial disfranchisement of revenue officers had been expected. Nevertheless, Robinson was hopeful of two Pittite conversions. 'With the support of government the present members will make their election good here again', he wrote, 'and they deserve it, for they are very steady and always well inclined to support government.'\(^3\) Farnaby and Evelyn were duly rechosen, and, by repelling a renewed challenge from the now Foxite John Sawbridge, no doubt gave added satisfaction to Pitt. However, the victory was in part attributable to the coming-of-age of the independent interest among the neighbouring gentry, which William Evelyn had been cultivating since the ousting of the Sackvilles. Sawbridge's radicalism was quite unacceptable, but Evelyn was to exhibit his freedom from ministerial influence by opposing Pitt on a number of issues before the French Revolution.

No such independence was likely at New Romney. 'This borough is Sir Edward Dering's', noted Robinson, 'He will most likely return himself and Mr. Jackson again, and as things change, Sir Edward is not obstinate.'\(^4\) Dering was an unfettered country-
member of the old school, who in the debate on the resignation
of the Rockinghamists on 9 July 1782, defined his principles thus:

When he took an attachment once, he was not apt to
change it without good cause; thus having formed a good
opinion of the administration antecedent to that of
Mr. Fox, he still retained a predilection for the members
of it, and he wished to have supported them and kept them
in office. Hay, so zealous a friend was he, that where
he attached himself politically, he could go the length
of supporting ministers at all hazards, of whose talents
and integrity he had a good opinion.

North's coalition must therefore have come as a profound shock
to an admirer who had freely acknowledged that 'he never had much
liked' Fox's political conduct. Thus while voting for the East
India Bill, Dering's store of goodwill towards 'the noble Lord
in the blue ribbon' was almost used up, and at a by-election in
1784 he made available a seat at New Romney for the Pittite East
India man, Richard Atkinson.

Grants of £2,000 at Sandwich and Hythe, and an unspecified
sum to Sir Edward Dering, coupled with other means of electoral
enducement had evidently not lost their persuasive power. All
eight seats so far considered had been filled by Coalitionists
before December 1783, while in the new Parliament seven were among
Pitt's regular followers. In the remaining Kentish constituencies,
however, other factors determined the course of the elections.

As Mrs. George has written of the election, 'On the one hand it
was a new administration clearing out the followers of the old
ministry from the constituencies under its control, on the other
hand it was an appeal to public opinion.'

The postponement of a dissolution not only allowed the 'Rats'
to scramble for the vacant places, but gave government propagan-
dists an opportunity to employ their pens in an often bitter
denunciation of the Coalition and all its works. Both Kentish
newspapers demonstrated a distinct preference for Pitt, and were

2 Ibid.
3 George, 'Fox's Martyrs', 138.
regularly filled with parliamentary debates, details of important speeches and meetings, and reproductions of petitions and addresses, as well as columns of correspondence from local partisans. Recent events came under close scrutiny as, for example, in a 'POLITICAL RETROSPECT of the Conduct of Mr. FOX and the Earl of shrewsbury', which very unfavourably reviewed the former's early career and recalled his votes against wilkes and grenville's Act. In the same edition, the Kentish Gazette considered East Indian affairs, and having agreed that reform was urgently needed, protested that fox's ill-starred bill had not attempted what was necessary.

The question of right was scarcely canvassed. Compassion and pity attached the heart to their interest, but justice and equity were overlooked and forgotten. In the further prosecution of this business in the House of Lords, the Secretary's Bill of Reform was found to be a bill of annihilation, the statement of the Company's affairs was found to be falsely made; the principle of the bill was found to be unconstitutional: it deprived the executive power of its just right.

Fox's motives were not, of course, wholly bad, but his bill was undeniably an attempt to make up the Coalition's lack of patronage, and as such was quite unacceptable to gentlemen who not long before had been petitioning against undue influence. There seemed to be a threat to the sovereignty of Parliament, while the violation of charter rights touched a tender chord in every property owner.

Many of the more ephemeral methods of publicity were also readily seized upon. Carlo Khan has become legendary, and Fox was variously portrayed as Cromwell and Milton's Satan. Readers of the Kentish press exhibited a particular liking for poetry, and here too Fox and North were the butts for many a political satire. However the Government did not escape entirely unscathed, and it is interesting in the light of recent debate, that the

1 Kentish Gazette, 7-10 Jan. 1784.
2 Ibid.
figure most frequently singled out for abuse was Earl Temple.¹

When rumours began to circulate that Temple was about to re-enter the Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal, one Kentish bard wrote:

Good men are agreed it's proper and fit
That the State should be govern'd by Fox and by Pitt
While those who in secret influence deal
Vote Temple the fittest for Lord Privy Seal.
Mount then, my good Lord, an undertaker stand
Descend the back stairs privy seal in hand.
An office so proper sure none would dispute
For Bute or Earl Temple, Earl Temple or Bute.²

The war of words in the press was accompanied by a campaign of more than 200 loyal addresses to the King from many counties and enfranchised boroughs. Dr. Cannon tells us that no such address was forthcoming from Kent, due to opposition on the Grand Jury, probably inspired by, or in deference to, the county's Members who were engaged in the St. Alban's Tavern mediation.³ However, on 14 April, county election business was preceded by the proposal of an address to the King by Lord Naunton, which having been seconded by William Geary, "was approved of by the meeting with very few dissentients".⁴ Its appearance long after Pitt had triumphed in the Commons, further indicates that the inter-party negotiations had been allowed to run their course, and possibly explains why it never reached St. James's. Its text is worthy of quotation in full:

we the Sheriff, Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Kent, beg leave to return our most cordial thanks to your Majesty, for having dismissed from your Majesty's Councils, those Ministers, who, by their public conduct, have justly forfeited the confidence of the people.

² Kentish Gazette, 14-18 Feb. 1784.
³ Cannon, cit., p. 187 n 6.
⁴ Stanhope, pp. 1790/55: 'Resolves of the committee of the County of Kent', f. 36; and Canterbury Journ., 13-20 Apr. 1784.
And we assure your majesty, that we will support the present ministers appointed by your majesty, as long as they continue to support the true principles of the constitution.

These were the sentiments of 'a far greater number than ever before recorded' of Kent's electorate, and their uncompromising hostility to the Coalition was frequently echoed as the open and semi-open constituencies went to the polls.

Compiled in December 1783, Robinson's survey made no allowances for the popular tumult of the ensuing months, and has thus caused much confusion. His comments on Rochester, for example: 'Probably the same members', was woefully wide of the mark, as was his post-election prediction of 'hopeful' and 'con'.

Robinson probably expected George Finch Hatton, who had enjoyed the government interest since 1774, to abandon North. Like Queenborough's M.P.s, however, he stayed faithful and was consequently defeated by Sir Charles Middleton, an admiral and naval administrator, who received £1,330 from the Secret Service fund. Much more instructive of the popular mood was the fate of the borough's independent seat, with which the name of Robert Gregory had been intimately connected for a decade. Warner described Gregory as '...a very honourable, incorrupt, independent man, simple, or rather shy and repulsive in his manners, unadorned by any accomplishment of mind, but laborious, attentive to business, and possessing very extensive local information on East India concerns.'

Although on one occasion he warmly denied in the Commons that he was 'a devoted partisan of the opposition', he was a close friend of Fox, and was named as one of the infamous commissioners by the East India Bill. On 1 December 1783 he defended the Bill which he felt offered the best remedy yet proposed to the 'perplexed
and involved affairs of the Company, and assured the House that 'he acted in this, as he had ever done in all matters of trust, with the most scrupulous integrity'. 1 But in the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion, Gregory could not escape the imputation of self-interest. His Rochester constituents were not impressed by his protestations, and early in April he announced his retirement. 2 The vacancy was filled by Nathaniel Smith, a Pittite, and a leading opponent of Fox's Bill at East India House. The election at Dover, no less than Smith's return at Rochester, demonstrates the fragility of past service in the face of rampant public opinion. Robinson's rather confused assessment was thus again found wanting:

Although it is the wish of the inhabitants of Dover because it is so much their interest, and although if a good man could be found to stand there, he would probably carry it, yet as Lord North is Lord Warden there may be some doubts about it, and therefore both men are classed as they stand now, against. 3

The Coalitionist, John Henniker, chose the dissolution to make a discreet withdrawal, leaving the old Wilkite, John Trevanion, in an unholy alliance with Lord North, against whose malevolent influence so much of his career had been directed. The bizarre spectacle was symptomatic of the times, and can only have aided the new candidates who declared themselves, 'strongly attached to King and Constitution, and firm and secure friends to Mr. Pitt.' 4 James Luttrell had remained neutral through the disputes of 1783 until it became clear who held the key to future patronage, 5 while Robert Preston was a London merchant and steady opponent of Fox's Bill. Despite North's help (a factor greatly over-estimated by Robinson) the Pittites were emphatically

4 * Kentish Gazette,* 27-31 Mar. 1784.
5 He was rewarded with a place; * Aspinall (ed.), The Correspondence of George III,* i. 47; * Pitt to George III,* 30 Mar. 1784.
The defeat of Bazeley and Irevanion is made the more impressive when one considers their local associations. A certain John Bazeley had served his country as captain of the castle, and then, during two terms as Dover's mayor in 1758 and 1761, had undertaken improvements of the harbour. Irevanion's political ties were even more recent, and it was no doubt in the hope of recalling them that he wrote in the Canterbury Journal:

I have ever served you faithfully and independently. I have never asked, or received any place, pension, emolument or favour of any kind for myself, my family or my friends, and the only applications I have made of that nature to a minister, were those you yourselves directed me to make in favour of those you recommended - my votes in parliament have been, I am confident, in general agreeable and satisfactory to you - I have constantly voted for shortening the duration of parliament, and in favour of parliamentary reform. When I have received your instructions on a particular point, I have paid the utmost regard to them and given up my own opinion to yours - I am not the follower of a minister and I am the intended supporter of the minister only, who shall prove himself to be the true friend of our constitution.

But Irevanion, though he had not voted on the East India Bill, was known to incline towards Fox, and for that stain upon an otherwise commendable radical escutcheon he was cast off. Thus while the 1784 election showed that government still controlled one seat at Dover, even without help from Walmer Castle, it confirmed that the popular interest which Irevanion had striven to liberate was prepared and able to eject any MP who betrayed or offended it.

Canterbury provided no surprises, and for once Robinson's expectation of 'Both the same members' on a sittite ticket was fulfilled. The sitting members were challenged by James Trotter.

1 J. B. Jones, The Records of Dover: the Charters, Record Books and Papers of the Corporation, with the Dover Customal (Dover, 1920), p. 94.
3 For letter highly critical of Irevanion's claims to local support, see Kentish Gazette, 10-14 Apr. 1784.
4 Laprade (ed.), Parliamentary Papers, p. 73.
and James Lynch, but as neither would swear to the necessary qualification, the sheriff refused to accept votes on their behalf.\(^1\) So meagre an opposition testifies to the unanimity of feeling in a city which conferred its freedom on Pitt. Both Gipps and Robinson had voted, in the minority on the second reading of Fox's Bill, and could probably also count on the great body of Canterbury's dissenters and reformers. To the latter at least their promise to 'promote to the utmost of our power a more equal representation of the People, a shortening of the duration of Parliament, and be ever ready to obey the Instructions of our Constituents...'\(^2\) must have raised hope that the new ministry would not be deaf to its cries. However, when one remembers that Trevanion made precisely the same professions, the conclusion is inescapable that current politics and not reform decided the outcome.

Only at Maidstone among all the Kentish boroughs was an avowed Foxite elected regardless of a Pittite opponent. As a life-long independent, Sir Horace Mann had refused to participate in the East India debate, and when the St. Alban's Tavern plans came to nothing, he seems to have grasped the expedient of his wife's ill-health to depart for the continent until party spirit had subsided.\(^3\) In addition he possibly wished to avoid the forthcoming wrangles over the parliamentary reform which he so abhorred. His place as the spokesman of the neighbouring gentry was taken by Gerard Edwards, a nephew of Lady Lucy Mann, and, as he made clear in the Commons on 20 August 1784, a fervent Pittite.\(^4\)

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1 Trotter and Lynch petitioned against the conduct of the sheriff, but failed to press their accusations. *Jom. Jour.*, xl. 94-5.
3 Romney MSS. U1300/C4/4: Sir H. Mann to Lord Romney, nd. 1784.
4 *Parl. Hist.*, xxiv. 1589. Edwards probably had the support of the borough corporation which had itself addressed the King in favour of Pitt, P.R.O. HO. 55. 15/34.
William Gerry, who had seconded Lord Mahon's address to George III, was also in the field, and described himself in the Canterbury Journal as 'Strongly attached to our king and Constitution, a firm and fierce friend to Mr. Pitt and the present Administration.' He had not yet, however, attained the experience or the prestige which were to make him a county member in 1796, 1802 and 1812, and was defeated by the radical Foxite, Clement Taylor. For the numerous dissenters and small tradesmen of Maidstone alone, recent struggles against Lord Aylesford appear to have carried the day.

The most celebrated upsets in 1784 occurred in the English counties. Byng in Middlesex, Sir Thomas Bunbury in Suffolk and Thomas Coke in Norfolk were all unsuccessful, and in Yorkshire the mighty Fitzwilliam interest declined a poll. Kent, although returning Harsham and Honywood unopposed, was by no means immune from the national ferment. Argument raged until the very day of nomination, while the decisions of 14 April were still dividing men at the 1790 election.

Matters were already well advanced when 'Stigand' wrote to the Canterbury Journal urging freeholders to follow the example of Yorkshire, and select 'two independent gentlemen' in place of the sitting Members, and informing them that Sir John Honywood and Sir Richard Betenson were ready, 'if properly supported,' to come forward. He then proceeded to expound his reasons:

For though Mr. Harsham and Mr. Honywood may be men of respectable and worthy private characters, yet their late public conduct has been such as justly to incur your contempt and resentment; one of them (Mr. Harsham) has been the Chairman of a disappointed party, unconstitutionally assembled at the St. Alban's Tavern, for the purpose of dictating to his Majesty the method of forming a coalition between those two opposite characters, Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox, who after making resolves upon resolves, at last made an unaccountable resolve to return thanks to the two worthy gentlemen Mr. Fox and Lord North; and your other member (Mr. Honywood) gave his silent vote

2 Canterbury Journal, 6-13 Apr. 1784.
to all the late desperate resolutions of the Coalition; therefore as you have now the opportunity, by the election of two independent gentlemen, avowed friends to the Constitution and enemies to the Coalition, of redressing yourselves, I trust you will for a moment consider the inevitable dreadful consequences which will of course follow if Mr. Fox again gets a majority in the Commons House of Parliament, and not by returning your two former members, give your assent to any violent state in our glorious constitution.

The strands of opinion behind so forthright a letter were many and complex. Pitt's support in Kent derived from both family and personal associations. Not only had Chatham taken up residence at Hayes, but Pitt's earliest actions as a reformer had been alongside his brother, his brother-in-law Lord Mahon, and many local gentlemen on the Kent Committee of 1780. Like Syvill's followers in Yorkshire, Kentish reformers seem to have rallied to the new Prime Minister, with both 'Stigand's' proposed candidates being associates of Mahon's Committee. Pitt was a man of principle and consistency, who shared the aspirations of many substantial freeholders, whereas Fox had entered Judas-like into a cabal for power. In the Commons on 9 February 1784, Lord Mahon made great play with a paper, signed by the 'Friend of the People', which roundly condemned North¹, and later master-minded the government campaign in Westminster with £9,000 of Secret Service money.²

However, if Pitt's commitment to reform strengthened his popularity, 'Stigand's' letter once more emphasises that it was the spirit of fear and conservatism engendered by the Coalition's attempted constitutional innovations which prompted greatest unrest. Marsham and Honywood were noted reformers, but had none the less fallen under suspicion by their participation at the St. Albans' Tavern. As a leader of the movement to restore political unity, Charles Harham was frequently on his feet in the Commons, and received communications from many prominent figures.³

² Aspinall (ed.), The Letter Correspondence of Geo. III, i. 116.
³ See the notes and letters in Romney 1775/6.
the beginning of 1784 a union of parties offered to the inde­pendents the best prospect of breaking the deadlock, but to Pitt it posed something of a dilemma. If he compromised with Portland and Fox, he would appear to acknowledge the force of their com­plaints; if, however, he remained aloof, he might well lose the back-bench support which he so badly needed. The whittling away of Fox's majority radically altered matters, and by mid-March most country gentlemen had followed James Luttrell in moving from a belief that both parties were 'too strong for either to govern the kingdom' to outright support of Pitt. Marsham and Honywood incurred the displeasure of 'Stigand' because they were among a minority which seemed to be inclining to Fox. On 11 February Marsham had welcomed North's offer to stand aside as 'noble, upright, patriotic, and disinterested'; and on 5 March he spoke for the adjournment of the Mutiny Bill on the grounds that 'he considered the very existence of the Constitution to be at stake'. Honywood, like Clement Taylor, may have continued to regard Fox as the true apostle of reform, while both county members were too closely associated with the calls for Pitt's resignation to meekly transfer their allegiance. For these reasons they were called upon to resign at a heated and crowded county meeting on 14 April.

Lord Mahon captured the initial mood of the freeholders. He spoke of his opposition to the East India Bill, and his con­stant endeavours to retain personal independence. Why then did a meeting which voiced its detestation of the Coalition by voting Mahon's loyal address, conclude by re-electing the supposed transgressors? The reason for the swift evaporation of 'Stigand's' opposition appears to lie in Marsham and Honywood's

1 Par. Hist., xxiv. 452.
2 Par. Hist., xxiv. 592 and 732.
3 Summerbury Journal, 13-20 Apr. 1784; nd 'Resolves', ff. 35-7.
ability to make satisfactory explanations on both the topics raised by Lord Mahon. In the first place, their general voting record since 1780 was consistent. As a 'Sincere friend to my Country' noted, in the Kentish Gazette, they had regularly censured North's ruinous administration, and had divided with Pitt on Shelburne's peace proposals. ¹ Above all, Marsham and Honywood had been in the Commons' minority on the East India bill, and on 14 April agreed to present the county's address.

Secondly, as Sir Edward Dering was later to recall, neither Member would have been returned, if they had not directly declared three or four times, that they would direct their conduct in Parliament, to measures not men.² Honywood, for example, assured his listeners that, 'Attached to no man, I have endeavoured to support measures for the good of my country, and such as I conceived to be otherwise, I steadily opposed'; while in his published thanks he again denied 'connection with any party'.³ But if the freeholders were won over, the King was not. 'From what I had heard of the county of Kent', he wrote to Pitt, 'I had hoped new members would have been named at the meeting, for Mr. Marsham is so candid that, under the letter of the declaration, not the spirit, he will soon find the means of distressing Government as a half friend, which would not be the case if he avowed being an enemy'.⁴ In the coming years, this pledge was to be a recurring theme in Kentish politics.

II

Mrs. George concluded her study by observing: 'The 1784 election was remarkable not for an exceptionally extensive change

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² Namier and Brooke, iii. 112.
³ Canterbury Journal, 13-20 Apr. 1784.
⁴ Aspinall (ed.), The Later Correspondence of George III, i. 54; George III to Pitt, 16 Apr. 1784.
in the composition of the House, but for the ferment in which it took place, for the character of the Pittite victories and for the way in which Foxites were thrown back on nomination seats and venal boroughs'. An analysis of the Kentish results underlines many of these points and indicates the way forward. Six of the nine constituencies were contested, and in every one, the influence of government, patron or public opinion was exercised wholly or in part on the basis of allegiance in the late parliamentary struggle. Of the county's eighteen M.P.s at the dissolution, only nine were re-elected. Among the nine who did not reappear for Kentish seats, five were Northites who no longer enjoyed ministerial favour, and a further two fell victim to popular disapprobation. All the new members were Pittites, so that in the new parliament, administration could generally count on fourteen Kentish votes. The only exceptions were Clement Taylor, William Evelyn, and, most controversially, the knights of the Shire, all of whom inclined to Opposition. However, the result, although emphatic in terms of seats, should not be allowed to obscure a very real split along 'party' lines among the electorate. The representation of Maidstone and Hythe was divided between the two national rivals, while John Trevanion laboured to restore his interest at Dover and was returned at a by-election in 1789. Moreover, as new issues arose, the fragile peace attained in the county was rudely shattered, thereby forcing freeholders to make a definite choice.

For Pitt and the country the honeymoon was soon over. The sessions of 1785 and 1786 saw a series of defeats for the Prime Minister and his Government which imparted a distinct 'party' flavour to national and local politics. The bitter personal

1 George, 'Fox's Martyrs', 167.
2 The Morthites were Frederick, Rawlinson, Sutton, Henniker and Minch-latton; Gregory and Trevanion were overwhelmed by public feeling; Mann and Jackson retired. Cf. lists in Cannon, op. cit., 244-5.
rivalry of 1783-4 was maintained and perhaps even intensified by Pitt's attempt to dislodge Fox from his dearly-won seat at Westminster. The protracted legal wrangling was abruptly terminated by the Commons on 3 March 1785, but not before it had taken its toll of public opinion. As 'JUVENIS' told readers of the Kentish Gazette, '...what some few persons may consider as a trifle lighter than air itself, the Westminster Scrutiny, has operated upon my young mind with so powerful a weight of argumentative force, that from a rank Tory, it has rendered me a determined Whig; so that from a warm partisan of Pitt and Prerogative, I am become a deadly friend to Mr. Fox and the liberties of my country.'

Foxites were thus quick to celebrate their victory.

Mr. Fox, Mr. Fox,
You're in the right box,
And Sir Cecil at length is defeated;
Spite of Pitt on his side,
With his strength all opposed.
For Westminster finally you're seated.

The Pittite 'INDEX', however, hit back with telling blows. Again he reviewed the relationship between Fox, the 'violent Tory' turned 'flaming Whig', and that 'unblushing monster' Lord North.

The scrutiny was not only justified and legitimate, but it showed Pitt to be sincerely attached to reform, whereas his opponents were either hostile or untrustworthy. Above all, 'INDEX' pointed to the growing ideological bankruptcy of the Whigs, which in the next months bred division within the party, and led to the constant reiteration of the supposed injustices of 1783.

Throughout the spring and early summer of 1785 the Kentish press devoted much space to editorial remarks on Pitt's ill-fated Irish policy. However, as Dr. Kelly has noted, public interest was never awakened outside the manufacturing districts, and in

2 Kentish Gazette, 1-16 Mar. 1785.
3 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Mar. 1785.
4 For example, Kentish Gazette, 15-19 Jan. and 30 Mar. - 2 Apr.
any case, Kentishmen were far too preoccupied with the storm raging about the ears of the county Members. The controversy was of a type guaranteed to inflame the party passions of the late 1780's, and was commenced on 2 April when 'PUBLICUS' contrasted Marsham's and Honywood's election pledges to assist Pitt unless they believed his policies to be 'destructive of the public good', with their subsequent record of anti-ministerial votes. 1 Since both had been elected on the basis of these undertakings, some explanation was surely due to the freeholders. The Knights in their turn did not lack apologists. 'A Freeholder' entirely approved their opposition to the Scrutiny and the Irish resolutions, and hoped that future measures might be more acceptable. 2 'A Small Country Gentleman' further argued that 'the plain and obvious inference hence deducible is, that the political measures of Mr. Pitt, are not consonant to Mr. Marsham's and Mr. Honywood's ideas of sound and constitutional policy', and could only lament the defects which had lost the ministry such independent and disinterested well-wishers. 3 Thereafter, the debate degenerated into the sort of inter-party bickering endemic in Kent since 1783. 'A COUNTRYMAN' began his attack on the previous writer with a panegyric on the political creed of the late Earl of Shatham, and then proceeded to heap execration on the Coalition as 'an uniting of men...as unnatural, and little to be expected, as for an union to take place, and perfect amity to be concluded, between those two contradictory elements, fire and water'. 4 And so it rumbled on well into the summer recess. 5 Marsham and Honywood had been early lost sight of, but there was no doubting the keenness with which national politics was followed, or the wide-

2 Kentish Gazette, 4-6 Apr. 1785.
3 Kentish Gazette, 11-14 Apr. 1785.
4 Kentish Gazette, 31 May - 3 June, 10-14, 3-7 June 1785.
5 For example, Kentish Gazette, 31 May - 3 June, 10-14, 3-7 June 1785.
ness of the gulf separating Kent's rival interests.

Pitt emerged chastened from the defeats and party strife of 1785, but with his grasp on power unimpaired. He had been able to carry the House on the majority of its business and learned from his mistakes, while the failure of victory to bring office heightened frustration and dissension in the Opposition. The principal casualty of 1785 was, however, the cause of parliamentary reform. As the exclusive preserve of neither Pittites nor Foxites it was fatally weakened in an atmosphere of party warfare. The Foxite 'Small Country Gentleman' was quick to seize upon the handling of the Westminster election as proof of Pitt's bad faith. 'I think I can discern his conduct both as a man and a minister to be so completely at war with his professions,' he wrote, 'as to render it highly problematical, whether the Honourable gentleman is really in earnest in wishing well to a measure which he declares it to be his intention boldly and honestly to bring forward and to support'. The poor attendance at Wyvill's recent Yorkshire meeting, and the expected apathy in Kent were thus clear signs that 'the people at large no longer view Mr. Pitt through the same false medium by which he stood presented to them during the fever of the late general election'. Lord Mahon was accused of having diverted the freeholders from reform in 1784 by means of a gang of dock workers, and 'RUSTICUS' attacked the now Pittite Wilkes as the 'pretendedly strenuous advocate of civil liberty' who 'was never serious in any one action of his life, except where his pleasures or his interest were materially concerned'.

'An Earnest Friend to our true Constitution' on the other hand, welcomed Pitt's lead in seeking to remedy a state of affairs which he described as 'exceedingly decayed and disordered'. Pitt he felt was sincere and it was the duty of the people to encourage

him in his endeavours. Yet even when reform did appear on the floor of the House there were those prepared to find fault with it from essentially factious motives. One writer, for example, argued that the effect of both Pitt's proposals and the bribery and election bills of Lord Shelburne would be to increase the influence of the Crown, and wholly ignored their many advantages to the purity of the representations. In the widely reported division on Pitt's unsuccessful reform motion, twelve Kentish M.P.s voted in the minority, but in the following weeks reformers were as disunited as ever. 'A Small Country Gentleman' was critical of Pitt and Wyvill for not pressing shorter parliaments, and could not concur in 'A COUNTRYMAN's' view that Pitt's good faith had been vindicated. After 1785 reform disappeared from British politics in all but a very peripheral manner, so that, as Wraxall noted, when in 1786 Marsham attempted to extend Crewe's Act to voters employed by the Navy and Ordnance, 'he soon discovered that ministers were no longer favourable to such propositions'. Many reasons may be cited for the rapid demise of the spirit of 1780-2. Despite the picture of distress painted by 'An Earnest Friend to our true Constitution', the nation's economy was gradually improving, with the result that gentlemen were less easily moved by complaints about high taxation. Nevertheless it still seems fair to conclude that a prime cause of Kent's non-participation in the petitioning campaign of 1785, and the eclipse of reform as a major national issue long before the French Revolution, was the fragmentation along party lines of its potential adherents.

1 Kentish Gazette, 16-19 Feb. 1785.
2 Kentish Gazette, 2-6 and 16-20 Apr. 1785.
4 Kentish Gazette, 31 May - 10 June and 10-14 June 1785.
Following the excitement of the 1785 session, British politics entered upon a period of relative tranquillity. Government was defeated on 27 February 1786 on the Duke of Richmond's dockyard fortification plan, but otherwise there were few alarms. The Kentish press, too, was unusually silent on national affairs. The impeachment of Warren Hastings and the early struggles against the slave trade were not the issues to inspire mass agitation, and only the Commercial Treaty with France prompted extended comment in the winter of 1786/7. Printers and correspondents turned their attention to social and philanthropic subjects such as the poor and the Game Laws, while the Canterbury Journal kept up its strong literary tradition through the "Kentish Raser" to beguile its readers with scenes from county life, rural, domestic and clerical. Not until the latter part of 1788 did national politics again impress themselves upon Kentishmen, with the result that there was an immediate return to the party alignments of Pitt's early years.

An important factor in reawakening public interest and reviving those alternative constitutional interpretations later to be hotly debated during the King's illness and the French Revolution, was the approaching centenary of William III's 1688 landing. At first, poetry was widely employed to celebrate the victories and liberties won by the expulsion of the Stuarts.\(^1\) A Speculist in the Kentish Gazette then pointed out to his readers the preparations being made in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and under Coke in Norfolk to mark 'a day, which shines so conspicuous in the annals of our country, for having given consummation to the plan of the glorious revolution'; and remembered 'the more inestimable rights and immunities which the men of Kent,

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in common with the rest of our countrymen, derive from our admirable form of free government, for the preservation of which we are indebted under God, to the immortal William Nassau, Prince of Orange. Was the county which had resisted the Conqueror and mustered against the 'Young Pretender' in 1745, to degrade itself by not commemorating so historic an event? Some parts at least were not. Dinners were held at Chatham, Gravesend, and at the Bull Inn, Rochester, attended by the corporation and the borough's K.P.s, and the windows of Quakers were broken for not being illuminated. The tone of the Rochester meeting was of 'great mirth and loyalty', with the Clerk of the Cheque at Chatham in attendance, but at Maidstone a far more partisan spirit may be discerned. The corporation party and the Whigs under Clement Taylor met separately, and only a half-hearted move seems to have been made to shelve local differences. A gathering under the chairmanship of the Rev. Edmund Marshall listened to Burnett's account of the Revolution and a eulogy of William's triumphs over Louis XIV and James II, as well as toasting liberty and 'The Duke of Portland, and every sincere friend to this country throughout the Kingdom'. Reflecting on these festivities, the 'Speculist' regretted that more areas in Kent had not imitated the above examples, and was highly critical of 'Mr. Pitt and his gloomy junto of obsequious followers' for not organising national jubilees or taking a personal share in the rejoicings. However, while opposition groups probably gained most from the propaganda war of late October and early November, news of the king's illness quickly enabled Pitt to regain the initiative both at Westminster and in the country.

From the moment the royal illness became public knowledge during the first half of November 1788, the press was regular in

1 Kentish Gazette, 17-21 Oct. 1788.
2 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 Nov. 1788.
3 Ibid.
4 Kentish Gazette, 18-21 Nov. 1788.
chronicling the comings and goings of ministers and doctors, and in assessing the possible course of events. The prevailing mood of a fresh crop of patriotic verses was quite clearly one of sympathy for the prostrate King and of suspicion about the intentions of the Prince of Wales and his Carlton House cronies. The development of the Regency Crisis has been traced elsewhere, but its effects upon provincial politics are less well documented. Pitt was the master of Parliament throughout the dark months of uncertainty, and in the Commons' division of 16 December won the support of thirteen of the Kentish M.P.s, with only Taylor, Honywood and Evelyn voting in the minority. Charles Harasham was probably speaking for a majority of his constituents, as well as of his fellow Members, when, three days later, he said 'he thought it necessary for Parliament to declare, that it was their right and their duty to provide the means for supplying the defect in the exercise of the royal authority'; and it was such sentiments that Fox offended by his over-hasty words. Everywhere friends of administration strove to raise sympathetic addresses, and by the time of the King's recovery Canterbury, Dover, Hythe, Maidstone, Queenborough and Sandwich, along with the freeholders of Kent and the commissioners of the Navy at Sheerness, had all responded. Yet, while the 'Man of Kent' could counsel that nothing would be more injurious to the Prince than to substitute 'the leaders of faction' for 'a minister appointed by your father and beloved by the people'; few can have doubted that the establishment of a regency would be accompanied by the

2 Parl. Hist., xxvii. 778-2; Gipps, Robinson, Harasham, Blom, Richardton, Sullivan, Henniker, Preston, Parnaby Radcliffe, Aldridge, Bowyer, Stephens and Brett.
installation of Fox in highest office. Kentish Whigs were thus
understandably confident, and it was one of their number who
penned the following lines in the Kentish Gazette:

God save Great George our Prince!
Long live our noble Prince,
God save the Prince!
Send he may conquer, Pitt,
Nor be by Thurlow bit,
But as Prince Regent, sit!
God save the Prince!

'A Social Whig' concluded from his study of the Constitution that
the prerogative powers should be held by the sovereign's heir,
and on no account usurped by the legislature, while a week
later, 'A Freeholder' sought to explain why he had not addressed. He
did not wish to insult the Prince, and was steadfastly opposed
to Pitt because of his manner of assuming office, his creation
of peers, his attempt to gain popularity by pretending to desire
reform, the Scrutiny, the extension of the excise laws, and many
other aspects of recent fiscal policy. Finally, as Pitt's
regency Bill passed slowly through the House of Commons, 'A
Friend to the House of Brunswick' welcomed the lead being given
by the men of Hampshire, and hoped that Kent would soon do like­
wise by addressing the Prince. But, as the Whigs built cabinets,
promised honours, and perhaps even contemplated a snap dissol­
ution, fortune smiled once more upon their rival. On 19 Febru­
ary the Lord Chancellor told the Lords that the King had entered
a phase of convalescence, and the battle was over. A disunited
Whig party had gambled and lost; and in the ensuing months Pitt
and the country set about recovering their debts with a ven­
geance.

However, an election was postponed for more than a year,
and in the interim one further issue demanded public attention.

1 Kentish Gazette, 2-6 Jan. 1789; and poem in 9-13 Jan. 1789.
2 Kentish Gazette, 2-3 Jan. 1789. Cf. 'A TRULY WTIIC' in Kentish
   Gazette, 9-13 Jan. 1789.
3 Kentish Gazette, 9-13 Jan. 1789.
4 Kentish Gazette, 10-13 Feb. 1789.
The dissenting community had long wished for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and in 1784 had generally thrown in its lot with Pitt and the King, only to be dismayed in 1787 when the Prime Minister publicly rejected its claims. The question was again mooted in Parliament in 1789, and rapidly became a party matter, with Fox proposing a third motion in 1790. Perhaps stimulated by the 1588 spirit and the apparent resurgence of libertarian ideas in France, a national campaign was mounted in 1789 to assist the Whig leader. Kent's substantial population of dissenters might exert considerable electoral pressure in the county and larger boroughs, and this is certainly reflected in the surviving division lists. In both 1787 and 1789 votes for repeal were recorded by Canterbury's Charles Robinson, Maidstone's Clement Taylor and the two knights of the shire. As usual, the press was a major forum for debate. Reports of protest meetings in other counties were printed, the history and repressive effects of the Restoration statutes were explained in some detail, appeals were made to the new tide of reform currently sweeping across Europe, and electors were advised to scrutinise the conduct of their representatives. However, strong opposition was to be expected in a society which would later spearhead the defence of the Protestant Constitution against Catholic Emancipation. 'A True Friend of Liberty of Conscience and Toleration; but for no Dissenters in State Affairs' warned of the dire consequences of repeal; and 'A Plain Englishman' expected stiff resistance from the Anglican clergy. After the 1790 vote, archdeacon Lynch of

4 Kentish Gazette, 7-11 Nov. and 6-9 Oct. 1789, and 5-9 Mar. 1790.
5 Kentish Gazette, 5-8 Jan. 1790.
Canterbury's visitations at Sittingbourne, Ashford, and his own city prompted expressions of 'unanimous thanks' to Pitt 'for his warm, learned and manly support of the rights of the Church of England'. Hence on yet another issue Kentish opinion was deeply split. It now remains only to be seen how far the 'party' quarrels of 1784-90 were reflected as the county entered upon a fresh round of elections.

III

The 1790 general election crystallised many of the themes of recent national and local politics, and is of added interest to the historian as being the last for many years in which parties and public opinion could operate without the restraining consciousness of war. There were many imponderables, and still more spurs to redoubled efforts. Whig complaints about their treatment in 1784 had been intensified rather than quietened by subsequent events, while Pitt, despite a record of achievements, had undergone sufficient defeats and alterations of course to render ministerial complacency far too dangerous. Both parties sought to exercise an influence in 'open' and 'close' constituencies, and Opposition went some way in creating an organisation. But how would the electorate react? Would candidates be judged solely on past votes and probable future allegiance? Had the Regency Crisis, as J. J. Hill suggests, 'left Opposition less popular in parliament and in the country than at any time since 1784'; or would disgruntled reformers and dissenters tilt the balance in favour of Fox? All these aspects may be documented

1 Kentish Gazette, 18-22 June 1790.
4 Hitchfield, 'The struggle over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1789-1790', 575: 'The subject of repeal was, at best, a very minor electoral issue.'
by a study of the contests in Kent.

With a poll being resorted to in seven of the nine constituencies, there had clearly been no diminution of interest. The best reported and most important of these were at Canterbury, Sandwich and in the county, but all were of some significance, and, with the natural exception of New Romney, each affords evidence of party confrontation. At Maidstone, for example, the late 1780's saw the borough as divided as ever. The by-election in July 1788 to replace Gerard Edwards witnessed a tight struggle between the government-supported merchant and Sheriff of London, Matthew Bloxam, and George Lynng, the son of the Foxite martyred in Middlesex. Later, at the Revolution celebrations, a resolution was carried hoping that the new harbinger, Mr. Bloxam might conduct himself as honestly and independently in the House of Commons, as his worthy colleague Mr. Taylor; which strongly implies that the Whigs and radicals feared he would not. Nevertheless both men were convincingly re-elected in 1790 by their rival parties.

At Queenborough and at Rochester, Government and its supporters were directly challenged. George Grant and William Popham were comfortably fended off at the former, but in the hope of securing Rochester's independent seat, Opposition put up the Marquis of Hertford, the eldest son of the Duke of Portland. Admiral Sir Richard Bickerton was assured of a smooth return in place of Middleton, whereas the absence of Nathaniel Smith made necessary the selection of a new spokesman for the popular party. The election coincided with a meeting at the Assembly Rooms on 3 May called 'to consider the most effectual means to obtain a Reform in the Government Part of the Corporation'; and it was from this local discontent with a self-electing Common Council and bench of Aldermen that the Whigs sought to benefit.

1 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 Nov. 1788.
2 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 May 1790.
Titchfield's campaign thus hinged on freedom of election and the still potent fear of corruption. As Charles Bentinck wrote on his behalf: 'You conceived, Gentlemen, that those Rights were trampled upon, were sacrificed to a secret [illegible] interested Family Compact, you conceived it to be a part of a Contract with Government to give you up, and that you were bargained away by the Contractors, without any regard to your Rights as Freemen'. However when the polls closed, these sentiments had not been sufficient. Titchfield's failure to appear in person no doubt counted against him, especially as his opponent was George Best of the Chatham brewery, whose local connections were many and excellently suited to the needs of eighteenth-century electioneering.

In 1790 the Whigs paid considerable attention to the Cinque Ports and commissioned surveys of a number of the boroughs. J. Jackman recorded hopefully: 'Mr. Walter... informed me that Sir Edward Derings influence at Romney was on the go - I give you his own words, and he is a leading man in the corporation'. Jealousy may well have existed among the inhabitants about the distribution of the patron's favours, but was evidently not considered strong enough to merit an inevitably expensive opposition. Nevertheless, when soliciting a peerage in 1793, Dering claimed that he had refused 'some very advantageous offers' during the Regency Crisis; a disclosure which indicates extensive activity on the Whigs' part, and that men like Dering still viewed Pitt as the best source of honours.

Anticipation of Whig successes proved better founded at Dover and Hythe. At the height of the political uncertainty in January 1789, the Kentish Gazette had noted, 'The present administration is evidently not less popular at Dover than in every

1 Kentish Gazette, 18-22 June 1790.
2 Ginger (ed.), Whig Organisation in the General Election of 1790, p. 170; J. Jackson to Charles Whiting, 1 June 1790.
3 Ibid., p. 173 n. 9.
other part of the kingdom'. Yet in spite of this apparent loyalty, the labours of the government man, Charles Small Rybus, proved insufficient to prevent John Trevanion from recapturing his seat at a by-election shortly afterwards. Personal factors probably explain Trevanion's victory, but as the year progressed the Whigs seem to have been attracted to his cause by a renewal of local resentment at ministerial interference. William Adam and the Duke of Portland were involved on Trevanion's behalf in negotiations with Lord North, and helped settle questions of expenses and a possible partner for the forthcoming general election. Four candidates eventually took the field in 1790, and 'a very warm contest' ensued, before Trevanion and Rybus came home with clear majorities. The result thus restored the pre-1784 balance between government and opposition.

The state of politics at Hythe came under public gaze during the Kent election in which one of its principal inhabitants was deeply involved. William Deedes was accused by the Foxite 'VEXIMAS' of political inconsistency, since while he was zealous for the Pittite Sir Edward Annettebull in the county, at Hythe 'he has, and now does, support two men whose conduct in Parliament (since Mr. Pitt's administration) has been always diametrically opposite to each other'. Early in 1789 William Evelyn had been promoting an address sympathetic to the Prince of Wales, and in the autumn his interests did not escape the notice of Lord North and the Whig managers. However in his reply Deedes claimed that he and Evelyn had formerly agreed on politics, and

1 Kentish Gazette, 9-13 Jan. 1789.
5 Kentish Gazette, 30 Apr. - 4 May 1790.
that he had concurred in the somewhat unorthodox juncture of Evelyn and Farnaby Radcliffe as the best means of preventing an unwelcome and costly opposition.\(^1\) In 1790 the stratagem had the desired effect, and Evelyn continued to sit with the Whigs until the rifts of the French Revolution.

There is no evidence that Opposition either engineered or led the defeat which ended government's long electoral monopoly at Sandwich. Nevertheless 1790 was an important year in the borough's history and prompted much comment both locally and in the Kentish press. Among the four candidates nominated at the Guildhall on 21 April, one was Philip Stephens, the long-serving Secretary to the Admiralty, and another was Lord Parker, the Controller of the Household, who stood pledged to assist the projected harbour development.\(^2\) However, as the Kentish Gazette observed at this time, '...of late the power of a ministerial mandate is found at that place to be on the decline', due to 'a want of impartiality in the present members towards their constituents, and to an overbearing spirit in some of the Bench, to keep the principal tradesmen and freemen in general out of their share in the representation, to which as men of spirit and property they are likely no longer to submit.'\(^3\) The basis thus existed for an independent opposition, which was most fortunate in finding 'as distinguished a character' as Sir Horace Mann for its figure-head.\(^4\) Once the other non-ministerial candidate, John Dilnot, had withdrawn, the Kentish Gazette believed Mann was secure\(^5\); but some among its correspondents were less confident. As late as 8 June 'R.L.' was advising freemen that they had been exonerated from promises of votes to Stephens by his

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1 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 May 1790.
2 Kentish Gazette, 20-23 Apr. 1790.
3 Ibid.
4 HMG Various Collections II, 356: Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry to Commodore the Hon. William Cornwallis, 7 June 1790, 'Sir Horace Mann is a candidate for Sandwich in Kent, against Lord Parker. Both say they are sure.'
5 Kentish Gazette, 20-23 Apr. 1790.
subsequent conduct. Furthermore, votes should be withheld from the Secretary, whose election was virtually certain, in order to prevent the casting of votes to his lordship; for every vote given in that way to Lord Parker is a drop of poison in your cup. 'My Friends!' he concluded, 'you have kindled the fire of liberty in your town; it is with you to fan the GENEROSITY OF AMBITION, and screen it from the BLASPHEMY of LIBERTY.'

Despite a letter from 'X' deploiring the above sentiments as 'treachery', the Kentish Gazette on 22 June was able to hail Hann's return as 'a glorious assertion of the rights of Freemen, and of independency of representation', achieved by a party 'much the most opulent in the town', and by 'fair and honourable measures.'

To Lord Parker, 'The hand of superior power has been carried against me'; while the verdict of the Kentish Gazette was, 'The inhabitants of Sandwich, fettered by ministerial despotism, oppressed by the tyranny of their Corporation, obnoxious to the resentment of irritated power, have, notwithstanding, returned to Parliament, a man, eminently hostile, eminently inimical, to those who thought themselves their masters, because eminently the friend of liberty, the active abettor of the cause which animates us all.'

Sir Horace Hann was also an important figure in the early preparations for the Canterbury election. In a widely publicised address to the city's corporation of 8 September 1790, he revealed that in January he had declined an offer to replace one of the sitting Members at the next election, while in May he had resolved that 'he should not interfere directly nor indirectly in any contest which may arise,' after being obliged by a pledge to George Cipps to refuse an Opposition suggestion of a campaign.

1 Kentish Gazette, 4-8 June 1790.
2 Kentish Gazette, 11-15 June 1790; and ibid. for reply from ibid.
3 Kentish Gazette, 18-22 June 1790.
4 Kentish Gazette, 29 June - 2 July 1790.
5 Kentish Gazette, 22-25 June 1790.
against the Pittites. In the light of these declarations of impartiality, 'A FREEMAN OF CANTERBURY' seized his pen when in mid October it appeared that Richard Beckford had been sent to contest the borough with Sir Horace's blessing. 'INFANTIAL' leapt to Benn's defence, while a letter clearly designed for the consideration of the Prince of Wales, affords independent proof of the baronet's strict adherence to the terms of his recent commitments.

Meanwhile, the rival parties were drawing up their lines. 'A FREEMAN OF CANTERBURY' warmly recommended Gipps and Robinson as local men and tried servants, in complete contrast to Beckford, a stranger, of whom no more was known than 'of Horlando Coroso, Groom of the Stole to the Queen of Bntam'. Beckford was in fact a son of the Chathamite Lord Mayor of London, who, in March 1790, described himself as being 'zealously attached... to the Cause of Liberty and freedom of election; and felt flattered to be involved 'in your present Struggle against undue Influence and Oppression, to restore your Freedom and Independence, and resist every attempt that may then again be made by your Corporation, to deprive you of the free exercise of your Franchises'. By the time of the Common Hall nominations of 5 April he was coupled in this enterprise with Lord Deer, the son of the Earl of Selkirk, and seems to have derived encouragement from discontented elements, especially among the non-residents, and from the parliamenter Opposition.

A meeting of the city's London freemen had resolved on 19 October 1789 that, 'the members of the Corporation of the City of

1 Kentish Gazette, 18-22 Sept. 1789.
4 A. Aspinall (ed.), The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales, 1722-1812 (London, 1963), i. 511-12: Sir W. Mann to Capt. J. W. Payne, 7 Nov. 1789.
6 Kentish Gazette, 10-19 Mar. 1790.
7 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 May 1790.
Canterbury, have, for many years, assumed an exclusive right to nominate candidates to represent the said City in Parliament, which they felt was 'highly unconstitutional in its principle, insulting to the whole body of freemen, and is a flagrant violation of the freedom of election.' When they again met on 19 April 1790, it was to restate their determination to fight and to endorse the recent nominations. Beckford and Lord Daer were also materially assisted in their campaign by the Whigs. Two of the party's election agents, George Reid and Edward Kent, watched over their interests in the capital and in Canterbury, and money from Adam's election fund was used to defray expenses.

Neither was the Pittite corporation slow in promoting its candidates. At the beginning of November 1789 'A Freeman' was found praising the virtues of the borough's H.P., and when Charles Robinson announced his retirement on 24 March, a prestigious replacement was quickly found in Sir John Honywood. A series of meetings, dinners and speeches allied Gipps and Honywood even more closely with the interests of the mayor, and exposed such divisions in the borough that the outcome was uncertain until the very last moment. The event which destroyed whatever chances the Whigs may have had was the last-minute withdrawal of Beckford, which the hasty substitution of Lord Bondes' son could not repair. Lord Daer attributed his defeat to this abandonment, although the final figures suggest that he may have been a trifle over-optimistic.

2 Kentish Gazette, 20-23 Apr. 1790.
4 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Nov. 1789.
5 Kentish Gazette, 25-26 and 26-30 Mar. and 2-6 Apr. 1790. Robinson retired because he no longer wished to spend time in London.
6 Kentish Gazette, 9-13 and 13-16 Nov. 1790.
7 Kentish Gazette, 1-22 and 15-18 June 1790.
For the first time since 1754 the county of Kent was contested. Specific political issues played relatively little part, either in initiating the struggle, or in determining the outcome. Yet a campaign lasting nearly four months could not have been kept alive without widespread public interest, and did not pass without incident and controversy. In 1790 the day of judgment for Marsham and Honywood was at hand. Hauled before the bar of the county, they were called upon to account for their stewardship of the freeholders' trust. The accusations of 1785 were repeated with fresh vigour, the votes and allegiances of an entire parliament were minutely examined, and a sittite candidate was brought forward to redress the balance of interests. The personalities, the private characters and the public principles of each aspirant and many of their closest supporters were praised, condemned and lampooned by scores of newspaper correspondents, while money was lavishly expended in canvassing tours, dinners and fêtes. Party labels were freely attributed, and the result clearly demonstrates how extensively English politics and public opinion had been polarised - as Charles Marsham found to his cost, failure to espouse either side was the way of defeat.

Long before the dissolution, Sir Edward Knatchbull proclaimed his intention of contesting the county, and began his canvass with a sumptuous banquet at Hatch. The friends of the sitting members were immediately thrown into disarray, and at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand on 22 February, a number of them resolved to request the High Sheriff to summon a meeting in order to preserve the peace of the county. This the sheriff refused to do, though he

had no objection to a private requisition being made.¹ In
addition, 'A Friend to Equity and Truth' deplored the 'very
unfair Canvass', and called upon freeholders to show respect for
their M.P.s by not engaging too hastily to vote for An
tchbull.²
'A BY-SANDER' wished to know why Sir Edward had appeared so
abruptly, thereby 'kindling the destructive fire of opposition...
sowing the seeds of discord, and fermenting the occasions of prof-
usion and debauchery'. Only explicit proof of Honywood's unfitness
as a representative could justify such a proceeding³, and it was
to hear the arguments of the rival parties that between eight
and nine thousand people assembled at Maidstone on 8 March.⁴

The first purpose of the meeting was to nominate candidates.
Sir Horace Mann spoke of Harsham's long service, and William Geary
claimed that although some of his votes had not been pleasing to
every elector, he had always been guided by his original principle
and his own judgment. To Mr. Watson, Honywood was 'uncorrupt and
uninfluenced', while in the opinion of Sir R. D'Aeth, 'if we
wish to preserve our Constitution, we never can be better repres-
ented'. Lastly, Sir William Pagg proposed Anstchbull as 'the
Guardian of our civil and religious rights', whose fortune and
personal pride would shield him from the temptations of ministers.
Nevertheless, William Wedes left no-one in any doubt where the
baronet's sympathies lay:

Within these twelve months past we have seen every town
and village through the country ring with rejoicin-s for
the recovery of our beloved Sovereign; tears of joy were
the only tears that were shed. We had for some months
been under great apprehension of a change in the Ministry;
these fears were done away; we were then satisfied that
those confidential servants would continue in power under
whose auspices our country had emerged from the depth of
despondency to the pinnacle of glory.

 Pitt and his friends in administration were the only
people heard of in your convivial meetin-s; truth made
them applauded, and it is now for you to reward them by
sending proper men to Parliament.

1 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Mar. 1790.
2 ibid.
3 Kentish Gazette, 9-12 Mar. 1790.
4 report in Kentish Gazette, 5-9 Mar. 1790.
As to the three nominees; Knatchbull promised independent support for Pitt, Honywood repeated his constant wish to advance the interests of Kent, and Marsham professed himself ready to be guided by the freeholders. The sense of the crowd seemed to be in favour of Marsham and Knatchbull, which led William Geary to propose that since no opposition was offered to the former as the representative of the western division, 'he take no part whatever in the present contest with either of the other Candidates'. This was unanimously agreed, but Knatchbull's party wished to go even further. Deedes and Sir John Dyke suggested that Honywood should stand aside altogether, only to see their plans negatived amid scenes of great confusion. So matters rested, with all three men undertaking to fight on their own interests. However the future was far from clear, and the events and issues of 8 March provided ample subject for debate in the next weeks.

Much bad feeling was provided by the attempt to exclude Honywood from the contest. John Sawbridge had denounced it at Maidstone, and 'A Brother at Large' saw in the use of 'rabble from the yards and a majority of persons who were not freeholders' a foretaste of Knatchbull's conduct in a new parliament. The whole scheme was certainly unusual, and Knatchbull's friends had exposed themselves to further suspicion, since in the tumult many had mistakenly voted for Sir Horace Mann's adjournment motion, made in order to protect Honywood from embarrassment, only to hold up their hands again a few minutes later when Deedes belatedly tabled his idea. Such inconsistency was eagerly seized upon to depreciate Pittite strength.

Equally liable to misrepresentation was the political behaviour of William Deedes over the past ten years. We have already seen how 'Velasquez' drew attention to his apparently

1 Kentish Gazette, 16-19 Mar. 1790. Cf. i. p. for 'A BRITISH WISHE TO SIR EDWARD KNATCHBULL' and 'A FRIEND TO OUR ENGLISH CONSTITUTION'.

contradictory alliances at Hythe and in the county, and in keeping with the atmosphere of the day, Deedes chose to defend himself on a wide range of national as well as local issues. He had not approved of Honywood's reformist stance in 1780, and hence had not voted for him in the election of that year. In 1784 he had welcomed the fall of the Coalition, and had seconded Honywood's nomination because he felt unable to censure his fears of prerogative government, and because he believed him not disagreeable to Pitt. The Member's failure to fulfil this latter expectation, and not 'private pique' had led Deedes to deny any further assistance in 1790. Replying to this apology, 'SNIPPER' considered it remarkable that 'it is an essential recommendation in favour of a Candidate that he is not objected to by Mr. Pitt'. The wheel seemed to have come full circle, with Deedes moving from Lord North's camp in 1780, through a brief flirtation with the popular cause in mid-decade, to a renewed ministerial position in the Pittite ranks. And this was the man who so loudly championed Knatchbull.

The discussion centred upon William Deedes indicates that in 1790 Kentish voters were still preoccupied with the crisis of 1783/4 and the resultant party split which had been so manifest in 1785 and during the Regency Crisis. This was the dominant theme of numerous letters and poems as the merits and misdemeanours of Honywood and Knatchbull were laid before the public. Honywood was unrepentant, but to 'Probono Publico' his crime was clear enough; '...notwithstanding his most solemn and public assurances to the contrary, [he] has almost invariably opposed the present administration, and thereby forfeited the confidence not only of those who are friends to it, but as a public man of

1 Kentish Gazette, 30 Apr. - 4 May 1790.
2 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 May 1790.
3 Kentish Gazette, 11-14 May 1790.
4 See notices in Kentish Gazette, 2-5 and 5-9 May 1790.
the world in general'. The whole story of the pledge requested by Lord Mahon in 1784 was recapitulated by 'A FRANKLIN', and brought from the pen of 'TRUTH' a swift response. Honywood had been no stranger to the government lobby!

In those measures which have principally contributed to whatever degree of popularity Mr. Pitt may at present enjoy, he has zealously supported him; on other questions of great political and constitutional importance, he has as warmly opposed him; and in many instances, in conjunction with the most weighty and independent characters, among those who are most partial to his person and principles, he supported him in his plans for the diminution of the national debt, in most of his taxes, in his measures for emancipating Holland from the influence of France. He opposed him in the business of the Westminster Scrutiny, on the Irish Propositions, the arrest of taxes, the Naval Promotion, by which many valuable officers were superseded, and the Duke of Richmond's Fortification Project.

Moreover, he had voted with Pitt against Fox on the Shop Tax and the Prince's right to the Regency, and had opposed the settlement of the Prince's debts without the consent of the King. Certainly he had made promises in 1784, but once elected he had had to be guided by his own judgment. Other writers noted that Lord Mahon, now Earl Stanhope, had also gone into opposition to Pitt, and had differed from Honywood only on the Regency.

Speculation about present and future allegiance necessarily invited comparisons with Knatchbull. Seeking to restore his family's links with county politics which had been in abeyance since 1763, Sir Edward offered himself as 'a strenuous supporter of the Constitution in Church and State' but in assessing the much-prized independence of both men, 'CONTINUA.DVS' was convinced that Knatchbull had made some compact with ministers in order to

1 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Mar. 1790. Cf. ibid., 15-19 Mar. 1790 for 'A WELL-WISHER TO SIR EDWARD KNATCHULL'.
2 Kentish Gazette, 9-12 Mar. 1790.
3 Kentish Gazette, 12-16 Mar. 1790. Cf. ibid., 16-19 Mar. 1790 for reply from 'TRUTH'.
4 For example, 'GOODWIN' in Kentish Gazette, 10-23 and 23-26 Mar. 1790.
5 Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Mar. 1790.
secure their interest, and asked: 'Shall a respectable and enlightened county be stunned by the clamour of such a host, and surrender their rights of election to the disposal of the dock yards?' Honywood on the other hand, was a Whig and thus 'the Independent Candidate, and most zealous friend of the constitution.'

Stories went the rounds of chaises hired at Deptford to convey 'persons of creditable appearance, though no freeholders' to Maidstone, 'to make a show in Sir Edward's favour on the day of nomination'; threatened loss of patronage to unfriendly innkeepers; and of timely clerical preferments. Then again, 'Anti-party' was on the baronet's side because he disliked Honywood's close ties with the Foxites, whereas 'F.O.T' could only heap praises on the man who had spurned government in his faithful adherence to Fox and the Whigs. Personal deportment and integrity in private life were uppermost in the minds of 'an Independent East Kent Freeholder' and 'A constitutional Whig'. To the former, Honywood had cut the greatest figure at Maidstone in appearance and mode of address, while to the other it was the height of presumption and ingratitude on the part of the wholly inexperienced Knatchbull to challenge for the seat of his first wife's uncle. Finally, Honywood's reputation must have been enhanced by his extension of charity to a poor woman and her children who had been forced into the workhouse after her husband had been accused of killing fox-cubs on Knatchbull's land and compelled to flee the kingdom.

While this war of words raged in every newspaper, the two principal candidates were hard at work among the freeholders.

Charles Harsham on the other hand, remained aloof, relying on

1 Kentish Gazette, 12-16 Mar. 1790.
3 Kentish Gazette, 16-20 Apr. 1790.
4 It was also argued that ministers would pay Knatchbull's $20,000 expenses: Kentish Gazette, 26-30 Mar. 1790.
5 Kentish Gazette, 19-23 Apr. 1790.
6 Kentish Gazette, 16-19 Apr. 1790.
7 Kentish Gazette, 16-19 and 19-23 Apr. 1790.
8 Kentish Gazette, 16-20 Apr. 1790.
the decision of 8 March and content to watch the antics of the men of East Kent. But it was a curious and a dangerous stance. Soon after the Maidstone meeting 'A Fanciful On' was wondering on what basis Harsham had escaped the recriminations raining about the ears of his former colleague, for had he not also erred from his pledge? By the middle of April, one of Honywood's supporters was writing, 'If any miscarriage should happen, it will owe its rise to a want of early zeal and explicitness in a certain quarter'; and a month later 'Speculation' observed with regard to Harsham that 'from the strong party features that mark this contest he may, from the inconsiderate zeal of their [Knatchbull and Honywood] friends in pressing for single votes, eventually lose his election'. Harsham doubtless realised his plight, and rumours began to circulate of advances made to Knatchbull. 'Every friend to independence will surely coincide...', argued one correspondent, 'that it is better to have an open enemy to oppose than to encounter with the machinations of a fair friend.' Harsham strenuously denied the allegations, but they persisted until election day. '...liberal and disinterested Mr. Harsham,' ran one report, 'wishes to gain a momentary seat (in favour of his friend G---y, who is the fixed man to succeed him) in preference to the seven years tenure the friends of constitutional liberty would enjoy in the election of their UPRIGHT and faithful servant, Mr. Honywood, and on whose success the freedom of this county entirely depends'. The likelihood of Harsham being called to the Lords at any moment must have been a prime electoral consideration, but there is no evidence to substantiate the assertions made by Mr. Breton at Penenden Heath on 28 June that an agreement had

1 Kentish Gazette, 9-12 Mar. 1790.
2 Kentish Gazette, 13-16 Apr. 1790.
3 Kentish Gazette, 14-14 May 1790.
4 Kentish Gazette, 15-18 June 1790.
5 Kentish Gazette, 18-22 June 1790.
been made with Knatchbull to split the cost of bringing up the cross votes.¹

Whig fears were understandable, since alliance or not, Pittites were more likely to assist the moderate Harsham as the best means of ousting the self-confessed Foxite. Portland wrote to Adam on 30 June, 'I tremble for Kent - Last nights poll brought Harsham within 55 of Honywood & all Knatchbells split votes are thrown upon Harsham. For Knatchbull is 1342 above Honywood.'²

This is borne out by an analysis of the 205 clergymen who voted. Knatchbull received 157 clerical votes, Harsham 129 and Honywood 54. However the numbers of single votes cast were 33, 4 and 33 respectively, which indicate great interchange between the first two candidates and a strictly party support for the Whig. Despite this, the final return saw Honywood comfortably in second place behind Knatchbull.

Few major issues had managed to impress themselves upon the electors. Some opposition seems to have arisen to Honywood on account of his vote against the Test and Corporation Acts⁴, and this may explain his poor showing among the clergy. 'FREEHOLDER' endeavoured to revive reform to something of its former stature, and advocated local registration and voting, and the payment of M.P.'s. Pitt, he believed, was still sympathetic to the cause, and would be encouraged if men pledged to its support were elected.⁵

Neither matter was raised at the hustings, so that together with the borough elections, the result in the county tends only to bear out Dr. L. G. Mitchell's conclusion that, 'The dismissal of the Coalition on the question of the East India Bill and the amplification of important constitutional points in the personal duel

¹ Kentish Gazette, 25-29 June and 29 June - 2 July 1790.
³ Kentish Chronicle, 15-22 Mar. 1791.
⁵ Kentish Gazette, 7-11 May 1790.
between Pitt and Fox determined the political allegiance of a whole generation'.

Chapter five
Kentish politics and the French Revolution
1788 - 1802

On 22 February 1788 the Kentish Gazette recorded the death of the 'Young Pretender', and in retrospect it seems somehow fitting that the last vestige of the old Jacobite menace should have been swept away on the very eve of events which were to affect English politics even more dramatically than the flight of James II and the machinations of his exiled descendants. The Jacobin phase of the French Revolution inevitably cut short the party strife of the late 1780's, and redefined the political allegiances of a whole generation. Nevertheless, it may be argued that in some respects at least, it actually assisted the growth of Kentish public opinion. County and borough elections continued on the high note set in 1790, and on numerous occasions the enfranchised classes met to debate the state of the nation. More important, perhaps, the new ideological ferment encompassed many groups less accustomed to play an active role. The Reevite and Volunteer movements demanded the participation of men of all ranks, while Paineite ideas inspired working men to associate and to consider their response to local and national affairs. Consequently, while there was repression in the 1790's, Pitt's legislation and the treason trials may be stripped away to reveal some curiously positive long-term results.

At the outset, English attitudes to France were considerably influenced by comparison with William III's Glorious Revolution. As has been seen, a number of Kentish towns commemorated its centenary in November 1788, and as well as giving fresh vigour to the Whig-Tory conflict, the celebrations did not pass without references to contemporary happenings on the continent. At

1 Kentish Gazette, 19-2 Feb. 1788.
2 See supra, pp. 134-5.
Haidstone toasts were drunk to 'the cause of liberty all over the world, and may those be free who deserve to be so'; and more specifically the assembly declared, 'May 1788 be as auspicious to the French patriots, as 1688 was to the British ones'. Later, when reviewing the jubilee, the 'SPECTATOR' observed in the Kentish Gazette:

"The flood of joy so generally diffused over England in celebration of the centenary return of this glorious event, will do great honour to the national character in the eyes of Europe. It will convince the wretched slaves of France and Spain, that my countrymen retain too high a sense of that Constitutional Liberty, which the Revolution of 1688 secured to them, ever to surrender it; and it may possibly give a spur to the struggles making at this moment by French patriotism to shake off those shameful shackles of arbitrary power, in which their kings pretend to be their legal right to hold their subjects. The commemorative Jubilee of our revolution in the last, may, it is possible, stimulate our neighbours to emulation of something similar to it in the present century. May their exertions in so divine a cause, be attended with similar success."

When the revolution eventually began in France in 1789, such sentiments shaped the responses of Earl Stanhope and Dr. Price and of the London Revolution Society and the Society for Constitutional Information. Both bodies were active in publicising and explaining the principles of the French people, and maintained a regular correspondence across the Channel until early 1792.

If in 1788 it was hoped that France might attain the blessings enshrined in the Bill of Rights, a year later some Englishmen were drawing political inspiration from the progress of liberty in Paris. Professor Goodwin has argued forcibly that the renewed interest in the legacy of 1688 'first dissipated the public apathy on the question of parliamentary reform which had followed the debate on Pitt's proposals in 1789'; while to

1 Kentish Gazette, 4-7 Nov. 1788.
2 Kentish Gazette, 18-21 Nov. 1788.
3 For these societies see J. W. Black, The Association: British Extraparlimentary Political Organisation, 1789-1793 (Cambridge Mass., 1965), chs. v and vi.
5 Ibid., pp. 19-20.
G. S. Veitch the French Revolution acted like 'a touch of flame' on the old cause. Writing in June 1790, 'SYDNEY' asserted, '...when we see our Parliaments verging towards the insignificance of the late Parlements of France, mere registers of the will of the crown, it becomes our duty to prevent the future necessity of a similar revolution, by securing the independency of our Representatives'. He thus proceeded to advocate checks on expenses, a rate-payer franchise in the counties, and polling in each parish. Prospective candidates should be supported by ten gentlemen with freeholds of at least £500 per annum, and the final nomination of four or six men was to be made by a ballot of all the hopefuls and their groups of proposors. The tone was moderate and preventative, and quite in keeping with the scheme outlined earlier in the year by Henry Flood. However the preoccupation of Kentishmen with the fierce party warfare banished reform from the elections of 1790 as effectively as it had dismissed the issue from county politics since 1752. Parliamentary reform had already ceased to be the preserve of gentry-dominated movements in Kent as elsewhere in Britain, and when it re-emerged it was among the francophile working classes of London and the new industrial towns.

Nevertheless, the opening phase of the Revolution instilled in many breasts a sort of hazy optimism, and did not pass without challenging a number of time-honoured practices. In October 1789, for example, the Kentish Gazette carried an address 'To the Freeholders of Great Britain' which ran:

At a time when a nation on the Continent, formerly despised by us on account of its abject slavery, is asserting the indefeasible rights of mankind, and about to establish liberty on the broadest basis, it is too...

2 Kentish Gazette, 22-25 June 1790.
3 For the impact of reform during the election, see Goodwin, op. cit., pp. 121-2; and Veitch, op. cit., pp. 116-17.
dreadful to consider that in this land of hereditary freedom there should still exist laws as repugnant to common sense and common right, I mean the execrable Game Laws.

Such statements were acceptable in the months just after the storming of the Bastille, but it was not long before they were being viewed with the greatest of suspicion by the leaders of an essentially rural community. Equally chimerical were the happy reflections prompted in 'HáDÉ', by the celebrations of Louis XVI and his subjects in the Champ de Mars on 14 July 1790. He welcomed the peace and order of events in France, and noted the 'improving state of happiness'. The French, he believed, might soon become 'the protectors of the rights, and the vindicators of the injured and oppressed nations of Europe'; and he was sure that:

...the definite hour will come when the great actions, and glorious patriotism of the Franks will cause us to emulate everything which is just, rational, and friendly to human nature, in these new plans of government... Whensoever this time arrives, may it proceed under the guidance of reason, moderation and wisdom... rather may it arrive gradually and almost imperceptibly.

Reform in Britain might still be far off, but 'HáDÉ's' hope in the Revolution was unalloyed. 'I behold nothing but the dawn of greater happiness to mankind. I am neither afraid, that their efforts will be attended by any bad consequences there, or give rise to or produce any dangerous ones here'.

Other observers were less sanguine. As early as July 1789 the Kentish Gazette was counselling caution.

The French are now free!... let this nation, however, be still on its guard, or the present liberty of France may occasion the future thraldom of England! The contests of free nations are always the most bloody and obstinate.

While in March 1790 'HáX' could marvel that 'having been long pressed down to the earth', France, 'springs up with an elastic

1 Kentish Gazette, 6-1 Oct. 1789.
3 Kentish Gazette, 7-10 July 1789.
vigour and energy'. The Kentish Gazette had felt compelled to ask at the very commencement of this renaissance, '...what have not her neighbours, her rivals, and her enemies, to dread from France?'; and with Britain at the forefront of his mind, the printer had predicted ominously: 'When Greek meets Greek, then is the tug of war'. A year later, English fears were becoming more substantial. An address to the radical Earl Stanhope stated: 'There cannot be a greater proof of the weakness of the national assembly of France, than their destroying all rank and dignity... an act so contrary to reason and common sense'. The writer appealed to scripture for the basis of nobility, which he believed was essential if society was to remain active and ordered. 'All rank and dignity being at an end', he went on, 'France will very soon be a dull, flat scene of rich misers, and poor miserable paupers'. The tone of the address was still primarily one of concern for the well-being of the French people, but it was not long before attacks on aristocracy, the Church and the entire fabric of the ancien régime threatened to breed anarchy and confusion at home.

In the summer of 1790, a general apprehension of impending danger had not yet developed. The French Revolution was hardly mentioned in the Kent county election, while war, if it was to come, seemed most likely to be with Spain over Nootka Sound. However, in November Edmund Burke published his Reflections on the Revolution in France, and thereby not only quickened the disintegration of the Whig party, but inaugurated a pamphlet

1 Kentish Chronicle, 23-30 Mar. 1790.
2 Kentish Gazette, 7-10 July 1789.
3 Kentish Gazette, 20-23 July 1790.
4 See J. Ugl-Flsher to your Independence' in Kentish Gazette, 12-22 June 1790.
controversy of profound importance. The printer of the Kentish Gazette at once felt, 'Impatient to give our readers an early taste of the extraordinary work Mr. Burke has sent into the world'; and proceeded to reproduce many of its central arguments.\footnote{Kentish Gazette, 2-5 Nov. 1790.} By January 1791, one correspondent was rejoicing that 18,000 copies of the book had already been sold, because he conceived it 'to contain sentiments which cannot be too generally disseminated at this critical juncture'.\footnote{Kentish Gazette, 4-7 Jan. 1791.} All three Kentish newspapers entered eagerly into the new spirit of ideological debate, and at the same time kept the public closely in touch with every event in France and the rest of Europe.

If the continental situation was an increasing source of disquiet, the spread of radicalism in London and the provinces gave added credibility to Burke's wildest fears. Meetings were again held in November 1791 among the Whig friends of Mr. Polhill and Filmer Honywood, at Rochester, Maidstone and the Rose Inn, Sittingbourne, to celebrate the blessings of 1688.\footnote{Kentish Chronicle, 15 Nov. 1791.} However, the sands were fast running out even for the party of moderate reform. The appearance of Paine's \textit{Rights of Man} in 1791 and 1792, coupled with the activities of Hardy's London Corresponding Society and other kindred bodies, sounded the alarm at Westminster, and brought, on 21 May 1792, the royal proclamation against seditious writings and publications. In Kent, the Lord Lieutenant and the Grand Jury were put on the alert\footnote{Sackville MSS. U26/0141.}, and it was not long before a requisition was being circulated for a county meeting. Local opposition there was. 'A MAN OF KENT' asserted that only the freedom of Parliament and the press could achieve the repeal of the system of titles and pensions, and warned fellow reformers that those who supported the proclamation simply wished 'to
suppress all enquiry into the abuses of Government'. Nevertheless, the views of Sir Edward Knatchbull prevailed, and on 2 July the freeholders carried a loyal address to the King with very little difficulty. Lord Lewisham claimed: 'That doctrines of a most sedious tendency, and as novel as they were pernicious, had lately made their appearance, ...required no proof; and that they were circulated with an industry as malicious as that which gave them birth, was equally obvious.' Knatchbull concurred, and a letter of approbation from Filmer Honeywood was read to the crowd. The propertied classes of Kent were closing ranks behind the Constitution, whose 'every corner-stone', Thomas Knight prayed, 'might remain for ever unshaken, and resist the shock of time to the latest posterity.'

II

Within a very few weeks the apprehensions of the gentry seemed to have been vindicated. A report from Paris on 30 July announced: 'Every thing here has an aspect of tranquillity'; but it was the peace which precedes the hurricane, rather than that which follows in its wake. The Duke of Brunswick's manifesto appeared on 25 July, and with the relentless advance of Austrian and Prussian armies, the French first overthrew their monarchy (10 August) and then on 21 September proclaimed a Republic. The accompanying 'September massacres' sent a chill across Europe, while the lurid tales of fleeing émigrés were listened to with horror and mounting anger.

Kentishmen watched the exodus, and no doubt heard many a story of bloodshed and cruel persecution. The Kentish Gazette noted in mid-September that 10,000 French priests, in a 'truly pitiable' condition, had fled from their homes and parishes in

1 Kentish Gazette, 29 June 1792.
2 ibid., May 1792; and report in Kentish Gazette, 3 July 1792.
3 Kentish Gazette, 3 Aug. 1792.
the previous ten days, and believed: 'The apprehension of aristocrats continues with the most unremitting violence.' 

A correspondent from Hythe called on his readers to remember the national danger and apparent royal treachery which had prompted the recent excesses, and cited Glencoe to emphasise that massacre was not unknown even in post-1688 Britain; but he was among a fast-dwindling minority. More representative of the prevailing mood was 'HILARITANICUS', whose 'Observations on the late and present Situation of France with some reflections relative to the State of the two Countries and Governments' launched a scathing attack upon the absolute and tyrannical regime which was oppressing religion, ill-treating the King, his family and other notables, and indulging in execution without trial. 'If this is a fair statement of the affairs of France,' he declared, '...if such are the effects of Jacobin Societies and Republican schemes... may God in his mercy deliver every nation... from such ideas, such principles, and such men.'

'HILARITANICUS' was also concerned lest similar scenes of slaughter and rapine should be acted out in England as a result of a reform of Parliament, however moderate and well-intentioned it might appear. The Edict of Fraternity of 19 November, and the flood of addresses between English radicals and their brethren in the Jacobin clubs, convinced Pitt that an uncompromising stand was urgently required. Of those adopted, the formation of John Reeves' association for preserving liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, in London on 20 November, profoundly influenced the temper of Kentish society. With the full backing of ministers, Reeves published a series of loyal resolutions, and during December, the Canterbury and

1 Kentish Gazette, 14 and 18 Sept. 1792. 
2 Kentish Gazette, 2 Oct. 1792. 
3 Kentish Gazette, 2 Nov. 1792. 
Hastings papers were filled with accounts of borough and parish meetings summoned in response to his appeal. The inhabitants of Sandwich were perhaps typical of the majority of Kentishmen. On 14 December they pledged:

our staunch adherence to this our most excellent Constitution, against the attempts of wicked and designing persons, who would wish to overthrow the same, and by that means confound all order and property, and reduce this kingdom, happy and flourishing beyond all former periods, to the most abject state of misery and distress.

And resolved:

That we will use our utmost endeavours to discourage and suppress all such publications as may tend to alienate the minds of his Majesty's subjects from their affection to the present establishment, and to detect and bring to Justice, the authors, printers, publishers, and sellers thereof.

A day earlier, the men of Canterbury had met to pass resolutions 'for counteracting the evil designs of persons, who by their seditious writings and treasonable practices, are endeavouring to excite the people to insurrections against the Government;'' while an assembly at Rochester's Guildhall under George Jest re-affirmed its confidence in the existing social order.

...as in every Government, there must be different ranks and degrees of men, we are convinced, that in such as are well regulated, this does not tend to the encouragement of pride and oppression, but is the occasion of promoting industry, and of providing for the wants of the artificer, the labourer, and the indigent; and that therefore the adoption of any fancied system of equalisation, would, while it introduced civil confusion, deprive by its effects the lower orders of society, of those means of subsistence which they now enjoy.'

The principal object of every meeting was to address the King, and thereby to strengthen the hand of his ministers in dealing with the radical threat at home and abroad. However addresses were also useful in gauging the sentiments of a whole community, and in

1 Kentish Gazette, 21 Dec. 1792.
2 Ibid.
detecting the identity and whereabouts of potential mischievous.
No doubt with this in view, the magistrates of East Kent circulated draft addresses to the clergy and churchwardens of each parish in their division, and recommended the gathering of signatures from all residents over sixteen. Some places decided to go even further, and resolved to form committees to correspond with Reeves' parent association, and to organise local vigilance. At Maidstone a committee was empowered to offer rewards for the conviction of offenders, and like-intentioned bodies mushroomed at Broadstairs and Canterbury. At Sandwich, magistrates were requested to be severe upon those victuallers 'as shall suffer any tumultuous or seditious meetings to be held at their respective houses'; and in Kent's eastern division, constables were instructed to report any riotous gatherings and to warn ale-house keepers against the discussion of constitutional topics.

In seeking to combat radicalism, the loyalist movement made extensive use of the machinery of propaganda. By the end of 1792, Kent's three newspapers had taken up the ministerial stance, and William Epps had entirely failed to offset the defection of the Kentish Chronicle from the opposition camp by the printing of a pro-Mrig Kentish Herald in Canterbury. The press carried columns of patriotic addresses and resolutions, advertised forthcoming meetings, and cultivated popular hatred of Paine through verses and letters. The countywide network of associations enabled Reeves to distribute government-inspired pamphlets, and at the same time allowed local men to participate in the critical war of words and ideas. The Canterbury printer named John Jones produced his own tract, and the mayor of Maidstone was employed.

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1 Kentish Gazette, 11 Dec. 1792.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 For example, Whitman 138. U289/514; and among the papers relating to Deal in 1725/2.
on similar work. The association for the northern division of the Lathe of Aylesford and the City of Rochester, in which the Smith-Masters family of Neophian was closely involved, circulated, on Reeves' behalf, handbills detailing the original Crown and Anchor resolves and suggesting the most effective methods of forming provincial committees. Broadsheets such as Ten Minutes Caution: A Plain Man to his Fellow Citizens and One Penny-worth of Truth from Thomas Paine to his Brother John were made available to inhabitants, and Rochester's printing presses captured the major national issues in Plain and Earnest Address to Britons, especially farmers, on the Interesting State of Public Affairs in Great Britain and France and Effects of the Principles of Popular As and Revellers Among Our Neighbours; As attested by an Eye-Witness. The particular object of execration was, of course, Rights of Man, the second part of which was declared as seditious libel on 18 December. An effigy of Paine, whom 'C...C' had reviled in the previous June as 'the great demagogue of licentiousness', was drawn through the streets of Dover with his detested book in one hand and a pair of old stocks in the other, and finally committed to the flames amid choruses of 'God Save the King'. The cumulative result of these appeals to the intellect and the popular love of ritualised protest and parade, was 'one of the first manifestations of conservatism as a conscious and organised force in English history'; whose advocacy of the values of the British Constitution was, in the long-term, to ensure the defeat of the radical menace.

Even so, D. E. Cinter was undoubtedly correct to argue that John Reeves did not by himself accomplish England's wholesome

1 Jack, op. cit., p. 245; and Mitchell, loc. cit., 71.
2 Mitchell, op. cit., 01127/012, 013.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 29 June 1792.
5 Mitchell, loc. cit., 57.
on 23 November 1792 upwards of one hundred freeholders celebrated the 1688 revolution in company with James Honywood at the Rose Inn, Sittinbourne, and a month later, at the very height of Kent's loyalist fever, John Burney of Canterbury still felt able to plead that persistent criticism of corruption was quite consistent with support of William III's revered settlement. In 1799, despite the execution of Louis XVI and the subsequent declaration of war, reform continued to interest some newspaper correspondents, and even penetrated into Simons and Kirkby's new Kentish Register and Monthly Miscellany. In the House of Commons, on 18 February, Clement Taylor voted with Fox against the war, and in the Lords, Lord Stonhamp spoke of 'this calamity, pregnant with ruin to England'. In March, an appreciation of the career and principles of John Sawbridge was used as a convenient vehicle for a renewed discussion of moderate reform, while the Commons division of 7. May, the young Whig reformer Charles Grey was accompanied into the lobbies by Taylor and Honywood. However, with the sentencing of the Scottish radicals Hair and Palmer, the disruption of the National Convention in Edinburgh during November, and above all, the danger of an invasion in the spring of 1794, the public debate abruptly ceased, since it could no longer be doubted that the country's cherished institutions were in deadly peril.

Their purpose having been satisfactorily fulfilled, many of the loyalist associations disappeared in the early months of 1793, while others were transformed into 'Church and King' clubs. The French invasion scare resurrected militant conservatism, and with the formation of the Volunteers one further element in

2 Kentish Gazette, 30 Nov. 1792.
3 Kentish Gazette, 23 Dec. 1792.
4 Kentish Gazette, 18 Nov. 1792 and 22.
5 Kentish Gazette, 19 Mar. 1793.
6 Parl. Hist., xxx. 925.
Britain's 'party of order' was cemented firmly. Kent's geographical position made her population particularly sensitive to rumours of enemy attack, as had been demonstrated in 1745 and 1779. Consequently the subject was being anxiously mooted in the press by "POLITICAL" and others from an early date; and an eager response was forthcoming at both county and parish levels to the national plight. As Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Dorset proposed a plan for the county's defence, which, having been discussed by some of the principal land-owners at a private meeting in London, was laid before the freeholders on 3 April 1784. The series of resolutions was approved, calling upon gentlemen to raise Volunteer Corps of fifty men, and a subscription was opened to help defray expenses. A distinguished committee was also established, to which all subscribers of £10 or more were to be added, and meetings were regularly convened throughout the summer to review the state of preparations. By July, £45,000 had been collected, and among those to enrol their own troops were Sir Edward Hatchbull, Lord Barnley, Lord Camden, William Honywood, Sir John Honywood, Percival Hart, the Hon. J. A. Townshend and W. J. Woodgate, as well as the Duke of Dorset. Although the French landings never came, these corps were useful in quelling domestic riot at a time when shortage and rural unemployment were breeding discontent. The gentry saw their property protected, and acquired new prestige and patronage with which to sustain their influence in society, while as

2 Kentish Chronicle, 14 Jan. 1784.
3 For comment on manner of the plan's formulation, see Kentish Chronicle, 28 Mar. and 3 Apr. 1784.
5 See comments by "J.R.W." in Kentish Chronicle, 29 Apr. 1794.
member of an amateur army and police force, the freeholders and farmers of Kent were given an active interest in the preservation of order.

Elsewhere, Kentish patriotism was just as strong. In his capacity as Lord Warden, Pitt summoned a meeting at Dover Castle on 24 April to concert the defences of the Cinque Ports. Infantry corps were to be formed for the protection of specific towns, and a cavalry was projected for use wherever the need was greatest within the liberty. The inhabitants of Dover, Deal and Sandwich set to approve these schemes, and in each case instituted subscriptions, and committees of gentlemen, merchants and clergymen.\(^1\) Canterbury and other places followed suit\(^2\), and alongside the regular forces maintained a strict vigilance throughout the summer. There is no record that Dorset's committee met again after August, for by then, naval victories in the Channel had temporarily dispelled all possibility of a French crossing. Nevertheless the episode had been a significant one. 'SALAMIS' had unhesitatingly linked the cause of England and the Volunteers with that of the Divine Will and the preservation of the Gospel against 'the wild uproar of anarchy and irreligion';\(^3\) and such compelling views only strengthened the county's commitment to a war which had engendered much hostile comment in its opening phase. Filmer Hollywood was alone among Kentish H.P.s in voting for an end to the conflict in the Commons on 30 May 1794,\(^4\) and for a time at least, the majority of his constituents probably subscribed to the fifth resolution of 8 April: 'That the most speedy and effectual means of obtaining a safe and honourable peace, is by a vigorous prosecution of the war'.\(^5\)

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1 Kentish Chronicle, 2 and 9 May 1794. The Sandwich report gives details of the organisation of troops.
2 For Canterbury, see Kentish Chronicle, 20 and 24 June 1794.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 27 May 1794.
5 Kentish Gazette, 15 Apr. 1794.
III

If Kent's political classes had in great measure abandoned reform and accepted the need for the government's war strategy, the attitude of urban working men and the rural poor remained a topic of acute concern, not least during the years of economic hardship between 1794 and 1796. This was, after all, the period of the London treason trials, the monster rally at Copenhagen House, and the 'Two Acts', while few historians would wish to deny that the 1790's as a whole was a decade of crucial importance in the development of working-class organisation and ideology. The evidence is scarce, but there are hints that in some sections of Kentish society the doctrines of Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason* might expect a warm response.

In general, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period was one of prosperity for the farming community, and in the decade after 1800 especially, even the agricultural labourers enjoyed a reasonable standard of living. Wages were kept up, and the cultivation of marginal land meant employment during most of the year. However there were occasions in the middle and late 1790's when high prices and bad harvests brought real suffering to the rural poor. Rioting and rick-burning at moments of discontent had always been a feature of life in the countryside, while tithe-glutted parsons and the managers of game-parks were the natural targets upon which to vent anger and despair. Yet in an atmosphere of invasion and suspected treason, such proceedings could easily assume a more sinister aspect. Not surprisingly, therefore, every effort was made to ameliorate the worst effects of rural distress and thereby to forestall its escalation into open social disaffection.

In 1795 bread was expensive and in short supply. At Beckenham the Vestry ordered that grain should be purchased, ground, and sold to the poor at 9d. a loaf. Furthermore, since the real
cost of losses ranged between 1/- and 1/10/-d., it was agreed to establish a fund to defray the cost. In the following year, Kentish J.P.s were still active in the campaign to reduce the consumption of wheaten flour among the wealthier classes, and by 1800, attempts were being made to introduce other food into the bread-based diet of the labourers. The late 1790’s also witnessed the rapid adoption of the Speenhamland system of poor relief in many parts of southern England. In Kent, Pitt’s bill to give statutory force to family allowances and wage subsidies met with stout opposition at a meeting of West Kent justices in February 1797, on the ground that it ‘will prove very difficult if not impracticable in the execution and will greatly increase the amount of the poor rates without improving the condition of the poor in any proportionable degree’. However as J. A. Daugh has recently demonstrated, such expedients were regularly adopted in south-east England at times of dearth. In 1799, for example, Lord George Murray suggested a scheme to the selling justices under which, when the price of bread was at a shilling a loaf, a man with a wife and two children would receive an allowance of 13/9d. The problem was clearly great, but as a result of the remedial measures, together with the policing activities of the Volunteers, no serious disorders were recorded.

While the gentry were thus able to retain a pre-eminence in the countryside, their writ was less readily respected in Kent’s urban areas. By the late eighteenth century, Kent’s medieval iron and textile industries had all but disappeared. However the

1 R. Borrowman, Beckenham Past and Present (Beckenham, 1910) p. 13.
growth of metropolitan and Kentish markets stimulated alternative trades, many of which were concentrated in the north and northwest of the county, and down the Medway to Maidstone and Tonbridge. Paper-making was carried on along the banks of the Medway, and in its day, James Wharton's Turkey Mill at Rochester was the largest in England. Local hops and malt supplied a thriving brewing industry, and the rich diversity of agricultural produce and raw materials of the Weald provided employment for many men in carriage and processing. The American and French wars fostered the manufacture of gunpowder for the Ordnance, rope and cable making at Gravesend, and the building, repairing, and fitting-out of ships at Deptford, Woolwich, Chatham and Sheerness. The consequent rapid expansion of the population, and easy communication with London by road and river, thus created the most likely breeding-ground for radical ideas in Kent. Nothing on the scale of societies at Norwich, Sheffield and Manchester was to be expected, but when John Gale Jones was dispatched thither by the London Corresponding Society in February 1793, he found considerable interest in the cause of reform.

In November 1792 a small society at Rochester had addressed the French Convention deploiring Grenville's failure to recognise the new Republic; however nothing more was heard of the city's reformers until the London Corresponding Society received a request for assistance in October 1795. On his arrival, Gale

2 Ibid., pp. 1.0-6.
3 Ibid., pp. 127-34.
4 The History of the Incorporated Town and Parishes of Gravesend and Milton in the County of Kent (Gravesend, 1797), p.19.
6 Goodwin, op. cit., chap. 5.
7 J. Gale Jones, Sketch of a Political Tour through Rochester, Chatham, Maidstone, &c. etc., including directions on the conduct of meetings on the inadmissibility of those places, and on the success of the societies instituted for the purpose of obtaining a Parliamentary Reform (London, 1793). To Wharton, op. cit., p. 329, this was, 'quite a reliable account'.
Jones was told that the Rochester society had once boasted nine
or ten divisions, but that it had recently been 'diminished and
disorganised' by the apprehensions and timidity of its members.
While acknowledging that this figure was somewhat exaggerated,
he too lamented 'that in these degenerate days to be a friend
of reform is to subject oneself to persecution and unmerited
abuse'. In the wake of Pitt's Two Acts, therefore, Gale Jones'
mission was to revive flagging spirits and forge links with
London radicals. He addressed numerous gatherings, attended the
formation of a new society at Gillingham, and on 22 February saw
a meeting of the United Corresponding Society of Rochester, Chath-
am and Bromptons resolve 'to act in concert' with the M.C.B.

Having accomplished all this, Gale Jones was journeying back to London when he was first diverted to Gravesend, and then,
on receiving fresh instructions, returned via Rochester to Maid-
stone. The society at Gravesend was said to be well-established,
and simply in need of advice. Gale Jones spoke to a group of
about fifty men, with the encouraging result that sixteen new
members were enrolled. He described Maidstone as 'a divided
place', where 'party men so high that many of the neighbours would
not traffic with those who were of opposite opinions', and 'the
going into a tavern frequented by different parties might subject
a man to the hazard of being turned out, or at least insulted'.
Three meetings of the borough's reformers were held at the Castle
Inn, and a society for Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments
was founded under the leadership of Mr. S----, a local paper-
miller.

If Gale Jones' account is to be believed, therefore, reform-
ning zeal was great in this part of Kent. But who exactly were

[Footnotes]
1 Gale Jones, op. cit., pp. 8 and 77.
2 Ibid., pp. 27-8, 31-2, 41 and APP. 102-7.
3 Ibid., pp. 64-5.
4 Ibid., pp. 70 and 83-5.
those 'men of liberal minds and comprehensive understandings'\(^1\),
whom the missionary was so surprised to encounter outside London,
and why had they been converted to reform? 'At Hidstone, the H.P.
and paper-miller, Clement Taylor, was active in the cause, and
Mr. S------ asserted that his workers were all 'citizens' because
'their wages were less, and the price of provisions greater than
ever'.\(^2\) At Brompton, on the other hand, many millers and farmers
from the adjacent districts were being attracted to the movement.
Gale Jones described one such farmer of Gillingham, 'possessed of
a considerable property', whom he met at the Pelstaff Tavern, as
'a strong Democrat, and, I doubt, something more than a Reformer'.\(^3\)
Here too, the desperate economic plight of the people was at the
heart of the discontent. One miller admitted that he had a number
of tenants who were unable to pay their rents, but, as he observed,
'tis to no purpose... for me to distress them: I must wait till
better times, for at present they can scarcely procure for them-
selves the bare necessities of life'.\(^4\) Many inhabitants clearly
regarded the conduct of ministers and the harmful effects of the
war as the prime causes of their misery\(^5\), and in such circumstanc-
ences, the attractions of reform were almost irresistible.

Nevertheless, Government, its supporters and agencies, were
not blind to the dangers of disaffection among the lower orders.
Gale Jones' mission did not remain secret for long, and on his
first night in Rochester he was left in no doubt of the depth of
local patriotic hostility to radicals and dissenters. He was
quickly recognised by Rochester's post-master, who immediately
sought permission to open his letters, and called on the Mayor
to suppress all societies.\(^6\) These experiences, together with the
evidence afforded by the subsequent tour, demonstrate that profoun

1 Ibid., p. 59.
2 Ibid., pp. 34 and 85.
3 Ibid., p. 35.
4 Ibid., p. 73.
5 Ibid., pp. 5 and 57.
6 Ibid., pp. 16-16 and 29-30.
social and political tensions had already arisen which were to have far-reaching implications. The establishment of barracks provoked much popular antagonism towards the resident army officers, while the Bishop of Rochester was burned in effigy after having declared in the Lords: "The People have nothing to do with the Law but to obey them."¹ The Mayor of Gravesend had been angered by a petition against the Convention Bills, and retaliated by denying one of the signatories the repayment of a £30 debt; and at Chatham, Commissioner Proby apparently encountered concerted opposition when he tried to promote a congratulatory address among the dockyard workers.² The use of spies, the arrest of radical leaders, and the enforcement of Pitt's legislation all helped add a new dimension to Kentish politics which had been largely absent in the days of Wilkes and Wyvill. There was still too heavy a reliance on the motivating power of economic distress, but the influence of Paine and his disciples in the next generation ensured that the trends of the 1790's were carefully consolidated.

IV

Whether or not the developments observable in the Meakway towns were reflected elsewhere in Kent, the documentary record does not disclose, although it is difficult to believe that Canterbury's silk weavers and the port workers of Dover, Deal and Sandwich were wholly untouched by contemporary ideas. More accessible are the views of the county's political classes, and these may to some extent be gathered from the elections which were being keenly anticipated as Gale Jones made his progress in the spring of 1793.

While the county constituency was vigorously, and even controversially contested, comparisons with the preceding decade and

¹ Ibid., pp. 57-8 and 81-2.
² Ibid., pp. 65 and 74.
a half, reveal just how deeply the shock-waves of the French Revolution had penetrated. Gage Jones might derive comfort from the exploits of 'Citizen' Stanhope and his 'little remnant' of crypto-Jacobins, but at a time of national emergency even the moderate reform programme of 1760 was unlikely to be sympathetically received by a naturally conservative gentry, and was in fact never raised. More striking still, 1796 indicates a temporary disillusionment with the tenets of Foxite Whiggery, and the concept of an organised Opposition. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the success of Sir William Gely, whose soon-to-be-familiar role as an Independent eschewed party bias, and emphasised instead those traditional political virtues which the French threat had made to appear so precious. Gely was determined to preserve the Constitution in Church and State because it was 'beyond the mind of man to frame'; and explained its unique qualities in the following manner:

...it is given us by a long series of concurring circumstances, and was never fully defined until the Revolution; a period, when from the impression of the past and distant scenes of animosity and bloodshed, the two extremes of political opinion united in reflection, deliberation, and wisdom; and, from existing principles, produced those resolutions, which form the basis of a justly balanced Liberty, and Government.

Initial hopes that the French might tread the same path had quickly evaporated, and been replaced by a sense of fear and suspicion from which few were immune. Gely was no exception.

With the great majority of my Countrymen, I apprehended at one period of the French Revolution that this Kingdom was in danger from the admission of French principles, and I sanguinely joined in every measure to oppose them. I was ever convinced that our enemies offered their wild and impracticable opinions to their neighbours, first to divide and weaken them, then to usurp their Government, and subdue their country; the late declaration of the Directory is in my opinion confirmation of this system.

Thus committed, Gely was nominated on 20 May along with the

1 Ibid., pp. 82-3.
2 Kentish Gazette, 20 May 1796.
two sitting Members. Sir Edward Knatchbull was universally known as an unswerving Pittite, and there could be little doubt of his eventual return. Sirner Honywood, on the other hand, made no secret of his anti-ministerial sentiments. He lashed out at corruption, and the present 'most impolitic war' which had involved the nation in an 'extraordinary and extravagant expenditure of the public money'. Solemnly he warned his audience:

...we do not know but the next parliament may break up the constitution - you ought to be particularly careful what men you elect to represent you - The constitution has been shock nearly off its basis - The suspension of the habeas corpus act and the two bills lately passed were direct and open violations of the Bills of Rights.

This was strong language, and to Knatchbull was 'far more suitable to the galleries of the French convention than to a meeting of British freemen'. Fellow Whigs like Hanley Sawbridge recognised the dangers of adopting too uncompromising a position, and sought to recall Honywood's independent line on the East India Bill. However the Opposition hero of 1790 had nailed his colours firmly to the mast, and could simply await the verdict of the county.

While the freeholders deliberated, frantic negotiations were on foot behind the scenes. Rumours of an agreement between Knatchbull and Geary were circulating in the press before and after the nomination meeting, and were substantiated by the investigations which followed Honywood's petition. Honywood's counsel set out to prove that the compact between the two baronets had been entered into as a means, not only of sharing the heavy expenses of a poll, but of securing additional votes. The first point was

1 Report in Kentish Gazette, 24 May 1796.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., for subsequent addresses.
4 For example, 'A JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS' in Kentish Chronicle, 17 and 27 Oct. 1796.
5 Minutes of the Select Committee Appointed to Try and Determine the Merits of the Petition of John Aberst, esq. in Voters, Complaining of an Undue Election, and Return for the County of Kent (Kentisbury, 1797); in Journals, III. 49, 520 and 559.
6 See on expenses, Minutes, pp. 20-.
agreed readily enough by Sir Horace Mann, who had been a member of Knatchbull's committee, with which the scheme originated. However on the question as to whether Knatchbull had accepted money in return for a promise of his second votes, Sir Horace replied emphatically, 'I am convinced Sir Edward Knatchbull never did engage himself from any circumstances relative to this agreement, but from general principles of agreement in politics.' Both John Harbin and Robert Hascall concurred. The latter gentleman related how separate meetings of Geary's and Knatchbull's friends held during May had resolved to support the other's candidate in the forthcoming election, and added: 'I remember Mr. Hatton, the chairman, [of Knatchbull's committee] opposing the political conduct of Mr. Honeywood, ... and several other gentlemen gave their opinions to the same effect.' Likewise from Geary's camp, Lord Romney explained how, at an early stage of the proceedings, his friend had fully realised that his challenge was aimed entirely at the erring Whig, and had consequently been loath to deprive the county of Knatchbull's valuable services simply on grounds of expense. Admittedly the juncture had not been made public on 20 May, and doubts lingered as to the ethics of some of the canvassing. Nevertheless, the select committee was sufficiently satisfied that no important irregularities had been committed, and thus dismissed the petition.

The question of election expenses had clearly become a crucial factor in Kentish politics and will be dealt with more fully at a later stage. In the present context, however, the 1797 report is significant because it shows how readily the leading gentry could respond to national issues in their manipulation of county affairs. In like manner, the nine days of polling which followed the county meeting of 7 June testify to a high degree of

1 Ibid., p. 16.
2 Ibid., pp. 21-5 and 25-9.
3 Ibid., pp. 29-31.
4 Cf. ibid., p. 206.
political awareness among the freeholders, while the final defeat of the sitting Whig Member after sixteen years can only be attributed to his well-publicised pronouncements in votes on the French Revolution.¹

In the Cinque Ports the effects of the conservative reaction were equally unmistakable, though less well documented. When the polls had closed in 1790, three of the eight M.P.s were in opposition to Pitt; but after the 1796 election, only one Member could be placed in this category, and even he (John Prevevan) had seemingly abandoned his radical platform for a safer 'continuance of the most decidedly independent conduct'.² Until the last minute it appeared unlikely that Poyos and Prevevan would be challenged at Dover, and when Col. Bril of East Middlesex did force a poll, it was he that eventually conceded defeat.³ The tranquillity of New Romney was again unbroken, except possibly by the patriotic songs of Sir Edward Jenner's dinner guests at the New Inn⁴, while at Hythe, the Jacobin terror had frightened William Evelyn back into the government fold alongside his colleague Sir Charles Farnaby Redcliffe.

A similar transformation had been wrought in the mind of Sir Horace Mann, whose steady hostility to ministers had led him into the moderate reform movement of 1780-83 and won him a seat at Sandwich in 1790. However in the aftermath of the September massacres he told his constituents; '...it is with the most perfect satisfaction that I do in the most public and ample manner pay my tribute of gratitude and highest approbation to His Majesty's Ministers for that unremitted vigilance, those timely constitutional exertions to which we are indebted for our internal tranquillity'.⁵ In 1796 he stood as joint-candidate with the loyal

¹ Kentish Chronicle, 10 and 14 June 1796.
² Kentish Gazette, 1 July 1796.
³ Kentish Chronicle, 27 May 1796; and Kentish Gazette, 24 May 1796.
⁴ Kentish Gazette, 31 May 1796.
⁵ Kentish Gazette, 25 Dec. 1796.
ministerialist and office-holder, Philip Stephens, and encountered no opposition. 1

In the spring of 1795 Clement Taylor told John Gale Jones that, 'Administration threatened to put him to great trouble and expense at the next election' 2; and although as late as 27 May the Kentish Chronicle still expected the radical paper-miller to contest Brimstone 3, this apprehension, coupled with the impending collapse of his business, led him at length to decline in favour of Christopher Hull. On the Pittite side, Matthew Bloxam was joined by Oliver De Lancey, a major-general and barrack-master at Chatham, who in 1792 had been employed by Dundas to investigate disaffection in the army. 4 Both men were returned by comfortable, if not overwhelming, majorities, and De Lancey survived a subsequent petition which protested his ineligibility as a place-holder and a contractor. 5 But, while deprived of its representative, the popular party in the borough had by no means been cowed into submission, for as the Kentish Gazette noted:
'The contest, though short, was one of the sharpest ever remembered'. 6

In the light of the city's social and ideological ferment, it is not surprising that 1795 witnessed a hard-fought contest at Rochester. The election of George Best together with Admiral Bickerton in 1790 had somewhat disorganised the borough's popular interest. The return of Nathaniel Smith in 1794 temporarily redressed the former balance, but in 1794 he in his turn was replaced by A.m. Sir Richard King. Consequently at the dissolution Government was defending both seats. Best and King were again active, but in mid-May a Rochester correspondent observed, 'Our

1 Kentish Gazette, 31 May 1795.
2 ibid., op. cit., p. 30.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 27 May 1795.
4 G. Dundas, 'Political Disaffection and the British Army in 1792', B.I.R., xliii. (1975), 233 and 236.
5 ibid., cxxi. 46 and 575.
6 ibid., 31 May 1795.
city is now all alive', as 'a great opposition is expected'. Voters were first urged to refrain from any hasty engagement, since 'a Gentleman of the County, of known independence and most respectable character will assuredly offer himself a Candidate'; and shortly afterwards it was learned that Charles Turner, an auctioneer, and the Hon. Henry Fuson, brother of the Earl of Thanet, had stepped into the fray. Turner was substituted at the last moment by the Recorder, John Longley, who, according to Gale Jones, had written a pro-reform pamphlet, while on the other side Best was moved to retire by the prospect of heavy expenses. This slight hiatus left King and Nutton at the head of the poll, with the former declaring his loyalty to the King, and the latter pledging 'an unalterable attachment to the free constitution of our country'.

The radical right challenge was equally strong at Canterbury, where John Baker and Samuel Ellice Sawbridge put up against the sitting Members, Cipps and Hoylewood. At a Common Hall on 16 May, William Kingsford lamented the state of the Constitution, and ascribed 'all the evils that are now so loudly complained of in this country, to the war, the interested conduct of the members of the House of Commons, and the iniquitous practices of the Prime Minister'. He therefore asserted the absolute necessity of supporting only those men who would 'strenuously oppose the present Administration'; and it was on this basis that Sawbridge and Baker offered themselves.

As at Maidstone, contemporary accounts testify to the ferocity with which freemen entered into the struggle. On 31 May the Kentish Gazette recorded:

1 Kentish Gazette, 24 May 1796.
2 Kentish Gazette, 20 May 1796.
3 Gale Jones, p. 8.
4 Kentish Gazette, 27 May 1796.
5 Speech in Common Hall in Kentish Chronicle, 17 May 1796 and Kentish Gazette, 20 May 1796. Samuel Preston Stokes proposed to stand, but withdrew when he realised he had no chance.
6 For addresses, see Kentish Gazette, 20 May 1796. Sir Henry Coventry, 10 May 1796, for Stanley Sawbridge on behalf of.
The election has been more sharply contested than any within memory; and a greater number of freemen polled than at any election since 1751; the efforts of the friends of the candidates were also continued with unabating exertions for the length of four days; a longer period than ever known before in this city.

Just sixty-one votes covered the entire field, and it was the Opposition pair who came out on top. The victory was, however, a pyrrhic one, for with the acclamation of the multitude still ringing in their ears, whispers of a petition were rapidly going the rounds. Baker and Sawbridge were accused of bribery, and on 2 March 1797 a select committee upheld the charge.

Within a very few days the same candidates were bracing themselves to renew the engagement. At a Common Hall on 7 March a paper was circulated among the freemen which claimed that the unseated Members had been rendered ineligible to seek re-election; however in the absence of its principal signatories, the meeting voted it to be a 'libel', and pressed on with preparations for the new contest which was to begin on the 10th. As might be expected, an atmosphere of sober circumspection prevailed throughout, with not a house open on either side, although on one occasion effigies of the leading petitioners were paraded through the streets. This time Baker and Sawbridge won decisively; but again they were not permitted to enjoy their spoils unmolested. On 24 March another petition from John Calloway alleged that the new M.P.s had disqualified themselves by their former acts, and was in its turn followed by a counter-petition accusing Gipps and Honywood of corruption in May 1796. The former was upheld, and the two littites were then enabled to take their seats.

1 Kentish Gazette, 31 May 1796.
2 Ibid.
3 Com. Jour., lii. 20 and 357; and Kentish Chronicle, 3 Mar. 1797.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 7 and 10 Mar. 1797.
5 Com. Jour., lii. 425, 571. Two petitions were presented on behalf of Baker and Sawbridge, but were not proceeded with; ibid., 609 and 616.
The immediate result of the 1796 election, in which just four of Kent's nine constituencies were contested, was to send back to Westminster five men not unreservedly pledged to support Pitt. Of these, Geary and Trevanion, while as independent men they were prepared to consider modest schemes of reform, were not usually outspoken critics of administration; so that, in fact, only Sawbridge, Baker and Henry Tufton may be numbered among the regular Opposition, and two of them were ejected from the House in March 1797. But if 1796 represented a low-water-mark for Kentish 'friends of liberty', events at Rochester, Maidstone, Canterbury and in the county showed clearly that the electorate was still divided, and that issues such as the economy, reform, retrenchment and the conduct of the war, might again bring down fierce condemnation upon the heads of the King's ministers. The crisis of early 1797 was therefore quite predictable and required all Pitt's skill and natural confidence to surmount.

At the beginning of 1797, prospects for a speedy and successful end to the war appeared bleak. Newspaper correspondents watched with interest the Government's first faltering attempts at a negotiated peace, and when these seemed to collapse altogether, began to debate gloomily the probability of an invasion. When 'ANTIGALLICAN' took up his pen in February, the Emperor had been defeated in Italy and was about to make a separate peace, while Britain's other ally, Portugal, was in danger from Spain. The French landing in Ireland had been foiled by the dispersal of her fleet in a storm, but the enemy had drawn great comfort from the ease with which she had eluded the Royal Navy. Home defences were poorly prepared, and this was especially worrying at a moment when France might soon be able to switch the whole

1 Kentish Chronicle, 3 Jan. 1797.
of her victorious forces to the Channel front. Even when Pitt did try to increase the militia he provoked riots in the country, and the Whigs were always ready to criticise additional expenditure. To fears about national security were added a renewal of economic depression and high prices, with all that they implied for urban and rural harmony. The London Corresponding Society was entering its most extreme radical phase, and the Volunteers were frequently called upon to quell hungry mobs of unemployed labourers and incendiary outrages. The mounting burden of the National Debt was a source of increasing concern, while the suspension of cash payments prompted a run on the country banks which spelled ruin or at least severe inconvenience to many hundreds of tradesmen and the lesser gentry.

In December 1796, Baker, Tufton and Sawbridge had divided against Pitt on motions relating to the war and the abortive peace, and on 23 March 1797 the Earls of Guilford and Thanet supported Oxford's motion in the Lords for a negotiated settlement. Discontented elements in the country quickly caught up the refrain, and a series of meetings were held to address the King for the dismissal of his counsellors. Inspired by William Frend, a group of Canterbury freemen catalogued their grievances in just such an appeal. The principal target of animosity was, of course, the war which had been commenced in the supposed cause of 'liberty and humanity'. Its conduct had been characterised by 'folly and expense', and had led only to disarray in Ireland, in India, in the West Indies, and on the Continent, where the Duke of York had just

1 Kentish Chronicle, 10 Feb. 1797.
3 See a letter on the subject in Kentish Chronicle, 28 Apr. 1797.
4 At Sandwich, some leading citizens pledged not to demand gold from the local bank, unless absolutely necessary for business; Kentish Chronicle, 10 Mar. 1797.
5 Parl. Hist., xxxi. 1347-8 and 1493-4.
7 Kentish Chronicle, 11 Apr. 1797.
been defeated. At home, too, ministerial policy had been equally disastrous. Unconstitutional laws had been passed and credit destroyed. What the nation required was a new Government, an inquiry into past mismanagement, and a 'full, fair, and free representation of the People in Parliament'.

A county meeting was summoned for the same purpose on 19 April.¹ James Roper Head won great applause when in moving the address, he deplored the delay of Malmesbury's peace mission. The Earl of Thanet believed the entire scheme to be a ministerial ruse designed to secure a fresh subsidy, and had little more faith in Hammond's embassy to Vienna. Nevertheless opinion was divided. Sir John Shaw wished for peace, but felt that ministers were sincere and had not lost the confidence of the people. Lord Sydney thought peace was near, while Sir Edward Knatchbull and Sir Horace Mann justified the continuance of hostilities unless an honourable settlement could be reached. Sir Horace argued that Malmesbury had been duped by the French into remaining at Paris until the invasion of Ireland was made ready, and then dismissed, empty-handed. Neither he nor Knatchbull nor Sir William Geary saw anything to be gained from a change of administration, especially if its replacement simply confirmed the Vienna mission, and all three deplored Head's address as showing the enemy that Britons were torn by dissent. Thanet and Earl Stanhope pointed with horror to the cost of the war and the high taxes it necessitated, but only Mr. Breton went so far as to applaud the system of government then existing in France. Despite Lord Romney's condemnation of such language, the High Sheriff declared that the original address had been approved, (some said by 10 or 30 to 1) and its opponents had to be content with a counter-blast voted after the adjournment, at the Bell Inn.

¹ Report in Kentish Chronicle, 21 Apr. 1797.
An important consequence of this rather heated exchange of views was a series of newspaper articles (later published in pamphlet form) by Lord Rokeby. In the Address his lordship began by analysing 'our National transition from Peace, prosperity and security to war, Bankruptcy and the possibility of a foreign invasion'; and then proceeded to seek some underlying explanation. In 1688 William of Orange had ended the rule of prerogative, but, Rokeby believed, this had gradually been replaced by 'influence and corruption' through 'the powers of the Crown in the Navy, the Army, the Church, the Law, the Customs, the Excise, by Places, pensions, by honours, titles, by loans and contracts and by innumerable other means.' Thus while peace and the removal of Pitt were essential if the present crisis was to be resolved, 'A real representation of the Commons in Parliament' was the ultimate solution to the nation's ills. 'That', he concluded, 'can at a future time be our only true and effectual remedy for the many mischiefs come upon us in consequence of an undue and corrupt influence.'

By the time Rokeby sat down to compose his Postscript, however, the atmosphere of politics had dramatically altered. The Emperor had made peace, and Kentishmen could almost hear the tramp of French boots upon their beaches. An end to the war was more than ever imperative, and Rokeby set himself to demolish the arguments which sustained it. He described as the mere 'jargon of our government' the notion that France had been opposed because she had, 'declared war against all formal order, all regular government, law and property'; and claimed, with some justification, that many of Robespierre's excesses had arisen after foreign

1 An Address to the County of Kent on the Petition to the King for Removing from the Counsels of his Majesty its Present Ministers and for Adopting Means to Procure a Speedy and an Happy Peace (London, 1797); and Postscript (London, 1797).
2 Address, pp. 5-6.
3 Ibid., pp. 7 and 16.
interference in French affairs. His interpretation of 1789 was more optimistic.

May not this extraordinary and violent revolution of France be an effort or effect of nature acting in the human or moral worlds not by general or universal, but by infinitely wise and benevolent laws, to break the chains of absolute power and meliorate the condition of mankind?

In the new revolutionary climate, places like Holland and Lombardy might become an addition to human freedom and enjoy the like blessings and comforts, as do now the happy and peaceable inhabitants and cantons of Switzerland'. Thus, the war might in a curious way be acting against the 'general Good of Mankind'.

National peril had also given reform a more immediate relevance which Rokeby sought to harness and define. On universal suffrage, regarded by some as 'perfect rectitude' he would venture no opinion since it was too far removed from present practice to be attained in anything but the long-term. Instead he praised the plan of a household franchise and the division of counties as an 'excellent one', since it would comprehend all the owners of property in the kingdom and allow Parliament to speak 'the true and real sense of the nation'. And if even this proved impossible, then there was always Chatham's proposal to augment the number of county seats, coupled with some relaxation of qualifications in the boroughs. Clearly there was no lack of reforming ideas in 1797, and Rokeby was sure of their eventual triumph.

However, even in the midst of economic and military confusion it is doubtful whether they won very wide acceptance among Kentishmen. To demand peace and lower taxes was one thing, but to menace Gatton and Old Sarum was still quite another.

This was certainly the experience of Charles Grey, whose motion for reform was defeated in the Commons on 6 May by 256 votes to 91, with only John Trevanion and Henry Tufton of the Kentish M.P.s in the minority. Sir William Geary's views were
probably shared by many of his constituents:

he was at heart a well-wisher to a reform in parliament, but disapproved of the plan now proposed; because it appeared to be too nearly connected with the system of universal suffrage. He did not think this the very worst time to bring the question forward, but there were difficulties as to what plan the friends of reform would agree to; he did not, however, despair of that difference being made up, and that at no very distant time, and then he should be happy to give it his support."

Geary was to become something of a radical in later years, and even in 1797 spoke up for the ballot, checks on expenses, and the splitting of counties. However something half undefined, be it fear or expediency, yet turned him from Grey's lobby. Later in the year Sir Horace Mann expressed his sentiments with an uncom­promising vigour which exhibited no softening towards his foes at home or abroad.

... he was prepared to go as far as any man in the cause of humanity; but when he considered the nature of the enemy with whom we had to contend, he saw we had no alternative left but manfully to counteract and defeat the black designs which that enemy meditated against us. The object of those designs was no less than to destroy our commerce, to revolutionise the country, to abolish our laws, and to annihilate the constitution. But in these black attempts they would, he trusted, be baffled and confounded.

Faced with such determination, the relaxation and concensus for which Lord Rokeby and Geary both hoped, was likely to be long postponed. But if conservative zeal was increased, radicalism could also become more violent and extreme.

Probably one of the first instances of republican ideas to force itself upon the consideration of a wide Kentish audience was the Nore Mutiny of May–June 1797. Led by Richard Parker, the North Sea fleet transformed itself into a 'floating Republic', and attempted to negotiate with the Privy Council on a whole range of naval and political issues. There was open fraterni-

sation with the enemy and talk of surrendering part of Britain's precious 'wooden wall', which provoked great alarm at the very height of the invasion scare. Seditious handbills were also being distributed among the troops at Chatham, Sheerness and Maidstone, no doubt by the mutineers, aided and abetted by the former hosts of John Gale Jones, and the likelihood of disaffection was deemed real enough by the authorities to call forth stern counter-measures.¹

Order was eventually restored to the fleet, but Kent had not heard the last of conspiracy. Early in 1798 Arthur O'Connor, James Coigley and others were apprehended at Margate on their way to France to concert an Irish rebellion. In May the case for high treason was tried at Maidstone and the county was treated to the spectacle of many prominent members of the Opposition pleading on behalf of the accused. Coigley was subsequently convicted and executed, and the well-connected O'Connor was banished; but not before the Earl of Thanet had been party to a bizarre and unsuccessful rescue attempt, for which he received a heavy fine and a year in the Tower.² The effect of such proceedings could only be to squander whatever appeal and respectability still attached to reform, to further strengthen Pitt's control of Parliament, and to smooth the way for the final suppression of the radical societies by the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. Yet the nation was not silent for long, and with the new century dawned a fresh clamour for peace.

VI

When George III reviewed more than six thousand Kentish Volunteers in the grounds of Mote Park, Maidstone, on 1 August 1799, he did so amid scenes of opulence and splendour, brim full

¹ Kentish Chronicle, 26 May 1797.
of patriotic fervour. But as the old century ebbed away, this tide of national unity which had buoyed Pitt up through so many desperate storms was slackening alarmingly. The country was increasingly weary of a war she felt she could not win, and longed for an end to high prices and burdensome taxes. In December 1800, Thomas Pattenden, the Dover linen draper, recorded how the cost of soap and candles had lately risen on expectations of a war with Russia, and in March 1801 the price of bread stood at 3/7½d. Governments were changing too. Pitt resigned early in 1801 over the Catholic question, and was succeeded by Speaker Addington, whose overriding task was to make peace. His negotiations bore fruit in the Treaty of Amiens, and a nation rejoiced.

Having done all that was required of him, and with bread selling at 1/10d. by October 1801, Addington understandably sought to consolidate his parliamentary majority by going to the country at the end of June 1802. Without the restraining influence of war, six Kentish constituencies held a poll, but for ministers the results must have come as something of a disappointment. Electors in a number of places celebrated their new freedom by revenging themselves upon the Pittites, and favouring men from the moderate Opposition.

Nowhere was this more apparent than at Canterbury. George Gipps had died in 1800, and Sir John Honywood wisely decided that the freemen of Honiton would be more receptive to his wooing than those who had rejected him twice in 1796 and 1797. John Baker again offered himself as an 'Independent Man', but his former partner S. E. Sawbridge, while acknowledging many promises of support, felt unable to undertake the arduous duties of an

1 Hasted, x. 446-52.
5 Macfie, loc. cit., 141.
M.P. The victor of the 1800 by-election, the Hon. George Watson, also sought a renewed mandate. Having been proposed on 5 July by Richard Milles, he was described by Alderman Hodge as a man above party; 'motive of interest could not bias him - place or pension could not purchase him'. On Watson's own testimony, he had differed sharply with a group of his constituents over the war, but, as he pleaded, 'conceiving a peace to be necessary and desirable, he had felt no hesitation in giving his vote in approbation of the terms'. Probably because of the likely expense, no challenge was made to Baker and Watson - a circumstance 'not within the memory of the eldest inhabitant'. The only discordant note came from the radical Joseph Royle:

UNDER the present wicked and corrupt system of Representation, it is of little consequence whom you send to the Commons House; impressed with this opinion, I must beg leave to decline coming forward as a Candidate at the ensuing Election, to represent you: and further, as I have no intention to sell you, I feel no inclination to purchase a Seat in the ensuing Parliament, being a decided enemy to the Slave Trade in all its branches.

Nevertheless the existing system had not prevented Canterbury from making fairly considerable changes in the character and attitudes of its Members.

The radical creed fared little better at Rochester, but not before Sir W. S. Smith had received a severe fright. He had expected to be returned along with the independent local banker, James Hulkes, only to be recalled hastily from Dover on 3 July when George Smith and James Roper Head entered the contest.

Head had been prominent in the 1797 agitation, while Smith was later to admit that he had been 'amongst the most violent admirers of the principles of the French Revolution'. By 1802 his revolutionary ardour had somewhat cooled, but he remained a

1 Kentish Chronicle, 29 June 1802.
2 Nomination meeting in Kentish Chronicle, 6 July 1802.
3 Ibid.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 29 June 1802. Joseph Royle was the defeated candidate in 1800.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 6 July 1802.
strenuous opponent of ministers: 'I would have gone any lengths to have obtained a perfect and equal representation of the people, supposing that a Parliamentary Reform was the only means of saving the country'.\(^1\) In the end, however, even the electors of Rochester proved unready for such ideas, and their champions attracted only 45 and 10 votes respectively.

General De Lancey was compelled to retire at Maidstone some days before the commencement of polling.\(^2\) And when the votes had finally been totalled up, it was discovered that Sir Matthew Bloxham had been pushed into second place behind John Hodson Durrand, who, as the *Kentish Chronicle* observed, 'comes in on the Whig interest'.\(^3\) In all three boroughs, peace had brought a return to the *status quo* of the 1780's, although recent experiences continued to cast a shadow on the kind of activities just beginning to re-emerge in Westminster and the City of London.

For New Romney and Sandwich, 1802 represented no alteration of the prevailing balance. At Hythe, however, the election was to be the first in a series of keenly fought contests between the neighbouring gentry and rich carpet-baggers. Initial impetus was given by the death of Sir Charles Farnaby Radcliffe in 1798 and then by the retirement of William Evelyn at the dissolution. After nearly thirty years, new faces had to be found, and in the absence of a supreme interest, candidates were not lacking. Viscount Marsham, the other sitting Member, was eager for a second term; Alexander Evelyn was hopeful of replacing his 'near relation'; and Matthew White and the county's High Sheriff, Thomas Godfrey, were nominated to run in harness.\(^4\) According to the *Kentish Chronicle*, 'much anxiety prevailed', and the hall was 'crowded' as the polling began.\(^5\) As was generally to be the

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2 *Kentish Chronicle*, 6 July 1802.
3 *Kentish Chronicle*, 9 July 1802.
4 *Kentish Chronicle*, 2 July 1802.
5 *Kentish Chronicle*, 6 July 1802.
case at Hythe, national issues were strictly subordinate to personality, and on this basis the freemen chose Godfrey and White as their new M.P.s.

Dover was no stranger to contests, but that of 1802 was remarkable because it witnessed the defeat of the principal Treasury nominee, who on this occasion was none other than the young William Huskisson. On 2 July an anonymous correspondent called on voters to reserve their judgment, 'as a Gentleman is shortly expected to offer who has eminently distinguished himself in the service of his country, and is now engaged in high important duties which prevent him waiting on you immediately.' The question is,' he then proceeded to explain, 'whether the freemen shall chuse (sic.) a member, or be under the necessity of chusing (sic.) a person in direct opposition to their inclination.' It may well be that this absent personage was the locally-born Sir W. S. Smith, and that when he selected Rochester as his future constituency, his place was filled by his brother, John Spencer Smith. The gallant admiral was, at any event, active in canvassing on behalf of his brother, who, as had been advertised, stood pledged to uphold 'the rights of free election'. These principles obviously appealed to the borough, and after a long, though amicable poll, Smith was victorious along with John Trevanion.

The most protracted of the 1802 disputes was that for the county itself, where the epic tussles of 1790 and 1796 had not yet worn out the ambitions or the finances of the warring parties. With no time for extensive canvassing, all eyes were immediately focused on the nomination meeting fixed for 7 July. As was to

2 Kentish Chronicle, 2 July 1802.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 6 and 9 July 1802.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 13 July 1802.
5 Addresses and nomination meeting in Kentish Chronicle, 2 and 9 July 1802.
be expected, Knatchbull was proposed as 'the guardian of our truly enviable constitution'; and Sir William Geary made many professions of his independent attachment to that revered edifice. Filmer Honywood was then nominated in his absence by Sir Narborough D'Aeth and Charles Polhill of Chipstead Place, although serious doubts about his state of health were voiced by Richard Milles. Polhill stressed that both the sitting Members had regularly supported Pitt, and 'the late disastrous war — a war which he would admit to a certain period was a war of defence, till afterwards it became a war of aggression, an unhappy war, which had lost this country millions of money, and after the occasion for which it was undertaken, to prevent the opening of the Scheld (sic.), was accomplished, he believed every man would affirm, that there ended the necessity for its prosecution'. No other major issue was raised, despite attempts in the press to stimulate public debate on the slave trade¹, and the freeholders closed by giving a show of hands for Geary and Honywood.

When the 'great and arduous contest' began on Penenden Heath on 13 July, county feeling seemed to have switched behind the two baronets, but as parties of freeholders continued to arrive, fortunes fluctuated hourly.² On the second day Honywood was ahead, and arguments were breaking out among his rivals about canvassing and government influence. By the close on the eighth day Knatchbull was still publicly hopeful of snatching victory, but in the evening he signified that he would not reopen the poll. His defeat was just part of 'the change in the political sentiments in this country since 1796'; which the Kentish Chronicle was quick to isolate:

The changes which have occurred at Rochester, Dover, Hythe, Queenborough, and Maidstone, show the spirit of independence is again roused; and we have no doubt Sir William Geary owes his success to the exertions used

¹ 'A Friend of his Country' in Kentish Chronicle, 2 and 9 July
² Kentish Chronicle, 16, 20 and 23 July 1802.
in his favour by the friends of Mr. Honywood.¹

Hence, while the decade of the French Revolution may have rendered reform temporarily unfashionable, and banished 'party' from national politics, it had by no means removed public opinion from its position at the centre of Kentish affairs. On the contrary, it becomes clear that the 1790's actually strengthened and consolidated those forces which had been growing daily stronger since 1768.

¹ Kentish Chronicle, 23 July 1802.
Chapter Six
Kentish Electioneering, Public Opinion, and the Crisis of 1806 - 1807

After thirty-six years and seven uncontested elections and by-elections, the electoral peace of the county of Kent was broken at five of the seven general elections between 1790 and 1818. Had this concentration of activity occurred at any time under the unreformed representative system it would have been remarkable enough; but that it took place during a period of war in Europe and social tension at home, is one further indication that, in spite of the Jacobin menace, the propertied classes of Kent were sufficiently assured of local loyalty and stability to embroil the whole community in their struggles and ambitions. In addition, the great campaigns of 1790, 1796, 1802, 1806 and 1818 afford an excellent opportunity to examine in some detail the underlying structure of Kentish politics as it had evolved by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to evaluate the role played by public opinion. This may be done in three ways; firstly, by studying the county M.P.s and some aspects of electioneering; secondly, by analysing those means by which freemen and freeholders were being made aware of national as well as provincial issues; and finally, by focusing on the events of 1806-7, in order to observe the response of voters to the specific problems raised in that confused crisis.

I

A comprehensive analysis of the many M.P.s who represented Kentish boroughs between 1768 and 1832 must await the publication of further volumes of The History of Parliament. We shall therefore confine ourselves here to some reflections upon the thirteen men who sat for the county constituency during the last sixty-four years of the unreformed House of Commons. It has already been remarked that under the early Hanoverians, families such as the Fanes, the Sidneys, the Watsons and the Sackvilles could exercise
no decisive influence over county politics, and a strong element
of anti-aristocratic hostility may be discerned behind Lord
Middlesex's defeat in 1734. Hence it comes as no surprise to dis­
cover that only two of the Knights of the Shire under present
consideration were heirs to peerages. And even in these instan­
ces, John Frederick Sackville, as the nephew of the second Duke
of Dorset, was not everyone's choice in 1768\(^1\), while the Hon.
Charles Marsham owed his sixteen years at Westminster more to a
close association with the independent, gentry-inspired movements
of 1780-84, than to his father's position as second Baron Romney.
Thus, as in the days of Walpole and the Pelhams, it was the
squirearchy that was enabled to monopolise Kentish affairs. Of
the eleven remaining M.P.s, five were baronets - Knatchbull,
Knatchbull, Bridges, Geary and Farnaby - Filmer and William Hony-
wood were the sons of a baronet, and the four others - Knight,
Honywood, Hodges and Rider - were all men of substantial property
and good connections.

Two further classifications may serve to emphasise the full
extent to which the county seats were the jealously-guarded
prizes to be bestowed within a select coterie of distinguished
county families. There is, for example, very little evidence
that outsiders were successful in penetrating this close-knit
circle. As members of a junior branch of their family, the three
Honywoods were alone among the thirteen Knights in having their
principal residence in another county, while as former M.P.s for
East Grinstead and Steyning respectively, Sir Charles Farnaby and
Filmer Honywood were the only ones to represent a non-Kentish
constituency. More revealing still is the fact that eight of
the Knights were chosen from families which had already occupied
Kentish seats since 1700. Thomas Knight's father had sat for

\(^1\) For biographical notes on the Kentish Knights of the Shire,
see infra, app. 2.
Canterbury throughout the 1734 parliament, and he himself had filled one of New Romney's seats before standing for the county in 1774. When elected at Maidstone in 1768, Charles Marsham revived an association with the borough begun by his grandfather between 1708 and 1716, while J. F. Sackville was the nephew of both Lord George Sackville, who had served as a baron for Hythe and Dover, and Lord Middlesex, who had at various times been rejected by the electors of Kent, Rochester and Queenborough. The elder Sir Edward Knatchbull followed quite naturally in the footsteps of his grandfather, the noted diarist and high-tory convert to Walpolian whiggery, who had twice been Knight of the Shire as well as an M.P. for Rochester, and of his cousin Sir Wyndham, while in 1819 it was almost a matter of course that his son should succeed to his seat along with his titles. Sir Brook Bridges was the grandson of Sir Thomas Palmer, a Knight under Queen Anne, and the two William Honywoods were returned on five occasions by the same popular interest which had so often championed their kinsman Filmer. Finally, the absolute domination enjoyed by the leading gentry is revealed in the discovery that in the fifty years between 1780 and 1830, only seven men from just four families contested Kent's representation; that one seat was held by a Honywood in nine of the eleven parliaments during this period; and that the other seat was retained by a Knatchbull from 1790 to 1831, with a single four-year break after 1802.

It was thus the gentry who unmistakably held the balance of power in Kent at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, before going on to discuss their electioneering methods, something must be said of the local ministerial and aristocratic

1 Of the remaining four men: Farnaby sat for Hythe between 1774 and 1798; Hodges was connected by birth and marriage with Major John Cartwright and the Twisden family; while both Filmer Honywood and Thomas Rider were descended from families not unknown in Parliament.
interests as they had developed since the reign of George II. Government, although possessing influence in Kent, had not been prominent in county elections after Newcastle left the Treasury. In Hampshire, for example, where the Portsea docks and numerous small harbours mirrored similar installations at Chatham and in the Cinque Ports, the 'Talents' were able to eject the Pittites in 1806; but in Kent no such show of strength was possible, and was never attempted. Allegations of interference were of course frequently made. In March 1790 'CONTINUANDUS' asserted that Honywood had been opposed at the Maidstone nomination meeting by many non-freeholders, and asked: 'Shall a respectable and enlightened county be stun'd by the clamour of such a host, and surrender rights of election to the disposal of the dock yards?'. 'AMICUS VERITATI', too, believed that chaises had been hired at Deptford 'to convey any person of respectable appearance, though no freeholders, to make a show in Sir Edward's favour on the day of nomination'. Knatchbull was accused of having bartered a peerage and a stall at Canterbury for influential support, while in late June 1790 his opponents questioned '...whether this opulent and respectable county is, or is not to become an absolute Treasury borough, and its representatives absolutely dependent on the ministry'. Such charges were the lifeblood of whig and radical propaganda, and it can hardly be doubted that any available assistance was readily thrown behind a Pittite like Knatchbull. Yet, despite this advantage, Sir Edward was defeated by a war-weary electorate in 1802, and was then re-elected in 1806 when the Whigs had control of patronage.

Neither were Kentish aristocrats any more successful in manipulating elections on their own behalf. Estates were generally

2 Kentish Gazette, 12-16 Mar. 1790.
3 Kentish Gazette, 30 Mar. - 2 Apr. 1790.
4 Kentish Gazette, 16-20 Apr. 1790.
small, often being no more than summer retreats, or, as was the case with Lords Thanet, Radnor, Cowper and Abergavenny, owned by peers whose main property was situated elsewhere. The Marshams of the Mote were perhaps typical of the majority of the county's indigenous aristocracy, and may therefore serve to illustrate a familiar pattern. Robert, second Baron Romney had well-established family links with Kent, he was fairly widely connected with the neighbouring nobility and gentry, and was of good moral character, independent principles, and a philanthropic disposition. He had a commission in the militia, was a deputy lieutenant, and derived considerable wealth from estates in the West Indies. In political terms, however, his titular prestige and personal expenditure were insufficient, the patronage obtainable from his lordship of the manor of Maidstone not great enough, and his tenants too few, to sustain anything more than a short-lived borough interest, while in the county he had no claim to special regard. Consequently, Romney's son wholly lacked the resources with which to defend his seat in 1790, and, although created an earl in 1801, and made Lord Lieutenant of Kent between 1797 and 1808, could not bolster his own son's electoral aspirations in 1806.

The Dukes of Dorset lived on a much grander scale, but when confronted with so numerous an elective body, were scarcely less impotent. With its fifty-two staircases, 365 rooms, and more than fifty servants, Knole was the resplendent focus of a thousand acre park. The Sackvilles owned two advowsons and the manors of Knole, Sevenoaks, Seal and Kemsing, while the third Duke was but the latest in a long line of diplomats and courtiers. Nevertheless, Dorset's grandfather had seen his son routed in the anti-

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excise fever of 1734, while his own meagre contribution to
Knatchbull's campaign in 1790 was a series of convivial breakfasts
among the Sevenoaks freeholders.¹

Unlike Yorkshire and Northamptonshire², Kent saw no aristocratic resurgence in the early nineteenth century. The premature
death of the young fourth Duke of Dorset in a riding accident,
caused the title to pass out of the county and the division of
the Knole property. The heirs of Lords Darnley, Romney and Cowper contested various borough seats, and the Earl of Winchilsea
and the fourth Earl Stanhope were regularly heard at public
meetings; but it was not until after the Reform Bill that the
emergence of the party machine encouraged the nobility once more
to engage actively in county elections. Comparisons with prac­
tices in Sussex well illustrate the continuing exclusion of the
aristocracy, and point the way ahead. When seeking his eldest
son's return at a Sussex by-election in 1742, the first Duke of
Dorset was forced to deal with magnates like the Dukes of New­
castle and Richmond; but when electioneering in his own county
it was the gentry who demanded his whole attention.³ Likewise in
1820, it was Lords Egremont, Sheffield and Ashburnham who helped
shape Sussex politics; whereas in Kent great controversy was
aroused, not by the machinations of some ambitious peer, but by
the meeting of a group of eminent gentlemen at Canterbury's
Fountain Inn, in the hope of finding a suitable candidate to oppose
W. P. Honywood.⁴

How then was Kentish politics carried on by the gentry in

¹ Sackville MSS. U269/0146.
² E. A. Smith, Whig principles and party politics: Earl Fitzwil­
 liam and the Whig party, 1748-1833 (Manchester, 1975), pp.299­
303; and E. G. Forrester, Northamptonshire County Elections
and Electioneering 1695-1832 (Oxford, 1941), chap. vi.
³ Compare Sackville MSS. U269/C150 with U269/C148 and /C149.
⁴ Compare J. R. McQuiston, 'Sussex aristocrats and the county
58; with infra, pp. 289-71.
the absence of treasury or aristocratic management? Under the early Hanoverians, the hopeful candidates toured the county in order to whip up enthusiasm, and relied heavily upon their friends to arrange treats for the local freeholders at which promises of votes might be secured by a tasty spread and some strong liquor. Similar techniques seem to have been adopted in 1790 and at subsequent elections. On 29 June 1802, for instance, Mrs. Woodgate wrote:

We are afraid we are going to have a contested election. Honywood's people are canvassing and Mr. Polhill was at Tunbridge yesterday and got many votes: and Sir Edward and Mr. Hussey called here two days ago, and went to Mr. Children's, the Major's, Lord Boyne's and Mr. Benson's, but said he should not canvass till after the nomination at Maidstone, which is expected very soon. I call his being here and at those places canvassing, don't you? Sir William Geary sent word he should call here this week; I really think it is time they should begin if they mean anything.

In every town and village the same general strategy was adopted, with the candidates' appeal being directed chiefly towards the natural leaders of the community, in the hope that their example would be noted by humbler electors. Knatchbull opened his campaign in 1790 with a sumptuous and long-remembered feast at Mersham Hatch, and continued to entertain in the grand manner. In 1802 it was advertised that he would meet his friends at the King's Head, Canterbury, on 10 July, and three days later those who sympathised with Filmer Honywood and resided near the same city, were invited to breakfast with Henry Collard at Hoath Farm.

The list of venues could be greatly extended, since until well into the Victorian era freeholders persisted doggedly to regard these rustic banquets as essential to the exercise of their franchise.

3 Kentish Chronicle, 9 July 1802.
The active assistance of gentlemen of wealth and leisure
was also mobilised in the day-to-day running of a county campaign,
although as the following paragraphs will argue, the growth of
the electorate, ever mounting expenses, an increasing reliance
on propaganda, and an independent public opinion, were in the
long-term to diminish the effective role of the amateur organiser.
Little evidence has survived from the earlier period to suggest
that county electioneering was in any sense co-ordinated. As
business became more complex, however, a network of town and
parish committees was gradually established to gather information
for a central body, and to arrange finance, dinners and transport
in the localities. Another example of this transition towards
a more professional organisation was the employment of attorneys
and election agents. The first Duke of Dorset relied heavily
upon his circle of informants, and made special use of the Rev.
Francis Austen and the Rev. Thomas Courteis to watch over his
interests when he was presiding at Dublin Castle. 1 Politicians
of a later generation were compelled by legal and financial dif­
ficulties to retain the services of more skilled men to super­
intend their affairs. 2 Agents were at work in Canterbury in 1790
on behalf of the Whigs 3, and in 1806 Mr. Selby of Town Malling
and Mr. Elwyn of Canterbury were acting for the Geary interest. 4
In 1790, 1796 and 1802, Filmer Honywood was assisted by the
banking house of Messrs. Clarkson, and in 1814 the sum of £350
was recommended as the appropriate fee for services rendered in
the latter year. 5 Hence, while the participation of individual

1 For the use of the clergy in this capacity see E. A. Smith,
2 Ibid., 15-19; and K. Robson, The Attorney in Eighteenth-Cen­
3 D. E. Ginter, 'The Financing of the Whig Party Organisation,
5 Honywood MSS. U221/04: From Thomas Ludbry, 13 Oct. 1814.
squires remained an important factor in Kentish electioneering until the Reform Act, the snapping asunder of parochial and deferential bonds, coupled with the rise of allegiance to specific political figures and even to party ideologies, had already begun to erode the influence of the gentry as a class long before that date.

The question of election expenses was one which closely determined the style of electioneering from 1790 onwards, and thus seems to merit separate attention. Large electorates at Rochester, Dover, Sandwich, Maidstone and Canterbury, together with sizeable bodies of non-residents, meant that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, expenses in the Kentish boroughs were by no means negligible. After the 1796 contest at Canterbury, for example, the Kentish Gazette commented:

> From the number of houses which have been open on each side during the whole of the contest, and the profusion observable in them, the expenses must have been uncommonly great - but heavy as they are likely to be, to the honour and credit of both parties, we find orders are already given, for all bills to be carried in for immediate payment.

And in 1830, Viscount Fordwich paid £5,466 9s. 2d. for a seat at the same constituency, despite an old family association. However, it was in the county itself that contemporaries most frequently remarked upon 'the enormous expense to which Gentlemen of fortune are put by such contests...'. As the Kentish Gazette went on to note at the end of July 1790:

> Greater expenses have been incurred on this head of County Elections now, than the oldest man remembers; it is the speediest way to ruin the most ample fortune, and at the long run, if Ministers adopt such measures, few indeed will be the men left to contest them with them.

In spite of having 'injured my fortune, trenched on my income, and narrowed my circumstances', Sir William Geary expressed a determination to fight on as an independent in 1806. But when

1 Kentish Gazette, 31 May 1796.
2 Panshanger (Cowper) Collection Box 40: 'Viscount Fordwich's Expenses at the Canterbury Election 1830'.
3 Kentish Gazette, 27-30 July 1790.
4 Kentish Gazette, 4 Nov. 1806.
standing at Maidstone just six months later, he was forced to admit that: 'The immense expense of contests in that field in which I had TWICE triumphed, was the only cause of my lately being obliged to retreat from it.'

Nevertheless, if gentlemen wished to sit in Parliament, high costs had to be borne, and if personal funds did not suffice, then other sources had to be found. Exact figures are not easy to obtain, but it is quite clear that the £2,000 paid by Dorset in 1734 and Robert Fairfax in 1754 for their campaigns in West Kent were greatly exceeded after 1790. When again a candidate for Kent in 1812, Geary claimed that in 1796 and 1802 he had spent £22,000, and confirmed that he had retired in 1806 to escape 'inevitable ruin'; while the official balance-sheet of Honywood's expenditure in 1802 alone, amounts to more than £5,500. In 1790 speculation was rife in the press as to the extent of Sir Edward Knatchbull's outlay. At the beginning of May it was estimated to be £10,000, and by the end of the month 'A FRIEND' was thinking more in terms of £20,000. These writers were seeking to imply that treasury gold was being distributed lavishly in the search for votes, but there is good reason to believe both that their calculations erred on the side of moderation, and that the vast majority of bills were met out of the baronet's own pocket. In 1818 the artist Farinndon was told by a gentleman of Maidstone that Knatchbull had 'formerly expended £40,000 in Parliamentary Contests' prior to 1812, while family tradition has it that Sir Edward laid out at least £60,000 during his electioneering sorties. The largest proportion of this would appear to

1 Kentish Chronicle, 5 May 1807.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 16 Oct. 1812.
4 Honywood MSS. U221/04: 'Kent Election; Monies paid on Account of Filmer Honywood Esq. relating to the Kent Election 1802 by Messrs. Clarkson'.
5 Kentish Gazette, 30 Apr. - 4 May and 26-30 May 1790.
have been used up in 1790, when a naturally extravagant young man was striving to restore political prestige to his house, and in 1806, when Knatchbull made a tremendous effort to regain the seat lost in 1802. Knatchbull had obviously dug deep into his purse on the former occasion, for in 1796 he entered into a controversial cross-voting pact with Geary, by which he promised £4,000 or £4,500 and his fellow baronet £5,000 to defray joint costs, and in both 1812 and 1818 he and his supporters seem to have done everything to avoid any liabilities whatsoever.

The agreement of 1796 was just one way in which candidates sought to off-set the potentially fatal drain on their income. On 17 June 1796 Honywood's friends resolved to begin a subscription to pay for the poll and the expected petition, and within a couple of weeks committees were at work raising money in all parts of the county. Similar schemes were set on foot on Knatchbull's behalf at the Star Inn, Maidstone, and the King's Head, Canterbury, in November 1806, and lists were opened for donations at most of Kent's banks. The same meetings also pledged to aid their champion by 'bringing up at their own costs the voters'; as had a pro-Honywood gathering at Canterbury in July 1802, on the grounds that 'the enormous expense attending a county contest is injurious to the cause of liberty, and subversive of the freedom of election.' Whether or not the Treasury contributed to Knatchbull's coffers in more than an indirect manner it is impossible to say. Honywood, on the other hand, did receive £500 from the Whig Club in 1796. All these devices undoubtedly eased what could quickly become a crippling burden, but it was not until

1 Minutes of the Select Committee Appointed to Try and Determine the Merits of the Petition of John Amherst, esq. and Others, Complaining of an Undue Election and Return for the County of Kent. (Canterbury, 1797), p. 13.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 21 and 28 June 1796.
3 Kentish Gazette, 7 Nov. 1806.
4 Ibid.
1831, when the freeholders burned with reforming zeal, that a concerted effort was made to return Rider and Hodges entirely free of expense.

Much of interest is to be learned by looking in detail at the accounts prepared for Viscount Fordwich in 1830 and Filmer Honywood in 1802.¹ The great majority of payments made by both men were to friends or agents, like Mr. Cooper, Mr. Beard and Mr. Hope at Canterbury, to cover canvassing expenses, and to local tradesmen. Fordwich paid out sums of £12 17s., £4 2s. 9d. and £8 for beer, just over £341 to Field's Tavern, £188 to Chaplin's Tavern, and in addition gave away countless tickets which might be exchanged for refreshments. A dinner cost his lordship £54, a supper £388 10s., and some venison was purchased for £5. The size of the county constituency and Canterbury's numerous non-resident body meant that for both candidates, transport was an important item of expenditure. The Union Coach Company received £48 from Honywood, and many smaller payments were distributed to private individuals for fetching freeholders. Scores of electors were lodged in Maidstone at five shillings a night, and it was reported in the press that one sixty-year-old freeholder of Canterbury claimed 6/9d. to defray the cost of his two-day journey to and from Penenden Heath.² Fordwich donated £10 to aid the 'Sufferers in France' and £5 for a 'Cattle Show', while Honywood united charity and self-interest by giving ten guineas to the Kent Dispensary. Finally, there was the poll itself to be paid for. Fordwich contributed £50 towards erecting the hustings, and Honywood's account records £96 for arranging the poll and £570 as part of the Sheriff's fee, together with payments of a guinea a day to a number of polling clerks. In all, it was calculated that Fordwich's 945 supporters who lived in Canterbury or Kent were polled

¹ The following paragraphs are based on the account books in Honywood MSS. U221/04 and Panshanger (Cowper) Collection Box 41
² Kentish Chronicle, 23 July 1802.
at a total cost of £3,333 12s. 11d., or about £3 10s. per vote, and that the 156 non-residents who favoured his lordship were secured at a charge of £2,032 16s. 3d., or £13 a head. The 4,763 freeholders who placed Honywood at the top of the poll, on the other hand, would seem to have cost about £1 3s. each, although this figure must remain highly tentative.

Other entries reflect the growing importance of propaganda and the appeal to public opinion in Kentish politics. Colourmen and ringers were employed, ribbons were bought and given out to the candidates' friends, a band cost Fordwich £70, and Honywood paid £37 16s. for drums and £73 for a band. Musicians, banners and cockades were all part of the election pageantry and undoubtedly helped to stimulate public enthusiasm. More representative of the new climate, perhaps, were the payments for printing in 1802 and the £124 5s. 3d. spent on 'advertisements' in 1830. Handbills, addresses, ballads and squibs all circulated freely, popularising the major national issues and satirising opponents, and supplemented the steady flow of comment and reports in the newspapers. Nevertheless it was the influence of the press which most clearly distinguished electioneering in Kent after 1768 from that of earlier decades. Very little was written in the Kentish Post during 1734 and 1754 about county or borough politics, and in the latter year, the same addresses appeared month after month between the nomination and the poll. With the Wilkite and Association episodes, the Kentish press assumed a new stature, and in the four-month campaign of 1790 every edition carried columns of letters and verses from the rival camps.¹ National papers were also widely read in Kent and were useful in reaching a scattered electorate. Lord Mahon had recognised this in 1782, and in 1802 Honywood expended sums ranging from £1 11s. 6d. to

¹ For examples of election verse see Kentish Gazette, 16-20 and 20-23 Apr. 1790.
26 16s. 6d. upon the Morning Post, the Morning Chronicle, the Morning Advertiser, the Sunday Review, the Courier and the English Chronicle.

II

Even the briefest survey of Kentish electioneering in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thus makes it abundantly plain that voters were neither ignorant of, nor unable to respond to, local and national affairs. Consequently, there is a sense in which public opinion was, as E. P. Thompson has said in a different context, 'present at its own making'.\(^1\) Contemporaries knew it existed and were aware of its potential. Lord Shelburne, for one, predicted: 'Public opinion once set free acts like the sea, never ceasing, controlling imperceptibly and irresistibly both laws and ministers of laws, both reducing and advancing everything to its own level.'\(^2\) And at a Rochester meeting on 15 December 1818, called to celebrate the 'triumph of public principle' as represented in the recent election of W. P. Honywood, Major Torrens' thoughts ran on a similar theme:

We live in difficult and dangerous times. While the spread of knowledge, and the temper of the age, demand a gradual relaxation of political monopoly, and the adoption of more liberal sentiments in the administration of public affairs, the Ministers of this country set themselves up to resist all change, and with ignorant and impotent arrogance attempt to decree, that political institutions shall not improve with the growing improvement of the world. It is impossible that this unnatural state of things should last.

But how exactly was it that public opinion was changed from a sporadic outburst of popular indignation or rejoicing, with only temporary significance, into a daily political reality to be cultivated and feared by Governments and Oppositions alike? The answer seems to lie in the economic and social developments of that crucial and formative period bounded by the Middlesex elec-

2 Lord E. Fitzmaurice, Life of William, Earl of Shelburne, afterwards First Marquis of Lansdowne, with extracts from his papers and correspondence (London, 1875), iii. 498.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 5 Jan. 1819.
Two factors demand precedence - the growth of the population, and the impact of London. Although relatively untouched by the Industrial Revolution, Kent’s population increased from 308,077 in 1801, to 368,350 in 1811, 426,016 in 1821 and to 478,028 in 1831. Such a dramatic rise, of more than half inside thirty years, could not be sustained by any society without severe consequences. Long-standing social bonds were torn asunder and a stimulous given to those improvements in transport and communications to be discussed later. The appearance of a newly prosperous middle class and a landless poor tipped the balance of urban and rural life, and in their different ways hastened the passage of political reform. One reason for this striking population growth was the proximity of the metropolis and its expansion into the county’s north-western hundreds. Monied men and others familiar with the values of city life were increasingly anxious to escape from the smoky and crowded streets of London, and very often found retreat amid the leafy lanes of Charlton, Lee and Eltham. Young and ambitious Kentishmen, on the other hand, inspired with hazy dreams of wealth and rank, flocked to the City or to Southwark, and it became customary for those upon whom fortune smiled to return to their native parts and assume the trappings of gentility. Innovations in the style of manners, dress and thought were thus reflected more rapidly in Kent than in less fluid communities, and could hardly fail to find eager acceptance among the rising classes of merchants, bankers and tradesmen in the boroughs and principal market towns.

While Kent’s geographical position facilitated an easy intercourse with the ways of government and society in London, its ports, its busy highways and its natural amenities constantly threw the population into contact with a stream of travellers.

1 W. Page (ed.), The Victoria History of the County of Kent (London 1908), iii. 258-70.
For Hasted, such an acquaintance with 'foreigners of all nations' meant that 'the inhabitants are more open and liberal-minded than others, who seldom, if ever, find an opportunity of conversing beyond their neighbouring district, or with any but their own countrymen.' In early-modern times, the road system in Kent had generally followed the chalk uplands from London to Canterbury and thence to Dover, with only two routes crossing the clay of the Weald. Acts of 1555 and 1563 made maintenance the responsibility of individual parishes, and it was not until the seventeenth century that a rate was levied to pay full-time road-repairers in place of the always inadequate practice of compulsory day labour. Even in 1801, however, a member of the Woodgate family was complaining of the roads that, 'they are so intolerably bad that it will be impossible for me to attempt getting to Broad Oak'; and was able to recall how, in the not too distant past, 'it was customary for the Spring Grove Woodgates to send out a wagon in advance with a number of faggots to repair the worst places when they went out to dine in the winter.' Nevertheless, the eighteenth century had afforded some relief to those who wished to travel for business or pleasure. Kent's first turnpike was established in 1709 and was quickly succeeded by another on the Dover Road in 1711. The people of Maidstone petitioned the Commons early in 1769, asserting that the road from their town to Borden and Bobbing was in a 'ruined condition, and cannot be effectually repaired and widened without the Aid and Assistance of Parliament' - which was duly given. A few years later, petitions were presented which sought to extend the powers of former turnpike acts and thereby further improve the

1 Hasted, i. 3.
2 E. Melling (ed.), Kentish Sources I: Some Roads and Bridges (Kent County Council, 1959), pp. vii and 7-2.
3 Woodgate, op. cit., p. 359.
4 Com. Jour., xxxii. 152.
highways between Farnborough and Riverhill and Rochester and Maidstone.\(^1\) Meetings, like that held at the Dog and Bear in Lenham on 19 November 1792 to advocate a turnpike from Maidstone to Ashford and Hamstreet\(^2\), became a common occurrence in which gentlemen, farmers and tradesmen participated with equal enthusiasm. The benefits of cheaper and swifter transport, as of the widening and paving of streets in Dover, Rochester, Canterbury and Sandwich, were legion, and helped greatly to enhance the economic and social progress of all classes.

Other improvements in communications complemented and diversified the advantages gained from an expanding road network. The economic potential of Ramsgate harbour was much increased during the second half of the eighteenth century by the removal of sand to permit the reception of larger vessels.\(^3\) An act of parliament allowed John Hooker to make the Medway navigable from Maidstone to Tonbridge by means of eleven locks, and from 1740 until about 1830 his Medway Navigation Company was a thriving local business.\(^4\) Canals, too, were projected, but encountered stiff opposition. The canalisation of the Medway was held up by local vested interests for over a century\(^5\), while John Calcraft described as 'farcical' a scheme to link Northfleet, Woolwich and Chatham with Portsmouth by a Grand Southern Canal, and argued that Croydon should be made the terminus in order to save 1,400 acres of precious land.\(^6\) In the end the enterprise failed, as did another for a Weald of Kent Canal; but it was not long before transport entered its most revolutionary phase. In 1824

\(^1\) Com. Jour., xxxiv. 20 and 69-70.
\(^2\) Kentish Gazette, 21 Dec. 1792.
\(^3\) J. Smeaton, An Historical Report on Ramsgate Harbour Ordered by And Addressed to, the Trustees (London, 1791), passim.
a correspondent in the *Kentish Gazette* expressed himself 'quite charmed' with the proposed 'Rail Road' between Canterbury and Whitstable, 'because I see in prospective the great advantage and convenience that will result to the public from its immediate adoption'.\(^1\) Passengers did not travel along the line until 1830, yet in the long-run his expectations were amply fulfilled.

If the coming of the railway and the associated growth of population and industry did not transform towns like Tonbridge and Ashford until after 1840, a start had at least been made during our period. Quicker and less troublesome communications prompted men to travel, and for those with leisure and money to spend, Kent had much to offer. That this was so, is demonstrated by the proliferation in the late eighteenth century of local and county guides and handbooks. Excursions were mapped out, antiquities, houses and landscapes described, and potted histories and biographies supplied to beguile the journey. A favourite Kentish resort to attract this sort of treatment was Tunbridge Wells, whose restorative waters had been discovered by Lord North in the early seventeenth century.\(^2\) At first the spa was frequented mainly by the county gentry, but under the supervision of Beau Nash it rose to rival even Bath as a centre of fashionable pleasure. The Prince of Wales was a visitor in Defoe's day, Prince Frederick was there in 1739, and in 1765 the Dukes of Gloucester and York were among the company, while in later years the Regent regularly took the waters.\(^3\) In 1780 the official guide painted an enticing picture:

> The place itself is now in a very flourishing state, with a great number of good houses for lodgings, and all necessary accommodation for company; its customs are settled, its pleasures regulated, its markets and all other conveniences fixed, and the whole very properly adapted to the nature of a place, which is at once designed to give health and pleasure to all its visitants.

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Other Kentish towns were not slow to recognise the lucrative possibilities of tourism. The waters at Lewisham were being acclaimed in 1681, and a century later, temperate air and a spa were drawing men to Bromley. The cathedrals and ruins at Canterbury and Rochester had long been the object of pilgrimage, and in the eighteenth century were constantly visited by families and parties of travellers along with the docks at Chatham and the fortifications at Dover. Kent was also well-endowed when sea-bathing became popular during George III's reign. Some attempt to capitalise on the new fashion seems to have been made at Gravesend. A bath-house was erected in 1796, part of the beach was acquired, and bathing machines could be hired at a guinea for the season, ten shillings a month or a shilling a time. A venture of more lasting success was the development of Herne Bay. Until the establishment of a small military post in 1796 began to attract curious sight-seers, St. Nicholas's Bay in the parish of Herne was the haunt of seagulls, a few fishermen, and the occasional hoy in time of storm. Under the patronage of Lady Hales and her Canterbury friends, however, the bay was transformed, and by 1830 had assumed something of its now familiar guise. In 1817 Horn's Description of Dover proclaimed proudly:

The delightful situation of Dover, the purity of the air, and the advantages of a fine beach for bathing, has caused this place to be much frequented in the bathing season; and it now promises to be one of the most fashionable watering places in the kingdom.

1 J. Peter, A Treatise of Lewisham Wells in Kent, showing the Time and Manner of their Discovery, the Minerals with which they are Impregnated, the Several Diseases Experience hath found them good for, with Directions for the Use of them (1681).
4 Kentish Gazette, 11-15 June 1790, 'STIMULUS' seems to be referring to Folkestone.
7 Horn's Description of Dover (Dover, 1817), pp. 1-2.
But, even before the advent of the railways, the most renowned of the Kentish resorts were Margate and Ramsgate. Margate became popular among the gentry soon after 1760, when the trip from London could be accomplished for 2/6d. by sea, or by road via Canterbury for 16/6d.¹ By the 1820's a steamboat service had been instituted, and visits by Caroline, Princess of Wales, and her daughter had raised its prestige high among a 'great number of nobility and persons of fashion'.² As at Dover, the delights of a 'pure and salubrious air' and a level sandy coastline, were combined with balls and card-parties to entertain a large company, and it was soon found necessary to undertake extensive building work. The Lord Warden was closely involved in a project to erect some 'handsome houses' at Dover³, while in Margate, Cecil Square was begun as early as 1769 and was soon followed by Harley Square and Assembly Rooms 'of the Ionic order, with Venetian windows, entableture and cornice'.⁴

Penetration from outside did much to widen the horizons of Kentishmen and to cultivate a deeper understanding of national problems and attitudes. It is also instructive, however, to examine those means by which news and ideas were circulated among the indigenous population. For the sons of the aristocracy, Westminster or Eton, one of the Universities, and perhaps the Grand Tour was the natural initiation into life. But within the county itself were a number of Free Grammar schools which acted 'to diffuse a taste for the polite literature of Athens and Rome' and 'to afford to the gentry, the clergy, the liberal professions, and in particular, the middle ranks of society, the means and advantages of an education at once pious, solid and comprehensive'.⁵

² Ibid., p. 41; and Hall's New Margate and Ramsgate Guide (Margate, nd.), p. 9.
³ Horn's Description of Dover (Dover, 1819), p. 27.
⁴ Hall's New Margate and Ramsgate Guide, p. 9; and Excursions in the County of Kent (London, 1822), p. 103.
⁵ A Concise History of Tonbridge School (London, 1827), p. 5.
A school was founded at Tonbridge in 1553 by Sir Andrew Judde of the London Skinners' Company, and long retained its ties with the City. Under the eye of the noted scholar and divine, the Rev. Vicesimus Knox, who succeeded his father as Head Master in 1778, Tonbridge reached the height of its popularity, and in due course of time his son James became the first old-boy to obtain the headship.\(^1\) The King's School fulfilled the same role in Canterbury\(^2\), while between 1764 and 1777 another ex-pupil, the Rev. William Polhill, did much to expand the facilities, reputation and social basis of Maidstone Grammar School.\(^3\)

Among humbler electors and the unenfranchised in town and country, Dr. Money has left us in no doubt of the importance of taverns, coffee-houses, theatres and book-clubs in disseminating knowledge and fostering joint political activity.\(^4\) The Fountain and the King's Head at Canterbury, the Star at Maidstone and a host of smaller inns and ale-houses were the most common venue for public meetings during elections, while in London each group of non-residents had its own favourite rendezvous. Most Kentish market towns had a book-seller\(^5\), and an increasing number could boast a library. Margate had four libraries by the 1820's, at each of which the metropolitan papers were available; at Dover Mr. Ledger was proprietor of the Albion Library and Mr. Horn kept the Apollo\(^6\); and in 1796 John Gale Jones visited a circulating library owned by 'a friend of reform'.\(^7\) Such institutions

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1 Ibid., pp. 49-54.
5 See list of booksellers in Kentish Gazette, 20 May 1796.
6 Horn's Description of Dover (Dover, 1817), p. 24.
helped distribute American and French revolutionary tracts\(^1\), while files of newspapers in clubs and coffee-shops enabled many of the poorer readers to keep abreast of recent news and comment.

Probably most important of all in the creation of Kentish public opinion was the growth of the newspaper press, both in London and locally. Newspapers made their faltering appearance in England during the latter decades of the seventeenth century, and were widely employed in the bitter conflict of Anne's reign.\(^2\) However, it was not until the tail-end of the constitutional crisis, in 1717, that James Abree, a Canterbury printer, founded The Kentish Post, or Canterbury News Letter.\(^3\) The Kentish Post generally gave moderate support to the Walpole ministry, although as the county's only paper, it could not afford to adopt an extreme position on contentious issues like the Excise and Jew Bills if sales were to be maintained. Apart from the columns of advertisements, its contents were culled chiefly from the metropolitan press, and throughout its fifty-year history very little space was devoted to reports or comment on specifically Kentish affairs.\(^4\) By 1768 the Kentish Post had become, as Mr. Eaton has observed, 'to all intents and purposes apolitical'; and it is therefore no real surprise to discover that, when Abree's former partner, George Kirkby, joined James Simmons in establishing the Kentish Gazette, the moribund parent was soon incorporated into its more vigorous off-spring.

1768 was, in fact, a landmark in the development of the

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3 For much of the following information I am indebted to K. J. Eaton, 'Newspapers and Politics in Canterbury and Maidstone, 1815-1850: Opinion in the Kentish Town', (Univ. of Kent M.A. thesis 1972), chap. 2.
Kentish press, since it witnessed the birth of two newspapers which were to operate throughout our period. James Simmons was a man of steadfast tory views, and under his management the Kentish Gazette remained a 'staunch supporter' of such principles.¹ The Kentish Weekly Post, which became the Canterbury Journal in 1770, on the other hand, was avowedly sympathetic to Opposition, and championed the movements led by Wilkes and Wyvill. In 1788 it was taken over by William Bristow, and as the Kentish Chronicle continued to pursue a distinctly whiggish line, until in the altered circumstances of 1792 it succumbed to the loyal sentiments of the nation. Both papers served Canterbury and the eastern parts of the county, but it was not until 1786 that John Blake founded the tory Maidstone Journal to meet the needs of the western division. A Maidstone Mercury had failed after twenty-five issues in 1725, and in 1737 a Maidstone Journal managed just three editions before its collapse. Yet by the late 1780's the public's appetite for news had increased sufficiently to sustain Blake's enterprise despite the proximity of London and its many presses.

As Professor Christie has pointed out, the early nineteenth century saw a great expansion in the newspaper industry.² Kent was no exception to this nationwide trend, since by 1830 the three journals already mentioned had been supplemented by John Saffray's more radical Kentish Herald at Canterbury in 1802, by the tory Maidstone Gazette in 1815, and by the Rochester Gazette in 1821. After Simmons' death in 1807, the Kentish Gazette assumed an open attachment to the party of government; the Kentish Chronicle returned to a more liberal stance at about the same time; while even the Maidstone Journal exhibited greater

¹ Ibid., p. 21.
concern for politics when John Vine Hall took on the reins in 1814. Two twice-weekly papers and four weekly publications was a far cry from the days of the Kentish Post, when even the circulation of a single twice-weekly journal was regarded as something rather exceptional.¹

In May 1785 the printer of the Kentish Gazette observed that:

...the spirit and excellence of a Country Newspaper consists in communicating to the Public, with the utmost despatch, the County Business contained in the Advertisements, ...and the State of the Markets, the Parliamentary Debates, with other national occurrences both Foreign and Domestic.²

It was a formula to which the Kentish press adhered with conspicuous success well beyond 1832. Nevertheless, as the nineteenth century progressed politics acquired ever more significance. The patronage of pro- and anti-reformers in 1832 enabled the Kent Herald and the Kentish Gazette respectively to sell 66,000 and 39,000 copies of each edition³, while it may be that the Kentish Chronicle's unpopular views on Catholic Emancipation led to its financial difficulties and contraction.⁴ Letters, reports and literary effusions had long been educating the public consciousness, and when the Kent Herald pioneered the practice of printing comments on the week's news, the old-style printer emerged from his chrysalis as the modern editor and tutor of the populace.⁵ And having read, Kentishmen could act. Just how far this process had developed by the early nineteenth century may be gauged by looking in detail at the crisis and elections of 1806-7.

III

Once the Peace of Amiens had collapsed, it was inevitable that sooner or later Addington would fall; and it was equally certain

¹ Cranfield, op. cit., p. 196.
² Kentish Gazette, 11-14 May 1785.
³ Eaton, op. cit., pp. 36 and 43.
that when he did so, he would be replaced by Pitt. Hence when Pitt died late in January 1806, the King seemed to have been left in toils. George III had vetoed Fox in 1804, but now he had apparently little choice but to accept the coalition of Lord Grenville and the Whigs. The story of British politics under the 'Ministry of all the Talents' has been often told.¹ In opposition, the Pittites were divided; with on the one hand Perceval, Castle-reagh and Hawkesbury, and on the other Rose and Canning. Both groups looked to Grenville as their natural leader and spent many fruitless hours in negotiating a return to office.² Government and its supporters were no more united. It was hard enough for Grenville to agree with his former opponents of the 1790's, but the need to satisfy Whitbread and his radical friends and the conservative Addingtonians as well, meant that few achievements were recorded in the sphere of policy. When at last it was decided to throw open commissions in the army and navy in England to catholics and dissenters, the King objected, and demanded that a pledge be given never to attempt such a measure in the future. Ministers refused, resigned, and were replaced at the end of March 1807 by the Duke of Portland and the Tories.

The exploits of George III, the 'Talents' and the Pittites were fully reported in the Kentish press, and on two occasions electors had an opportunity to make their voices heard. Weakened by the death of Fox³, and perhaps despairing at the state of talks

with Canning, Grenville determined upon an appeal to the country to bolster his majority. However the campaigning which got under way in Kent at the end of October 1806, although adequately covered in the press, lacked an issue with which to fire the imagination of voters. Events in Westminster were never lost sight of, but in general the picture was one of Government using its influence to return supporters, and where this was not possible, of local politicians attending to their own interests. Nevertheless the election does reveal much about Kentish politics at the half-way point in our period, and when contrasted with that of 1807, indicates just how easily public opinion could be aroused.

At New Romney the Dering interest was as strong as it had ever been. In 1792 Oldfield had noted how Sir Edward Dering's agents, Mr. Coates and Mr. Walker, held the mayoralty in alternate years, and remarked that: 'The number of places in the possession of Sir Edward's friends, and their relations, renders the return of treasury candidates an indispensable duty'.¹ In 1816, when the electorate had dwindled to a mere eight, the same author could still write:

Sir Cholmondely Dering has, by a very simple method, possessed himself of an influence in this port, not easily to be rendered insecure. His property in the neighbourhood is tenanted out, without lease, at very easy rents, to the electors; who, feeling that gratitude which never fails to inspire those immediately interested in the present possession of a good thing, could not be so ungenerous as to oppose the inclination of a passive landlord in so trifling a concern as that of the election of a member of Parliament.

In 1806 the Dering partiality for ministerialists and City gold was reflected in the return of William Windham and John Pering.

Neither was any opposition offered to the election of Samuel Romilly and William Frankland at Queenborough. Oldfield was to

¹ T. H. B. Oldfield, An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal, of the Boroughs of Great Britain (London, 1792), iii. 70 and 71.
² T. H. B. Oldfield, The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland; with the History of the House of Commons, and of the Counties, Cities, and Boroughs, of the United Kingdom, from the Earliest Times (London, 1815), v. 404.
estimate in his later survey that of the borough's 131 electors, eleven were employed by the Admiralty and twenty-three by the Ordnance, that seven were navy officers and one was in the artillery, and that fourteen or fifteen worked on the gun wharfs at Sheerness and Purfleet. Hence, as he concluded, Government had returned the M.P.s 'for the last sixteen years, by the mere power of office, in opposition to the corporation, and to the influence of the Evans family'. This monopoly persisted for another twenty years after 1806, but it was never as absolute as at New Romney.

The Admiralty was also strong at Sandwich, but could not retrieve the seat lost to the independent party in 1790. After thirty-eight years of unbroken service, Sir Philip Stephens chose 1806 to announce his retirement from public life. He was replaced in the government seat by Thomas Francis Freemantle, a connection of the Grenville family, who was unanimously nominated, together with Sir Horace Mann, at a Common Assembly on 23 October.

Such a happy compromise was not arranged at Rochester, where, as the Kentish Chronicle commented: 'A volume would not contain all the incidents of this extraordinary contest'. The paper then went on to explain how: 'Two parties of Rochester, whose lives have been spent in mutual animosity' had come together in a 'virtuous league' to defeat Sir Sidney Smith. On the one hand, Smith was opposed by that 'body of opulent freemen' known locally as the 'Family Compact' which owed its wealth to ministerial patronage, and on the other by the so-called 'Parr's Head, or Jacobinical party' whose strength had been steadily increasing since 1768. With the gallant admiral absent on active service, his friends fought a hesitant campaign and for a time even put forward T. B. Thompson in his place, while as a regular Pittite,

1 Oldfield, Representative History, iv. 79 and 80.
3 The following paragraph is based on Kentish Chronicle, 14 Nov. 1806.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 28 Oct. 1806.
Smith was a prime target for the new Whig Lords of the Admiralty. In addition, he seems to have fallen victim to the political and mercenary ambitions of the borough's electorate and its desire for a third man. One opponent was John Calcraft, the son of the city's former Chathamite M.P., who appealed to the 'independent spirit' of the voters in the hope of assuming the mantle of his 'worthy friend' James Hulkes. Calcraft seems to have claimed that he appeared in Rochester well disposed to Sir Sidney, and that he only shifted his allegiance when he discerned the temper of the borough. However, Denis O'Bryen, when speaking on behalf of the admiral, accused Calcraft of having schemed for six months to oust the sitting Member. The other candidate, who had arrived so late upon the scene, was James Barnett. In his address of thanks, Barnett revealed that he had been encouraged to stand by men with 'expressions of their firm attachment to the Government, so congenial with my own sentiments'; and rejoiced 'to have been the instrument by which you have had the opportunity of asserting your independence in the exercise of your own free and uninfluenced choice'.

The victory of Calcraft and Barnett over Sir Sidney Smith shows clearly that electoral power in Rochester was still divided between ministers and radicals, although they would not again make common cause until 1831. The fact is most strikingly borne out by a breakdown of the voting figures which reveals the extent of cross-voting between the supporters of the successful candidates. Of the 382 votes cast for Smith, 165 were plumpers, whereas Calcraft's 575 votes and Barnett's 393 votes only included 24 and 18 plumpers respectively. The corporation emphasised its strength by creating 49 new freemen only a few days before the

2 Kentish Chronicle, 18 Nov. 1806.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 11 Nov. 1806.
poll began, while a potential electorate of possibly 800 offered great scope for bribery and tumult. The 1806 election marked Rochester out as an expensive borough, and it was to be expected that Smith's friends should resort to a petition. However on 2 March 1807 this was rejected by the Commons' committee, which at the same time confirmed the franchise in the hands of the whole freeman body.¹

The only other Kentish borough in which Government might expect to exert a direct influence was Dover, where a large number of freemen included many non-residents. The earliest surviving poll-book reveals that of the 1,707 persons who voted in 1826, 1,067 were in-dwellers and 640 out-voters.² Dover closely resembled Rochester insofar as it was an expensive constituency and had sustained an independent interest since the days of Wilkes. However the unique circumstances of 1806 did not produce in the Cinque Port, the return of a Whig and a radical.

On grounds of the probable cost and pressing commitments, J. S. Smith declined to recontest the borough, and recommended every friend to the freedom of election to assist John Jackson, a man 'possessing ample means of defending his pretentions'.³ Jackson was 'a commercial man' who pledged 'a strict attention to your commands', and likened himself to 'the Citadel planted on your commanding heights immovably determined to guard your privileges and preserve your rights'.⁴ Charles Jenkinson on the other hand, took up the cudgels wielded by his 'very worthy and good friend' William Huskisson in 1802.

If [he declared] the most profound veneration for the memory of that great Statesman with whom you were so nearly and particularly connected, and a determination to support those principles of Government, by which this country, though surrounded by perils and difficulties

⁴ Kentish Chronicle, 28 and 31 Oct. 1806.
unexampled in our history, has been under his auspices maintained in its present state of security and prosperity, are any title to your favor, (sic.) no individual in these kingdoms entertains these sentiments more warmly than myself."

Memories of the 1790's and old associations obviously died hard, for in a large poll, Jackson and Jenkinson squeezed out Trevanion. Elsewhere, there was a similar lack of specifically national issues. As in 1802, Canterbury was uncontested, and returned, almost without comment, two independents - John Baker and James Simmons. But more than a thousand electors would not remain impassive for much longer. At Maidstone the municipal in-fighting, which had bred contests at every election since 1715, had departed only slightly from the balance of forces established in the early 1780's. One party was identified by Oldfield in 1792 as that led by the late Mr. Brenchly, a brewer and partner in a Southwark bank, whose aim it was 'to compliment the minister with the nomination of its members'; while the other, 'equally zealous in maintaining the independence of its constitutional rights' adhered to Clement Taylor. However Oldfield did see hope for the popular cause at Maidstone. 'The death of Mr. Brenchly,' he thought, 'has considerably weakened the ministerial interest, and it is not improbable, but at another election, it may shake off the trammels of government dictation entirely'. Nearly a quarter of a century later, these predictions had not been fulfilled. 'This borough' wrote Oldfield in the familiar manner, 'is divided into a ministerial and opposition party; the former generally prevails in returning the members'. In 1806, Sir Matthew Bloxam was defeated by the whiggish George Longman and the more conservative George Simson, but there are grounds for supposing that in a borough where seats retailed at £3,000 to £5,000, his Pittite

1 Kentish Chronicle, 28 Oct. 1806.
2 For addresses, Kentish Chronicle, 28 and 31 Oct. 1806.
3 Oldfield, History of the Boroughs, ii. 158 and 159.
4 Oldfield, Representative History, iv. 76.
stance counted for less than the length of his purse.¹

At Hythe, where neither minister nor patron had recaptured the influence of the Sackvilles, the local gentry were again embroiled in a contest. Oldfield had written in his earlier work that: 'The interest amongst the electors, is nearly equally divided between government and Mr. Evelyn, one of the present members'; and had lamented that in its 'present debilitated form', the representation did not permit the consolidation of an independent interest.² Nevertheless, the effects of Crewe's Act, the scarcity of ministerial places, and the retirement of Evelyn in 1802, threw Hythe politics into a confusion from which it did not escape until 1820. In 1806, Viscount Marsham, Thomas Godfrey and Matthew White all reappeared, and having severally canvassed the borough, each was confident of success.³ On this occasion, polling went in favour of Marsham and Godfrey, with the latter surviving the inevitable petition.⁴

Finally, in the county, came on the fourth and last of the great disputed elections. Nomination day was 3 November, and at once Thomas Hallett Hodges launched a bitter attack on the state of national politics.

If ever there was a time [he exclaimed] when the sordid views of party were prevalent, it was never more so than at the present moment, odious and disgusting as they were to every honest mind, and every feeling of just independence.⁵

The premature dissolution showed 'how much there was to be feared from party measures'; so that Hodges warmly recommended the ever independent Sir William Geary. Geary himself agreed that 'party animosity ran high'; and stoutly denied that he was about to join one of his opponents.

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1 Bloxam petitioned on grounds of bribery and corruption, but was unsuccessful, Com. Jour., lxii. 22 and 151.
2 Oldfield, History of the Boroughs, iii. 65.
3 For addresses Kentish Chronicle, 28 Oct. 1806.
4 Com. Jour., lxii. 36 and 37.
5 For report, Kentish Gazette, 4 Nov. 1806.
I will not take the opinion of government, or of opposition; I will not act on the opinion of any man, or of any party, but the opinion of a Representative of the County of Kent: - My own opinion shall be my guide.

Geary was resolved to fight on, whatever the cost, but there was a move afoot to arrange some sort of compromise. Sir Edward Knatchbull, though undoubtedly eager to regain his seat, offered to stand aside if by so doing he could preserve the peace of the county. He might not have been so compliant had he read a letter addressed by Lord Howick to Lord Grenville on 25 October:

In my way here I met Lord Thanet, who had just left a meeting of the Kentish people. They intend to support Lord Marsham in conjunction with Honywood, if Lord Romney's previous engagements do not stand in their way. If Lord Marsham stands for the county, some other candidate will be proposed on the same interest for Hythe. I thought it necessary to mention this in consequence of what passed this morning about Sir William Geary, as you will probably think it right to suspend any determination about their second candidate till this is settled. Any thing will be better than Knatchbull.

The Honywood in question was Capt. William Honywood, who claimed to share the same principles as his retiring brother, while the 'independent' Lord Marsham was the son of the Lord Lieutenant. Both men were nominated, Knatchbull withdrew, and a joint candidature was proposed by Mr. Hatton. But all did not go smoothly. Geary refused to retire, and a show of hands went in favour of Honywood and himself. Finally, in the evening Marsham announced his retirement, upon which Sir Edward immediately re-entered the lists.

The whole episode is a curious one. Knatchbull and the Tories had apparently acted in good faith to prevent excessive expenditure, but among their opponents, motives were more ambiguous. The 'Talents' had no desire to see so staunch a Pittite in the new parliament, and were clearly scheming against his return. Marsham, who on 1 November had been elected at Hythe, probably lost his nerve when a contest threatened to involve his family in expenses far beyond their limited means, while there is a

strong suggestion that even Geary's principles were not unshakable. After all, he had not scrupled to compromise his independence in 1796, and might have been tempted again. That Government resorted to such back-stairs methods again emphasises its electoral weakness in the county, as does the final outcome of the poll.

Writing to Viscount Lowther on polling day, Charles Long was convinced that Knatchbull would secure his election ahead of Geary\(^1\), and events were to prove him correct. The principal topic of debate from the hustings was the Slave Trade, but this was scarcely an issue capable of swaying large numbers of voters, even had the candidates disagreed violently.\(^2\) Sir William Geary declared that 'no-one was more anxious for its abolition than himself'; and associated his sentiments with those of Wilberforce. Knatchbull felt likewise, and recalled his motion of 1792 for the discontinuance of the trade, while Honywood could only add that in his opinion the trafficking in negroes was 'as disgusting to human nature, as it was disgraceful to Englishmen'. Voting then commenced, and by the end of the second day Geary recognised the futility of going further.

IV

With the rather insignificant exception of the Slave Trade, no national question was mooted in any of the Kentish constituencies during the 1806 campaign. At Dover, Hythe, Maidstone, Rochester and in the county, where contests did take place, voters were asked to choose between well-known personalities or local interest groups, and in no instance was the established balance of power departed from. The most remarkable feature of the 1806 returns was the sizeable proportion of new men. Of the eighteen sitting Members at the dissolution, only four were re-elected, five were defeated, and nine decided not to stand. The changed complexion of

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2 Kentish Chronicle, 14 Nov. 1806.
Government undoubtedly accounts for the new faces at Queenborough and New Romney, for Stephens' retirement at Sandwich and Smith's misfortunes at Rochester, and probably lay behind the results at Dover, where political distinctions had temporarily lost their keenness. While for the remainder, the persuasive qualities of newly opened purses and the natural ebb and flow of popularity may be ascribed.

However, the circumstances of Grenville's resignation presented the incoming Tories with an irresistible opportunity to scatter their beaten enemies, and, wherever possible, to reverse the nominations of the previous year. On 15 May 1807 the Kentish Chronicle was claiming that the cry of 'No Popery' was rapidly dying down as people realised that the relief proposed by the 'Talents' was 'infinitely less than the boon granted in Ireland by Lord Westmorland'. Nevertheless the paper was fully alive to the dangers of so emotive an appeal. It reminded its readers that Burke, Pitt, Canning, Castlereagh and Portland had all advocated Emancipation, and pointed out that even Bishop Pretyman had not opposed the 'Talents' in the Lords. Kentishmen were advised to follow the laudable example of Westminster and the City of London, and not to be deluded by unfounded exaggerations.\(^1\) Even so, when Parliament was dissolved at the end of April 1807 a section, at least, of the electorate had been roused, and as A. D. Harvey has recently written: 'More than any previous election, with the sole exception of that of 1784, this was an election fought on a clear national issue. It was the 'No Popery' election'.\(^2\)

To what extent, then, were the results in Kent attributable to an inflamed public opinion, and in what ways does the presence or absence of the catholic bogey shed further light on the basic

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1 Kentish Chronicle, 15 May 1807.  
shape of county politics?

The evidence available for many of the Kentish constituencies tends to recommend Dr. Harvey's more general reflection, that very often 'voting seemed one thing, public opinion another'; and to emphasise the wisdom of his cautious approach to the overall influence of anti-catholicism.¹ At New Romney, for example, the Derings were guided by motives far less idealistic than the safety of the British Constitution when replacing Pering and Windham with the Earl of Clonmel and the Hon. George Ashburnham. Likewise, the Kentish Chronicle anticipated that at Queenborough: 'The election is likely to be the longest ever known, owing to the necessary affidavits taken, as proposed by Colonel Chichester²; but there is no reason to believe that Joseph Hunt and J. C. Villiers, or their challenger, were concerned primarily with religious liberty.

At Rochester, John Calcraft wasted no time before defending his own conduct and the record of the ministry in which he had served.³ Having made many references to his father's close ties with the borough, Calcraft spoke of his recent support for the abolition of the Slave Trade, and described how, during his months at the Ordnance, he had participated in the 'Talents' programme of economy. Finally he attempted to explain Grenville's catholic policy, in a manner which argues a depth of confidence in the strength of Rochester's independent interest to resist the popular refrain. He complained that 'the dust of Popery is thrown in our eyes to blind us against premeditated peculation'; and urged that the Catholic Bill:

was only meant to enable His Majesty to avail himself of the assistance of the whole of his subjects, and that the effect intended to be produced by it was simply that

¹ Ibid., pp. 43 and 203.
² Kentish Chronicle, 5 May 1807.
³ Kentish Chronicle, 8 May 1807.
an office in the army having local rank in Ireland, should have the same rank and power if conveyed on this side the water.

Sir T. B. Thompson was a typical Admiralty candidate, while Sir Thomas Trigge, an army officer of fifty years' service and a place-holder at the Ordnance, was critical of the 'Talents' coercion of the King, and believed their much acclaimed economies to be more apparent than real. The nine-day poll, in which 633 of the estimated 800 freemen voted, was hotly contested, but at last Trigge conceded defeat.¹ The Catholic question had been debated as just one of a series of issues arising from the late ministerial hiatus, and had in no way affected the character of the borough's representation. Thompson regained the safe government votes which had dutifully returned Galcraft in 1806, and Galcraft himself simply became the mouth-piece of James Hulkes' popular party.²

As usual, Hythe was in a frenzied whirl. Thomas Godfrey was a candidate, as were J. W. H. Brydges and Matthew White. Viscount Marsham's retirement brought Thomas Plummer into the field with a pledge to uphold 'equally the Prerogative of the Crown, the Rights of the People, and especially the Interests and Privileges of your ancient Town and Port'; while in his turn, Lord Whitworth professed:

> a determined and inflexible adherence to those great constitutional principles, to aid him in the defence whereof our best of Sovereigns has now called for the support of his grateful and affectionate people.³

When Whitworth (who had married the widow of the third Duke of Dorset) appeared, Brydges immediately withdrew, but when his lordship himself retreated soon afterwards, it was William Deedes who leapt in to fill the gap, much to the annoyance of the

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¹ Kentish Chronicle, 12 May 1807.
² Oldfield, Representative History, iv. 67-8.
³ For addresses Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
⁴ Kentish Chronicle, 5 May 1807.
absent Brydges.\(^1\) Polling day was generally unremarkable, except for the accusation that Plummer had bought his previous constituents, and it may have been for this reason, as much as for any other, that he and his partner White were eventually disappointed. Both Deedes and Godfrey were country gentlemen in the orthodox mould, and there is no hint that any of the challengers were inclined to a pro-catholic position. Hence we must conclude that the outcome was decided in the typical eighteenth-century manner.

In the county, too, local factors were paramount. Tired of striving, and with bills from 1802 and 1806 still unpaid, the gentlemen of Kent had not the spirit for another tussle. Consequently, those freeholders who assembled on Penenden Heath found only two aspirants for their suffrage. Sir Henry Hawley described Knatchbull as 'a man firmly attached to his King, to the Constitution, and the Established Protestant Religion of these Kingdoms';\(^2\) and in his published address, William Honywood had made the equally definite pronouncement that:

\[\text{Frequent communications between the Representatives of the People and their Constituents, I approve; but national business depending in Parliament, the present dissolution cannot therefore approve.}\]

Under different conditions, anti-catholic sentiments in Kent might well have prompted an opposition to an unrepentant Whig like Honywood. But in the prevailing atmosphere of exhaustion this was never even called for.

The attitudes towards the catholics expressed at Maidstone, Dover and Sandwich, where by 1790 one seat had been captured by an independent group, well illustrate how the French Revolution and the war had either upset this balance or drained it of its former radical dynamic. At Maidstone, whose elections were very inadequately reported during these years, expenses were high,

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1 For nomination Kentish Chronicle, 8 May 1807.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 15 May 1807.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
and the salt of party conflict seems temporarily to have lost its savour. George Longman, on behalf of the popular interest, promised 'to support our Established Constitution with firmness and zeal'; and thus, together with the steadfastly conservative Simson, was able to withstand the efforts of the more liberal-minded, but self-confessedly impecunious Sir William Geary.

Although absent on active service, the freemen of Sandwich were assured that the Hon. Charles Cecil Cope Jenkinson (a half-brother of the second Earl of Liverpool) would be 'invariably disposed to use all his exertions in support of our excellent Constitution in church and state'. With ministerial backing, Jenkinson's election was beyond doubt, but the fate of the other seat was by no means so predictable. Perhaps sensing that after seventeen years his credit with the borough's independents was running perilously low, Sir Horace Mann associated himself with the government man in an appeal to 'all those persons who have a due regard for the welfare of their Sovereign and the security of their church and state'. It was not enough, for on 29 April a Sandwich native, Admiral Peter Rainier, had been nominated at a Common Hall, and when the polls closed he had received 124 plumpers and only 47 cross-votes against Mann's 146 cross-votes and just two plumpers. Nevertheless, the new standard-bearer of Sandwich's independence was, like his fellows, pledged to 'exert my utmost endeavours to preserve our excellent Constitution inviolate in Church and State'; and evinced no more sign of espousing reform than the vanquished Mann.

A few miles along the coast at Dover, a similar struggle was in progress. Of the ministerialists, the solid Pittite views of

1 Kentish Chronicle, 1 and 5 May 1807.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 12 May 1807.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 1 and 5 May 1807; and Oldfield, Representative History, v. 394.
Charles Jenkinson need not be restated, while, as was to be expected, the Hon. Henry Manvers Pierrepont swore 'constant adherence to the Principles of our happy Constitution, and the most loyal attachment to the Person and Rights of our Sovereign.'

As to John Jackson, who had taken over the role so long played by John Trevanion, he too was enabled to win the applause of a meeting of metropolitan non-residents with a patriotic declaration, and squeezed home ahead of Pierrepont by six votes. Thus in all three boroughs anti-catholicism emerges as a prerequisite to success, but not a watertight guarantee thereof. Most electors remained wary of change, and their conservatism was to persist for some years to come.

The only partial exception to the rule so far found applicable is that afforded by events at Canterbury. The borough had been uncontested in 1802, 1806 and at the by-election early in 1807, but the replacement of the deceased tory proprietor of the Kentish Gazette on the latter occasion, by a committed Foxite, ensured that Portland's snap dissolution would not have a similar scenario. During the first weeks of May a storm of recrimination broke about the ears of the sitting Members, S. E. Sawbridge and John Baker, comparable to anything undergone in 1796. Having outlined the manner of the 'Talents' fall and Brand's subsequent motion - which had amounted almost to an attempted censure of George III's conduct - one writer in the Kentish Chronicle asked: '...will Mr. Sawbridge's friends then presume to say that in voting for Mr. Brand's resolution, he did not vote in favour of the Roman Catholics?'; and was equally critical of the 'cautious neutrality' adopted by Baker in not attending the debate. Baker was also under fire from the city's

1 Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
2 Ibid.
3 Eaton, op. cit., pp. 20-1.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
independents, who had heard rumours that, fearing the expense of a contest, he had gone to the new ministers 'offering to lay himself bound hand and foot before them, and to give them his unqualified support, if they would not oppose his election.'

'A LONDON FREEMAN OF CANTERBURY' was even moved by these tidings to declare that 'if the Pope himself in such a case were opposed to Baker, I would give his holiness a vote, if it would keep the other out.'

Sawbridge chose to retire, but justified his vote as being wholly consistent with his past professions, and deplored 'the shameful introduction of Religious Opinions for Election Purposes'. However Baker was not left alone for long. His new partner was to be Edward Taylor, a local man, who promised 'to maintain inviolate our liberty, laws and religion'. His further declaration of 'attachment to the King, and to our glorious Constitution' was probably deemed obligatory, and was quickly called in question by 'AN INDEPENDENT FREEMAN' who pointed out that Taylor's family had connections with the Grenvilles. There thus existed ample opportunities for a 'Church and King' opposition, which materialised in the persons of S. R. Lushington and R.T. Farquhar.

On the hustings, General Harris proposed Lushington, his son-in-law and former secretary in Madras, as a man from an old Kentish family. He had disliked Grenville's decision to be the auditor of his own accounts at the Treasury, and disapproved of the 'Talents' proposal to disband the Volunteers. Above all, he welcomed the King's appeal to the nation, and insisted that Baker had 'connived at the Catholics coming into power'. Farquhar, for twelve years Lieutenant-Governor of the Prince of Wales Island,

1 Kentish Chronicle, 12 May 1807.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 1 and 5 May 1807.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 5 and 8 May 1807.
4 For addresses Kentish Chronicle, 1 May 1807.
entirely concurred, and denied that any help had been rendered
towards the joint campaign by the Treasury.¹ Canvassing was furi­
ous and money flowed freely, but after three days Baker and Taylor,
with their long-standing local associations, were victorious.
Nevertheless the catholic factor had materially affected the
result, since, while the new M.P.s had not actually voted for
relief, Sawbridge who had, had been forced to quit. Moreover, the
fear of popery had breathed new vigour into Canterbury toryism,
and ensured its long-term acquisition of one seat.

In conclusion it may be noted that throughout the election,
catholic relief was discussed in the press, and was mentioned in
every constituency where the electorate had a voice. Yet, although
Kentishmen were clearly conscious of this and a whole range of
other issues relating to Grenville's short administration, the
fact remains that the King's new servants did not make sweeping
gains in the county. Public opinion was certainly not as articu­
late or as fully developed as it was to become by the 1820's,
but even so, this failure to alter the status quo seems to spring
more from the deficiencies of the central question itself. As
was to happen again in 1826, anti-catholicism inflamed prejudice
and passion but was incapable of achieving positive political
progress, and, while it might numb local hostility, never succeed­
ed in making lasting converts. Only the quest for reform of
Parliament and the system of finance possessed the vitality needed
to break old bonds, and within two years this leviathan was
stirring from its enforced slumbers.

¹ Report in Kentish Chronicle, 12 May 1807. For returns of
thanks ibid. 15 and 19 May 1807.
Part Three
'There was little evidence in 1808,' it has been observed, 'that reform commanded great public support or could become the key to unlock the door to power'. The repressive legislation of the 1790's had apparently purged the nation of Jacobins, while since the collapse of the Peace of Amiens, the war against Napoleon had been waged more as a patriotic crusade than an ideological confrontation. The Slave Trade rather than the defects in the Constitution had kindled the reforming zeal of the 'Talents', and the Whigs stubbornly continued to regard the Prince of Wales as offering the best hope of their own and the country's salvation. Nevertheless, two general elections in eight months could scarcely fail to stimulate popular awareness of contemporary politics, and thereafter, a steady stream of gloomy reports from the Continent, where France was rampant and the new Peninsular campaign beset with difficulties, fanned the discontent which had already found expression in the metropolitan elections of 1807.

However it was not so much the news of military reverses, as the discovery of corruption and abuses at home, that finally prompted a fresh spate of petitioning and public meetings. As was to happen with even wider consequences between 1825 and 1829, the introduction of the catholic issue had focused attention on the use of the royal prerogative, and in many respects prepared men's minds to receive the celebrated revelations of Colonel Wardle. At the beginning of 1809 it was disclosed that Mrs. Anne Clarke had exploited her position as the Duke of York's mistress to influence the distribution of army commissions, and throughout the next excited months, Kentishmen were able to follow the Commander-in-Chief's every move in the pages of the county press.

The pro-government Kentish Gazette counselled caution:

We have again and again presumed to say that there are many defects in our Military Services which call for reform, but we cannot bring ourselves to believe that there is the slightest foundation for the many flagitious stories that have fed the ear that delights in slander for this twelve month past.

But the Kentish Chronicle, fast re-emerging as an opposition journal from its patriotic torpor, was less disposed to be charitable, since it felt the Duke to be guilty of 'several distinct and specific acts of abuse of his office...'

During February, the paper insisted that so vital a matter should not be shelved, and when an enquiry was at length begun, it was careful to scrutinise every piece of new evidence. Copious praise was heaped upon Wardle for his 'most excellent speech' in the Commons, and for the 'honest, candid, and manly' manner of his declaration in favour of an address to the King for York's dismissal; while as the crisis subsided, due prominence was given to accounts of meetings held in Westminster and the City to thank the zealous colonel.

The inhabitants of Canterbury, Deal, Dover, Hythe, Maidstone and Rochester responded by assembling to discuss recent events, and as politicians realised that a new spirit was abroad in the land, further instances of financial waste and misappropriation were quickly brought to light. Among the most diligent in scenting out the merest hint of abuse was Rochester's John Calcraft, and in 1810 it was his sifting that exposed the misdemeanours of Joseph Hunt, the Treasurer of the Ordnance and M.P. for Queenborough. Hunt had lately fled the country leaving his official accounts with a deficit of £93,296, and to make matters worse,

1 Kentish Gazette, 31 Jan. 1809.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 31 Jan. 1809.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 10 Mar. and 4 Apr. 1809.
he had never been required to deposit the statutory £10,000 security, despite having held his office since 1807. 'This was so palpable a breach of duty on the part of the board,' asserted Calcraft, 'as it was impossible to pass by without censure'; but the House refused to condemn the Master-General of the Ordnance, just as it had failed to pass judgment on the Duke of York in the previous year. The moral which many drew from such episodes was that Parliament and party politicians were no longer capable of governing with justice and equity. An unsuccessful war and the spectacle of Cabinet colleagues engaging in a duel had discredited the Pittites, and the warnings and lamentations of the Whigs were widely regarded as simply the crocodile-tears of a power-hungry aristocratic faction. The only lasting remedy seemed to be a far-reaching constitutional reform, and in 1810 its urgent necessity was emphasised by the case of Sir Francis Burdett.

Burdett was imprisoned in the Tower in April 1810 for contempt of the House of Commons, after giving his support to the recently arrested John Gale Jones in a letter to Cobbett's Political Register. Like Wilkes before him, the illustrious M.P. for Westminster captured the popular imagination, and tidings of his exploits filled columns of news-print. The Maidstone Journal and the Kentish Gazette commented disapprovingly upon the antics of Burdett and his adherents, but the Kentish Chronicle fought in the van of his defenders. In mid April it loudly declared:

...had not the bare faced priests of corruption, traduced and villified his character; and most shamefully stigmatised and attempted to blacken the purest fame in the nation; by ascribing motives to this worthy, popular and justly esteemed man, which only tend to lessen themselves in the eyes of the discriminating; proving the horrid state of corruption and venality to which the British press is reduced; whilst it exalts the patriotic

1 Parl. Deb., 1st Ser. xv. 237.
and envied Baronet, in the estimation of every dispassionate, reflecting and independent Man in the Kingdom.

The political and legal implications of the affair were examined by one correspondent, who feared that the Commons was seeking to establish the principle of summarily trying those whom it accused, and of coveting the 'right of being the sole judge what expressions, in point of law, constitute a libel'. If these powers were obtained, he argued, the House would 'be rendered more formidable than the prerogatives claimed by the Stuarts'.

The same themes were taken up in a series of petitions from the provinces. On 14 May a meeting outside Canterbury's Guildhall expressed its 'heartfelt regret' at:

the seizure and commitment of two of their fellow subjects, on a charge of having offended the House by their writings, the breaking open of a dwelling-house with an armed military force, under the alleged sanction of a Warrant from the Speaker of the House, and the foul stain of murder fixed by two Coroners Juries on that body of Troops to which the care of the Royal Person is more particularly confided.

The petition went on to observe, 'that if a body of men is allowed to be prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner in its own Court, there is not sufficient virtue in Man, to prevent that body from becoming arbitrary, oppressive, cruel and tyrannical; and contrasted the speed of Burdett's trial with the constant obstacles used to delay the evidence of electoral venality against Castlereagh and Perceval. The inhabitants of Rochester soon added their voice to the mounting chorus, and among other things, denounced the Commons' vote on the Walcheren expedition 'as contrary to the wishes, opinion and expectation of the Country, and as tending to induce a belief that the power of Government has an excessive weight in the deliberations of the House'. Both boroughs were convinced that reform was essential, but stopped

1 Kentish Chronicle, 17 Apr. 1810.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 4 May 1810.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 8 June 1810; and Com. Jour., lxv. 389-90.
short of championing a specific plan.

Opposition sought to harness the national desire by means of Brand's bill, but when the scheme was negatived on 21 May 1810, only John Calcraft and Maidstone's George Longman, from among the Kentish M.P.s, felt able to divide in the minority. However, if Kent's representatives still retained the suspicion of reform fostered in the 1790's, a county meeting summoned in the following October clearly showed that a section of the freeholders had regained their former enthusiasm. The day's proceedings were opened by Mr. Hodges with many references to the reforming ideas of Chatham, Pitt and Blackstone, and his petition was then seconded by Robert Foote of Charlton Place, who resolutely denied that 'some abstract question of policy, some difficult theory in the art and mystery of Government' was being demanded. All that was requested was 'the Constitution as established by the wisdom of our Ancestors'; and to Foote this blessing might be restored by remedies similar to those of Brand, coupled with curbs on election expenses. With the added recommendations of Thomas Rider and Sir William Geary, the proposal was approved, and a committee formed to assist the circulation of the petition. Greatest controversy surrounded the past and likely future conduct of Sir Edward Knatchbull. Not for the last time, Knatchbull was described by the Rochester auctioneer Charles Larkin as 'a bitter and deadly enemy to reform'; but, while acknowledging his recent vote against Brand, he was careful to preserve a cautious independence.

As the county petition steadily accumulated signatures, Sir William Geary was hard at work formulating and popularising a coherent programme of reform. The fruits of his deliberations

were unveiled in the Kentish Chronicle on 14 December, along with a solemn warning that if relief was not quickly forthcoming, a demoralised nation would be laid wide open to conquest.¹ For the boroughs, Geary favoured a rate-payer franchise, and in cases where even the incorporation of the neighbouring hundreds could not achieve an electorate of 500, he wished for the transfer of seats to larger constituencies. He advocated the ballot and triennial parliaments, and argued forcibly for the county poll to be held in the petty session districts and the registration of freeholders in order to check expenses. During the next months the debate raged in the press between writers like 'An Advocate for Reform' in the Kentish Chronicle and 'Anti-Reformist' in the Maidstone Journal², and on 11 June 1811 all eyes were focused upon Whitbread as he presented the Kent petition.³

However, reform was not a panacea universally acclaimed by Kentishmen. The people of Maidstone seem to have been reluctant to declare on behalf of Burdett in 1810⁴, while on 15 May 1810 the corporation of Canterbury had affirmed its belief in the excellence of the Constitution and expressed 'indignation and concern' at the 'insidious and mischievous attempts made to degrade, villify and bring into contempt' the House of Commons.⁵ Sir Edward Knatchbull's refusal to take charge of the county petition, on the grounds that it had been voted at a meeting of inhabitants rather than freeholders of Kent, thus somehow symbolised the deep divisions which still existed on the great question. Moreover, public interest could not be sustained indefinitely, especially as better news was beginning to filter

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¹ Kentish Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1810.
⁴ Kentish Chronicle, 3 July 1810.
⁵ Com. Jour., lxv. 417.
back from Spain. Hence, when the Whigs failed to capitalise on the installation of the Prince Regent and the assassination of Perceval, there was a marked slackening in the popular and parliamentary agitation, and in this welcome breathing-space Lord Liverpool went to the country.

While it lasted, the storm had been furious, but by the autumn of 1812 it had abated sufficiently to give local rather than national issues predominance. Hythe was soon embroiled in another of its own private quarrels. Reports of the March 1810 by-election, in which the former Lord Mayor of London, Sir John Pering, had beaten John Brydges and the avowed enemy of ministers, W. Busk, record no specific references to events elsewhere\(^1\), and in 1812 Thomas Plummer, Matthew White and perhaps J. W. H. Brydges were preoccupied with righting the injustices of 1807. White, for example, believed that he had been robbed of victory when his friends' second votes were given to the opposition, and had consequently made an agreement with the 'independent interest' to prevent a repetition.\(^2\) On the eve of polling he thus reminded freemen: 'The cause is YOUR OWN, the success, if you succeed, will be that of your own independence: and that success is certain, if you are UNANIMOUS'; and together with Pering finished comfortably ahead of Plummer.\(^3\)

The cry of independence was stronger in 1812 than at any of the three previous general elections, and reflects the depth of national disillusionment with the conduct and professions of Whigs and Tories alike. A typical product of this disposition among the electorate was Joseph Marryat, who stepped forward at Sandwich when the death of Captain Morgan deprived the popular

1 *Kentish Chronicle*, 16 and 20 Mar. 1810.
3 *Kentish Chronicle*, 13 Oct. 1812. Two non-residents petitioned against Pering on grounds of bribery, but were unsuccessful: *Com. Jour.*, lxviii. 56 and 108.
interest of its likely candidate. ¹ He pledged:

I am not enlisted under the banners of any party; that I consider measures, not men; and that my vote is directed according to the best dictates of my judgement, by a regard to the principles of the Constitution, and the public good. ²

Such a creed was no better suited to the destruction of well-entrenched loyalties than had been anti-popery in 1807, and the radical Oldfield was inclined to label both Marryat and Sir J. S. Yorke as ministerial men. However the former's disinterested service over the next twelve years was to prove the worth of his introductory promise.

Similar sentiments were upper-most at Dover and Maidstone, with the result that in those constituencies too, issues were at a high premium and even the merest hint of party bias might spell disaster. When William Huskisson's expected challenge came to nothing, Jenkinson and the independent Jackson were re-elected at Dover without a contest. ³ The appearance of Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges ⁴ did at least enable the freemen of Maidstone to hold a poll and enjoy all the accompanying spoils. Brydges and George Simson both attracted 380 votes, and it may possibly have been support for Burdett and Brand's reform bill in 1810 that prevented George Longman from repeating his previous triumphs.

Parliamentary reform had won more converts in the county than in a borough like Maidstone where the corporation had wide influence and the spur of Clement Taylor's old radical interest had for the moment lost its vigour. William Honywood announced at the very outset that 'attacks of Gout and Rheumatism, these two years past, and the use of my limbs being so far gone' would prevent him standing again. However he could not bid farewell

¹ T.H.B. Oldfield, The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland; with the History of the House of Commons, and of the Counties, Cities, and Boroughs, of the United Kingdom, from the Earliest Times (London, 1816), v. 394.
² Kentish Chronicle, 2 Oct. 1812.
³ Kentish Chronicle, 2 and 13 Oct. 1812.
⁴ Kentish Chronicle, 16 Oct. 1812.
without offering some parting advice:

In retiring allow me to impress on your minds, the present situation of the Country at large, and thereby the necessity of never losing sight of a CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN PARLIAMENT.

The words encouraged Sir William Geary to advertise his candidature, and on 13 October he was recommended to the freeholders by T. L. Hodges as 'the tried friend of the rights and privileges of his fellow subjects', who had expended a fortune in their advancement. Geary himself was more specific:

By the plan he would propose, every man would be able to vote in his own district, without the enormous expense which at present attended contested elections: an expense which had formerly pressed so heavily on him, as to prevent him, even now, from attending his duty in Parliament, (should he be chosen) without considerable inconvenience.

Sir Edward Knatchbull was quizzed by Robert Foote on his attitude to reform and the Roman Catholics, but the baronet and his supporters refused to venture beyond assurances of continued dedication to national and local business. Public feeling was not strong enough to inspire an opposition, but the election of Geary, with his reforming and independent background, does indicate substantial discontent with the current performance of the representative system.

A similar mixture of sentiments dictated the outcome at Rochester and Canterbury. John Calcraft's delvings into the darker recesses of the administrative machine during the late parliament, left no doubt of his commitment to sweeping change, and on this basis he was nominated at Rochester on 7 October along with Admiral Sir T. B. Thompson. The only discordant voice in 1812, as in 1802, was that of the ex-Jacobin, George Smith. Smith had been dismayed at the half-hearted policies adopted by the 'Talents' when in office, and since their dismissal he had

1 Kentish Chronicle, 2 Oct. 1812.
3 Ibid.
adhered firmly to an independent course. Calcraeft had always been closely associated with the Whigs, and perhaps for this reason he had incurred the displeasure of a group of the city's freemen led by James Barnett. The sitting Member publicly rejected a joint canvass with his former colleague, and respect for his family would probably have carried him home ahead of Smith even without Charles Larkin's passionate plea for unity in the face of a common enemy. Smith eventually withdrew, but not until he had heard Larkin speak out forcibly for change:

...we want no revolution, but we want a reform, we want men who will watch over the expenditure of the public money, and oppose such large grants of money as have lately been made to the household, money which was granted when the people were groaning under the weight of most grievous taxation, and suffering the most lamentable privations; how can it be that the Parliament will refuse supplies? How can it resist the will of a minister when it is not elected by the people? It is impossible to carry any plan of economy into execution whilst the House of Commons is constituted as it is.

A poll was not so easily avoided at Canterbury, where the division of seats between roughly equal pro- and anti-government interests had not yet been finally established. Four men were active during the weeks of canvassing. The friends of Edward Taylor and John Baker were confident of success, Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges was eagerly detailing his knowledge of politics, and Stephen Rumbold Lushington was hard at work among the non-residents in London.¹ By 7 October, when the election came on, Brydges had decided to fight at Maidstone, but his departure had in no way diminished popular excitement.² The independent Baker was prepared to rely on the fulfilment of his previous promises as the best guide to his principles, and Taylor seemed ready to employ the same strategy until cross-questioning by Samuel Kingsford revealed a disquieting ambiguity in his commitment to reform. Lushington, on the other hand, made no secret of his

1 Kentish Chronicle, 2 Oct. 1812 and Kentish Gazette, 6 Oct. 1812.
attachment to existing practices:

I am free to confess, after reading all that has been recently published upon this interesting subject, I have seen no speculation upon the theory of representation, which has promised to my judgement, any practical amendment of the Constitution, as now carried into execution...

When the polls closed, Lushington was found to have avenged his 1807 disappointment, and was accompanied to Westminster by the long-serving Baker.

II

The revival of reform between 1809 and 1812 was due as much to economic as to political factors, and thus the period may be regarded as in every sense the harbinger of the post-war crisis. The effects of Napoleon's Continental System, the retaliatory Orders in Council, and the collapse of the South American market, severely disrupted the country's manufacturing industry. The business community of Dover and Deal had complained bitterly in the winter of 1810-11 about the impositions of the Militia Act and the ravages of privateers in the Channel, while among the casualties of depression were the Tonbridge Bank in which William Woodgate was disastrously involved, and the Hills' ship-building enterprise at Sandwich. However in Kent as a whole it was the state of agriculture that held the key to prosperity, and it was an improvement in the rural economy after the summer of 1811, that temporarily checked the popular clamour. In August 1811, Lord Auckland at Beckenham found himself 'up to the eyes in wheat, oats, barley and clover'; and a year later, Lord Liverpool was writing happily to Earl Bathurst from Walmer:

You know that this is the greatest wheat county in England. I was very particular in my inquiries yesterday, and I find with the exception only of the very heavy lands near the Medway the most favourable accounts of all the crops of grain. Even in these lands it is now expected that the crops will be reasonably good.

4 H.C. Fortescue, x. 164: Auckland to Grenville, 12 Aug. 1811.
By 1814, however, the pendulum had swung again, and this time the boom of the war years was finally over. Thereafter, letters like that of December 1815 from 'A RUINED FARMER', informing friends and creditors of heavy losses, were all too common in the county press, and until the early 1820's, petitions bewailing the distress and imploring relief continued to flood into Parliament. On 22 February 1821, for example, the Commons heard complaints from owners and occupiers of land in Kent's western division and in the parishes of Faversham, Ashford and Horsem onboarden, as well as from the merchants and traders of Ashford and Wye. Kentish peers and M.P.'s were not slow to respond, and among them the younger Sir Edward Knatchbull won national acclaim as the spokesman of the Agriculturists. Public opinion, too, was active on a broad front. The air was alive with talk of protection and free trade, of low prices and unequal tithes, of burdensome poor rates and the state of the currency, while support was never lacking for reductions in taxation, rigid economy in expenditure, and reform of the representative system. But if the suggested causes of distress were many and diverse, they were united by an almost universal belief that Government bore the ultimate responsibility and possessed the most effective means of relief. Hence the reaction of ministers was crucial in determining the peace-time attitude of those propertied and rural classes whose loyalty had upheld Pitt in the 1790's.

Parliament's first measure to assist farmers and landowners was a bill to exclude foreign grain until domestic prices had reached 80/- a quarter. The Corn Laws rapidly became the rallying cry of the agricultural lobby, and it was not long before

1 Kentish Chronicle, 8 Dec. 1815.
2 Com. Jour., lxxvi. 100.
other producers were seeking the same safeguards. On 2 April 1816, Maidstone's fruit growers called on the Commons 'to impose such Duties on the importation of Apples, Pears, Filberts, and Walnuts, from France and the Low Countries, as may effectually afford protection...'; and in April 1819 it was recommended:

That all the productions of the soil of the United Kingdom may in future be protected from import of similar commodities duty free, in as full, ample and beneficial a manner, as the Merchants and Manufacturers of the United Kingdom are, by the Navigation Act, and other statutes of the realm, protected in their shipping and manufactures, from importation duty free.

Yet the Corn Laws never quite fulfilled the Agriculturists' over-sanguine hopes of a speedy return to the era of high prices. In February, 1815, owners and occupiers of lands in Kent were attributing their hardship to 'the defective state of the Corn Laws'; and even after amendments had been made, a similar petition of April 1816 could lament, 'the sudden and enormous fall in the price of corn, and every other sort of produce in agriculture'. The reality of the situation was, of course, that no amount of legislation could sustain the grossly inflated profits of the decade of war and scarcity, or diminish the effects of over-production on now uneconomic marginal land. Moreover, the population of Britain was no longer solely dependent on agriculture, and in the age of Luddism, Peterloo and the Cato Street Conspiracy, low food prices had their advantages as a social opiate. The merits of freer trade were keenly debated in the Kentish press, and found a staunch advocate in W. P. Honywood, but to the Agriculturists the consequences of peace and the growing band of ministerial converts to the principles of Smith and Ricardo were gall and wormwood. Any attempt by Liverpool or Wellington to moderate or change their policy was guaranteed to

1 Com. Jour., lxxi. 260 and lxxiv. 326.
stir up a hornet's nest of protest. In 1821 Sir Edward Knatchbull insisted that the nation's distress was due to foreign grain imports during the previous year\(^1\), and in 1822 a county petition urged the rejection of a scheme to release bonded corn when the home price had risen to just 65/- a quarter.\(^2\)

Equally controversial was the Government's policy towards the currency. After arousing initial discontent, Pitt's suspension of specie payments had won general approval within the agricultural interest. In 1812, for example, Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges argued on behalf of the fiduciary system:

> It has been characterised on the other side as delusive, dangerous, and hollow; not as wealth, but as the fallacious appearance of wealth. He would assert that if it was not wealth, it was at least the mother of wealth. To what other source could be attributed the vast and unexampled start which had been made by our population, our commerce, our manufactories, our shipping, our canals, and our buildings since the year 1785. These at least were solid wealth; and from what other than this calamitated, but creative source, could they spring?

He denied that inflation was the inevitable result, and claimed that since a metallic-based currency could not be vigorously maintained by the mines of South America, its reintroduction would bring economic stagnation.

Nevertheless it had been promised in 1797 that peace would be accompanied by the resumption of cash payments, while in the closing phase of the war, some worrying flaws had emerged. At the time of the Tonbridge Bank's collapse, Lord Auckland told Grenville that: 'The embarrassments of the paper currency are tending to some great crisis'\(^4\); and as late as 1819 correspondents in the Maidstone Gazette were still counting the cost of the disaster.\(^5\) An immediate decision was postponed in 1815, but at length a committee headed by Peel advised the imple-

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3 Parl. Deb., 1st Ser. xxiv. 298.
4 HMC. Fortescue, x. 321: Auckland to Grenville, 19 Dec. 1812.
5 Letters on the Subject of the Kentish Banks' Affairs, occasioned by a Lapse of Nearly Three Years without any Distribution of the Assets (Maidstone, 1819).
Agriculturists suffered badly in the predicted deflation. Having been induced by high returns to borrow capital, farmers found themselves burdened with debt repayments which falling prices and rents could not satisfy. Earl Stanhope felt that the 15% drop in the value of the 'circulating medium' should be compensated for by a comparable cut in taxation, and even in 1830 the evils of Peel's report were capable of firing the wrath of Kentishmen.

These two aspects of ministerial policy had the effect of straining relations between Government and its traditional adherents in the provinces. The apparent influence of commercial and industrial interests was bitterly resented, and there was a very real fear among the landed classes that economic distress, if not soon abated, might have disastrous social and political ramifications. The payment of tithes, for instance, had always been a source of rural disharmony, and its injustices became particularly unbearable at moments of acute hardship. The question of the 'heavy and vexatious burden' of tithes levied in kind was raised by Lance Tadman of Northfleet at a county meeting in March 1816, and freeholders were reminded of the severe checks imposed by the practice on agricultural improvements. Mr. Russell of Swanscombe also inveighed against the prevailing system, and made the revealing comparison between the farmer who paid £200 a year in tithes out of an income of £500, and his 'opulent neighbours' with ten times the capital return from 'manufactures and warehouses' who were liable for only a few shillings. Tadman wished for the certainty of fixed payments in lieu of tithes in order to finance the Church and to introduce a greater equality of sacrifice. However for other speakers, anti-

1 Hilton, op. cit., chap. 2.
clericalism was the principal spur. Based on a complex and obscure tangle of custom and precedent, the assessment and collection of tithes often brought quarrelling farmers and parsons into the law-courts, while for Mr. Russell and Dr. Waddington the spectacle of non-resident clergymen 'feeding in luxury on the very vitals of the country' argued irresistibly that reform was long overdue.

Like the agitation against tithes, concern for the plight of the landless poor had its social as well as its economic dimension. Earl Stanhope painted an ominous picture in May 1820:

In circumstances like the present, of extraordinary difficulty and danger, the consideration of this subject is perhaps of all others the most interesting and important, as we know that in almost every part of the country, the want of employment for the poor has produced severe distress; and as we know also, that the discontent of those who suffer from that distress has in some parts of the country assumed even the character of disaffection. ¹

The East Anglian riots of 1816 provided an awful warning of what might be expected elsewhere, and Stanhope was anxious to eradicate the potential cause of a future conflagration rather than simply to equip himself with 'fire-engines and buckets'. ²

Hobsbawm and Rudé have described in detail the process by which the close relationship between farmer and labourer began to disintegrate during the war years, and was replaced by a rural poverty-trap from which it was seldom possible to escape. ³ Contemporaries, such as Stanhope, analysed the problem somewhat differently, and preferred to confine their attention to the inadequacies of the financial system and Government's neglect of the agricultural sector. These ideas were far more akin to the views current among Agriculturists, while the desire to achieve permanent employment and an independent subsistence exhibited all the hall-marks of a wistful tory paternalism. Undoubtedly the most

¹ Parl. Deb., New Ser. i. 395.
² Parl. Deb., New Ser. i. 395-6.
popular remedy in the 1820's was the division of waste lands into plots capable of being cultivated by a single family. To Earl Stanhope, the adoption of this scheme would quickly stem the flow of paupers to the workhouse, and in the longer term he hoped the re-establishment of 'the class of small yeomen' might discourage wanton marriages and thereby check the growth of the rural population. The problem of poverty had, however, developed far beyond the resources of private philanthropy. Commentators like Stanhope recognised that the use of Crown land and public money was essential to the success of his projects, but despite lengthy and detailed appeals from a group of dedicated individuals, Government could not be persuaded to respond.  

The worst effects of ministerial delay and inaction were felt in 1830 when Captain Swing went abroad to take vengeance on an unfeeling society. In the meantime, however, the propertied classes were left to maintain the poor as best they could. The figures indicate the magnitude of their responsibility. In 1815, for instance, 11.25% of Kent's population was being relieved from the poor rates. By 1823, 8, 263 out of the 21,719 inhabitants of sixteen Wealden parishes were paupers, and in 1826 six of these communities had more than sixty entirely unemployed persons. Kent never had been a major Speenhamland county, and it has recently been shown that in the south-east of England the cost of poor relief actually fell during the 1820's. Nevertheless, the dramatic increase in the level of rates from £77,895 in 1776 to £213,989 in 1803 and to its peak of £399,201 in 1817-18 represented a very substantial drain on the incomes of Kentish gentlemen.

2 Hobsbawm and Rudé, op. cit., p. 53.
III

Alongside the agitation of the Agriculturists, was a nation-wide preoccupation with the urgent necessity of strict economy in the machinery and expenditure of the state. Writing in the Kentish Chronicle in April 1821, for example, 'AGRICOLA' advised his neighbours to look beyond the unfruitful pursuit of increased protection to what he conceived to be the root cause of their distress.

...would it not be sounder policy in us, my friends, to turn our thoughts to the reduction of the immense and insupportable expenses that have risen by degrees in long and tedious war and a destructive paper currency? To unite and act for such a purpose would do an infinite good, by securing to us, as farmers, a protection that high prices could never yield.²

The works of Halévy, Cookson and Mitchell bear witness to the importance attached by public opinion and politicians of all descriptions in the post-war period to the assault on waste and extravagance³, while it is clear that the same considerations weighed heavily with Kentishmen when selecting their M.P.s or determining the merits of a new county gaol.⁴

Debates on military estimates and Household expenses consumed many hours of parliamentary business after 1815, but among the most celebrated and best publicised episodes was that surrounding the fate of the property tax.⁵ The abolition of Pitt's levy formed the subject of a number of whig-inspired meetings held during the latter months of 1814. The Kentish Chronicle devoted much space to events in London and Westminster⁶, and on

¹ Melling (ed.), Kentish Sources IV: The Poor (Kent County Council, 1964), p. 147.
² Kentish Chronicle., 24 Aug. 1821.
⁴ Parl. Deb., 1st Ser. xxv. 197-8.
⁶ Westminster meeting reported in Kentish Chronicle, 27 Feb. 1815.
15 February 1815 a petition for repeal was presented on behalf of the inhabitants of Rochester. Ministers acquiesced readily enough, and only reimposed the tax when news arrived of Napoleon's escape from Elba. However the issue's appeal to both the Englishman's fear of standing armies and executive encroachment and his financial self-interest, was well calculated to arouse popular feeling, and by the beginning of 1816 a second wave of protest was gathering momentum in the provinces. At Rochester's Guildhall James Hulkes and Charles Larkin secured the unanimous acceptance of a petition which declared the tax to be 'so unconstitutional in its principle, so oppressive in its execution, and so unequal in its effects'; and a few days later, W. P. Honywood told the freeholders that: 'Ministers have economy in their mouths, but extravagance in their hearts'. Thomas Rider, Sir William Geary and the Earl of Thanet all spoke against the continuance of the tax, and stressed the need to put an axe to the towering tree of corruption. The county petition spoke of the distress which existed in Kent, and of 'the great weight of Taxes, public and parochial' which had been borne with resolution and loyalty throughout the war. Now that victory had been gained, however, it was time to remove those impositions and institute 'the most rigid system of retrenchment and economy in the Civil List as well as in every other department of state'.

Reinvigorated by many similar demonstrations of public opinion, the parliamentary battle was waged with spirit and enterprise, and on 18 March the proposal to retain the tax was defeated by 238 votes to 201. Of the nine Kentish M.P.s who participated, Calcraft and Marryat divided in the majority, while Lushington, Jackson, White, Yorke, Brydges, Moorson and Osborn

1 Com. Jour., lxx. 34.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 8 Mar. 1816.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 15 Mar. 1816.
supported the Government. The triumph emphasised the potential strength of a well organised extra-parliamentary movement, and established economy as the leading issue of the day. However the failure of Opposition to repeat its success in the next years led to renewed speculation about the extent of royal and ministerial influence. Charles Larkin was thus not alone in his belief that '...it was much to be feared that no retrenchment would be affected till there was radical reform in Parliament'.

By the beginning of 1817, the effects of a bad harvest and the Government's uncompromising reaction to the Spa Fields riots, had intensified pressure for change, and for some months petitioning became almost endemic. John Calcraft spoke in favour of a batch of petitions which deplored the suspension of Habeas Corpus, and to Sir William Geary the demand for reform was widespread. Geary was also entrusted with the presentation of another Kent petition, which among other things recommended that economy, further tax cuts, the limitation of sinecures and reform of 'the notoriously inadequate Representation of the People' were essential in a nation 'fast approaching to ruin'. Whether or not the meeting had voiced the sentiments of the entire county was a matter on which Calcraft, Ponsonby and other leading Whigs violently disagreed with Sir Edward Knatchbull. The baronet alleged that many men of substance signed the requisition merely out of a sense of duty, and was not prepared to acknowledge the validity of a petition to which only the High Sheriff had affixed his name. But if talk of political innovation still terrified a conservative squirearchy, the regularity with which candidates and electors returned to the question of reform and retrenchment

1 Parl. Deb., 1st Ser. xxxiii. 451-5.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 15 Mar. 1816.
3 Parl. Deb., 1st Ser. xxxv. 784 and 90-1.
during the 1818 general election does suggest that public opinion had finally discarded its anti-Jacobin reserve.

Of Kent's three uncontested constituencies in 1818, only Sandwich could boast a popular interest. As in 1812, the independent candidate was Joseph Marryat, and it was squarely on the basis of his record in the old parliament that he renewed his appeal.

I voted for the repeal of the Property Tax, and for various reductions in our public establishments. I opposed the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act; being of opinion that the other bills passed by Parliament, had armed the Executive Government with sufficient powers, without resorting to a measure so repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution. I have supported every motion to promote the Repeal of the War Duty on Leather; considering that tax not only as oppressive upon the labouring classes of the community, but as injurious to the manufacturers, and therefore prejudicial, in a peculiar way, to the prosperity of the Town and Port of Sandwich.

Marryat made much of his willingness to listen to the views of his constituents, and it was with similar professions that Sir George Warrender filled his address. No opposition was forthcoming, although the choice of an Admiralty official from the Canningite wing of administration does imply that great care was being taken to nurse the ministerial interest in the borough.

Another experienced parliamentarian and former Canningite was sent down to contest Dover. During twenty-five years in the House, Edward Bootle Wilbraham had steadfastly inclined to those principles on which our excellent Constitution in Church and State is founded, and those measures which appeared to me best calculated to uphold and maintain it. With these credentials, and some local connections, Wilbraham was returned top of the poll, but it was by no means so certain that the long-serving Sir John Jackson would enjoy as easy a passage. Frequently to be discovered in the government lobby, Jackson was no longer the

1 Kentish Chronicle, 2 May 1818.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 12 June 1818.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 12 June 1818.
4 Addresses in ibid.
ideal representative of the borough's popular party, and an attempt was made to entice John Hinet Fector into the arena. However this scion of two respected Dover families felt unable to undertake the arduous duties of an M.P., and in his absence, R. B. Robson could muster only 256 votes against Jackson's 505. Perhaps the freemen had not yet recaptured that liberating spirit of 1774, although from the emphasis given to local matters in his return of thanks, it is evident that in the midst of his victory Sir John recognised that his enemies were cast down but not destroyed.

Since 1812 the electors of Rochester had unmistakably recorded their disapproval of government policy in a dispute which united the freedom of election with hatred of placemen. Trouble began in May 1816 when Sir T. B. Thompson was appointed Treasurer of Greenwich Hospital and it was announced that since the post was held on the same basis as a commission in the navy no by-election would be required. The inhabitants of Rochester, on the other hand, argued that the office was in fact a place of profit, and were upheld in their assertion by the House of Commons. When a new writ was issued, Thompson was not unexpectedly defeated by James Barnett, and only obtained a second chance to make good his seat when the latter's two-vote majority was declared void on the grounds of bribery and the premature close of the poll. However as the extent of Barnett's support became apparent, Thompson decided to withdraw, leaving anti-ministerialists in an unaccustomed tenure of both the city's seats.

This freak balance of power could not be expected to outlive the dissolution, and the question thus arose as to which of the sitting Members would step aside. Galcraft believed that his colleague was bound to retire, and must have been dismayed

1 Kentish Chronicle, 16 June 1818.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 26 June 1818.
3 Com. Jour., lxxi. 429.
4 Com. Jour., lxxi. 525-6 and lxxii. 74 and 111.
when a Common Hall of 5 May 1818 denounced such a demand as 'a dereliction of principle, and an insult to the Freemen at large'.

Rivalry between the two men had been fierce since 1807, and on the present occasion the purely independent Barnett romped home ahead of the Canningite, Lord Binning, and compelled Galcraft to have himself elected at Wareham.

The 1818 election marked a new departure in the politics of Maidstone. The national convulsions of recent years had shown the freemen to be as divided as ever, but had at least primed the electorate for a change of men and ideas. In 1816, Sir S. E. Brydges had stirred the wrath of Brougham and a section of his constituents when he claimed in the Commons that the borough shared his approval of the property tax, while in 1817 the local ministerialists proclaimed their continued loyalty in an address congratulating the Prince Regent on his escape from an assassination plot. Neither Simson nor Brydges sought re-election, perhaps realising that expense and popular dissatisfaction with past votes would assuredly overwhelm them, and were replaced by the more liberal pairing of George Longman and Abraham W. Robarts.

Throughout the next decade, Robarts, a London banker, took on the role vacated by Clement Taylor in 1796, and was instrumental in channelling Maidstone opinion along an increasingly progressive course.

A similarly heightened sensitivity to current affairs may be detected at Canterbury, where on 9 June the Kentish Chronicle expressed 'a most fervent hope and expectation' that 'the Friends of Freedom and Independence will ultimately triumph, and that our city will be once more returned to that consequence which it formerly held in the estimation of those who are the real friends to a free and full representation of the People in Parliament.'

1 Kentish Chronicle, 19 May 1818.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 30 June 1818; and Jom. Jour., lxxiv. 60 and 228. for Torrens' unsuccessful petition.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 6 and 21 Mar. 1817.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 8 June 1818.
Of the sitting Members, the most vulnerable to popular discontent was John Baker, who in early June was moved to seek self-preservation in some sort of alliance with S. R. Lushington. A declaration allegedly made by Baker to James Davey and William Lepine may shed further light on his motives:

You drive me to join Mr. Lushington, I cannot and will not join Lord Clifton as I conceive Mr. Taylor and John Cooper brought him in to oppose me, and not Mr. Lushington, and I will join with Mr. Lushington to oppose Lord Clifton with all my might.

The contest, which began on 16 June, was clearly destined to be a protracted and acrimonious one, comprehending both personal and political antagonisms.2

When proposing Lushington, Deane John Parker ranged widely over the events of the previous six years, eulogising the efforts of his Majesty's counsellors, and recalling 'the happy termination of the late glorious war'. The candidate himself then took up the theme. In 1812, he reminded the freemen, 'England was in a situation of the most alarming nature, engaged in a bloody war abroad, and threatened with a faction of discontented people at home'. 'But thanks to the wisdom of its legislature,' he continued, '...the war is happily succeeded by an honorable (sic) peace, and England is now in a state of happiness and tranquillity'. Lushington was also anxious to defend his own conduct. On his acceptance of office, he asserted:

It is an erroneous idea of some people, that a member holding an emolument under Government is not at liberty to exercise his free discretion; I can assure you on my honor (sic) that I have in every instance acted strongly from principle, and proud am I to boast that my conduct has always been marked with strict uniformity.

And as to his share in wrecking a treating bill, he explained:

For my part I am a strenuous supporter of the Elective Franchise; it is, I conceive, a sight highly calculated to impress the mind with the value of British liberty, to see the colours waving and the cockades flying in all directions; and I think myself justified in asserting, that I never stood for any reasonable expense.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 2 and 9 June 1818.
He did not regard expensive contests as furthering the designs of ministers, and concluded by hoping that he had ever acted with 'a degree of liberality and spirit'.

To Sampson Kingsford, John Baker had the priceless advantage of being a native of Canterbury, always on hand to listen to complaints, and in the habit of spending the whole of his income in the city. He was not the man 'to enrich himself or his family with a shilling of the public money'; and in the future would at all times exercise an unfettered judgement. Mr. W. Frend described Lushington's place as 'an effectual bar' to an adequate representation, and Alderman Cooper was confident that Lord Clifton's 'princely fortune' would place him above temptation. On the 'great question of Parliamentary Reform', Clifton admitted that 'he had not made up his mind, but he considered some reform necessary and was favourable to the measure as far as it could be carried into effect with safety to the state'. However beyond this, and a conviction that ministers were not justified in retaining so large a standing army in peace-time, his lordship was not disposed to commit himself.

When the polls finally closed, Lushington and Clifton were well ahead of Baker. The Earl of Darnley's heir readily acknowledged the assistance he had received from the city's Independent Club, and it was a member of this body who sought to dampen Lushington's boast of a 'triumphant majority', by reminding the ministerialist that while he had benefited from Baker's second votes, his noble opponent had fought alone and attracted the most plumpers. But the central lesson of 1818 was that a portion of the freemen were tired of the unadventurous independence of John Baker and had thus plumped for a more energetic agitation of their interests.

When compared with the titanic struggles of 1790, 1796 and

1 Kentish Chronicle, 26 and 30 June 1818.
1802, the Kent county election of 1818 was a very modest affair. Sir Edward Knatchbull promised only to labour unceasingly in the service of his brother freeholders, while Sir William Geary announced:

I hesitate not a moment in determining once more, to come forward in defence of your independence. I cannot but recollect the victories I have gained for that principle in the County or Kent, and the spirit which you have shewn(sic) in obtaining them. I look forward with a full reliance in your exertions to crown our cause in 1818 with the same triumph which has attended it in other contests, when the whole strength of the County has been polled.

New men were also in the field. William Philip Honywood was eager to associate himself with the views and achievements of his late uncle and father, and Sir John Courtenay Honywood, though well-inclined to administration, felt it incumbent upon him to pledge:

Sensible how heavily the burdens, occasioned by a long state of warfare, still press upon all classes, it would at all times afford me the sincerest satisfaction to support those plans which might appear eligible towards effecting a reduction of them, and also to oppose any that militated against the accomplishment of so desirable an object by a disregard to proper economy in the public expenditure.

Sir John eventually retired in order to contest Hythe, and after a poll his namesake was returned along with Knatchbull.

Sir William Geary was perhaps the most prestigious casualty of the striking alteration in the mood of the nation since 1812. At Hythe, where Matthew White made way for John Bladen Taylor to become the new partner of Sir John Perring², intense political in-fighting continued to preclude coherent debate, but at Rochester, Dover, Maidstone, Canterbury and in the county, the old guard of independents was passing away before the onslaught of a younger and more partisan generation. Parliamentary reform still hovered in the wings, awaiting a call that had not yet come. Nevertheless, in economy and retrenchment, opposition groups had discovered an electoral issue of universal appeal.

1 Addresses in Kentish Chronicle, 9 June 1818.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 9, 12 and 16 June 1818.
For the Whigs and their allies, the twelve months which followed the 1818 election proved something of an anti-climax. Government made every effort to economise, and reformers could offer nothing more ambitious than Russell's Grampound Bill. Hence, the reports of blood-letting at Manchester's St. Peter's Fields, and Sidmouth's injudicious congratulation of the magistrates, came as a welcome focal-point for renewed petitioning and aroused fresh fears for English liberty.

The Kentish Chronicle published letters from Manchester, and John Calcraft was active mobilising county opinion behind the Whigs. His hand may probably also be discerned in the summoning of a Common Hall in Rochester during early October to consider what Charles Larkin termed 'the cause of justice and humanity'. The meeting was not, Larkin told the freemen, 'one of a political nature, it was not one to discuss the necessity of a reform in Parliament, nor in what manner the Constitution was to be mended, but whether they were to have a Constitution at all'. The crowd had behaved in an orderly manner on 16 August, and had assembled for the sole purpose of exercising the subject's right to petition for the relief of grievances. Orator Hunt had appealed for harmony, and Larkin was convinced that only the provocative intervention of the yeomanry had excited tumult. The freemen of Rochester agreed, and voted an address to the Prince Regent requesting an investigation and the punishment of the 'murderers'.

The gentry and freeholders were more reluctant to pass judgement, in spite of the passionate eloquence of 'DEPTFORDIUS'.

My Brethren of Kent - You are individually and collectively interested; the first public question on which you may meet to deliberate, may be decided by a misdirected soldiery among you with sharpened sabres. Surely you will not allow the fertile and beautiful County of Kent to sink in political importance to the level of a rotten borough. Justice, humanity and self-interest summon you to act.

But no special meeting seems to have been requisitioned, and the county by-election in November, in which the young Sir Edward Knatchbull replaced his lately deceased father, witnessed no manifestation of popular clamour.¹

Government's response to the crisis was swift and harsh. On the one hand, the Six Acts were applauded as indispensable to the preservation of property, and on the other, they gave substance to 'JASPER'S' axiom of 1816 that: 'All governments, independent even of the intentions of those who administer them, have a tendency to despotism'.² W. P. Honywood made no secret of his abhorrence during the committee stage of the Seditious Meetings Bill on 13 December 1819. He rejected as 'a libel on the people of England', the suggestion that 'they were disloyal or disaffected to the constitution'; and went on:

That they were disaffected he would admit; but to whom were they disaffected? Not to their king; not to their country; but to his Majesty's ministers. If that was a crime, he was also guilty; for he was equally disaffected to them.³

Peterloo and the repressive legislation appeared the logical extension of ministerial policy in 1809-11 and 1816-17, and the evident impotence of Parliament, after all that had been said on the hustings, led Honywood to confess that:

...although I think the plans broached on Parliamentary Reform, at the different meetings in the country, are wild and impracticable, yet, after the proceedings which occurred in Parliament this year, when we saw a new Parliament agree three millions of unnecessary taxes, which fall almost exclusively on the impoverished and starving population - when we witnessed a Royal Grant of 10,000 per annum, and a determination to crush the rising Independence of South America, I say, with these demonstrations of a new Parliament, the people were justified in raising their voice for a Reform in the Commons House of Parliament, and I trust they will persevere in a firm and constitutional manner until they have attained that great object.

This represented a shift of emphasis in political thinking of

1 Report in Kentish Chronicle, 19 Nov. 1819.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 19 Jan. 1816.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 8 Oct. 1819.
immense long-term significance, which had been hinted at in 1816 but not developed in 1818.

Nevertheless, Lord Liverpool was sufficiently sure of the continued loyalty of the propertied classes, to call another general election soon after the death of the old King on 29 January 1820. Candidates and electors were naturally inhibited by the threat of rebellion in the industrial regions, and there prevailed throughout a general desire not to inflame the passions of the lower orders by rash talk or excessive treating. There was, of course, a contest at Maidstone, but Robarts and the corporation's man, John Wells, proved too strong for Richard Sharp.¹ The status quo was also maintained at Rochester. Lord Binning again held the ministerial seat, while James Barnett was replaced by Ralph Bernal, who was to win his spurs during the next decade as a fervent disciple of Joseph Hume in the war on waste.

Both Sandwich's sitting Members believed they had fulfilled their former undertakings², and after completing his canvass Sir George Warrender was pleased to report that: 'I find universally pervading our numerous body, constituents of affectionate loyalty to the Throne, and ardent attachment to the ancient political institutions and liberties of your Country'.³ No opposition was offered, even though there was a feeling that Warrender's duties at the Admiralty had caused him to neglect his local responsibilities. A similar tranquillity, or was it sheer exhaustion, settled upon the freemen of Hythe. White and Perring did come forward during February, only to retire before 8 March, and thereby permit Stewart Harjoribanks and the wealthy banker, Samuel Jones Lloyd, to carry off the spoils unmolested.⁴

¹ Kentish Chronicle, 22 Feb. and 10 and 14 Mar. 1820. For unavailing petitions, see Com. Jour., lxxv. 187 and 188.
² Kentish Chronicle, 22 Feb. 1820.
³ Kentish Chronicle, 3 May 1820.
But if the underlying trend in the Kentish constituencies was one of harmony and circumspection, the elections at Dover, Canterbury and in the county did at least throw up matters of lasting interest. In 1823 Cobbett wrote in *Rural Rides*:

> Butterworth, the bookseller in Fleet Street; he who is a sort of metropolitan of the Methodists, is one of the Members for Dover. The other is Wilbraham, or Bootle, or Bostle Wilbraham, or some such name, that is, a Lancashire magistrate. So Dover is prettily set up.

In 1820, the prejudices of the great peripatetic radical were evidently foreign to the borough's electorate. The principal object of the freemen's displeasure was Sir John Jackson, whose professions of 'zealous care for your ancient Rights and Privileges, and a firm determination to support the British Glorious Constitution', had finally ceased to ring true. A gathering at Canterbury's Fountain Inn on 15 February sounded the death knell of his association with Dover. It was resolved:

> That it is the Duty of every Member of the House of Commons to support the King and the Constitution, to resist every encroachment upon the prerogatives of the Crown, and upon those Liberties secured to the People by Magna Carta, the Habeas Corpus Act, and the Bill of Rights.

> That it is the opinion of this Meeting, that the Freemen of Dover have not been freely, fully, or constitutionally represented.

> That we will use our utmost endeavours to ensure the Election of a Representative, who is unbiased by party prejudice, and whose main object in obtaining a seat in Parliament is to promote the best Interests of his Constituents, and of his Country.

> That Joseph Butterworth esq., from his tried and established Principles, has proved himself to be equally the Constitutional Supporter of the Dignity of the Crown, and the Rights of the People, and is therefore a fit and proper man to represent this Town in the next Parliament.

Butterworth acknowledged the truth of all that had been said, and it was not long before Jackson let it be known that a slow recovery from illness would prevent him standing after all. The

3 *Ibid*.
4 *Kentish Chronicle*, 22 and 29 Feb. 1820.
independent interest had thus clearly restated its power of nomination.

Shortly before polling day, Robert Foote addressed the 'UNBOUGHT' freemen of Canterbury in the following terms:

With one of your Representatives, I am far from coinciding in many material articles of public opinion. I am, however, in the habit of a friendly intercourse with him — but what private Income — what individual Independence can stand in competition with a TREASURY PURSE? What public principles (however just) can face the array of contractors and jobbers — of actual — and of would be placemen? — such a struggle is nearly hopeless — such a struggle I DECLINED.

And concluded:

It is, I confess, with infinite regret, that I perceive this most ancient and respectable city, becoming a prey to ministerial thraldom, and registered in the list of Treasury seats, I regret it to my soul — and I regret it the more, because under present circumstances I feel unable to assist with efficacy and success, a cause which is so very near my heart.

Lord Clifton, on the other hand, welcomed the impending 'Trial of Political Conduct', since he was now a tried man and could be judged on achievements rather than mere promises. 'I have turned my most serious attention to prevent any increase upon the burthens of the people', he told the electors on 7 March, and then went on to explain his activities in the last session:

I certainly was alive to the liberty and to the peace of my country, I looked with a jealous eye to what was passing on the one hand, and on the other to the proceedings of his Majesty's Ministers. I had determined to give Ministers my support if the Bills they proposed were calculated to allay the trouble that had taken place, but when I saw the nature of those Bills, the obnoxious clauses which they contained, I was unable to render them that support, but turned my back upon them and voted against them.

Lushington, too, was preoccupied with Sidmouth’s controversial package, although to him it contained 'measures calculated for the country's good, and intended to stop the progress of the

1 See letters in Kentish Chronicle, 16 Mar. 1820.  
2 Kentish Chronicle, 14 and 29 Feb. 1820.  
3 Report in Kentish Chronicle, 10 Mar. 1820.
spirit of sedition'. Despite his public statement, Foote was put in nomination, and on this account polling dragged on into a third day. However his meagre haul of just eighty-six votes is a striking indication of the extent to which popular antipathy towards corruption had been temporarily over-shadowed.

Peterloo and its aftermath also exercised a profound fascination over the minds of the freeholders, and for some weeks seemed likely to shatter the peace of the county. The attitude of the Members was the all-important factor. Knatchbull wrote in his address:

The short period of my service in Parliament, has been marked by circumstances of a peculiar character. I have, from a consideration of their necessity, supported such measures as the perilous state of the country required, EXPERIENCE and the EVIDENCE OF FACTS will enable you to decide how far I have acted consistently with your interests and my own duty.

However, Honywood's interpretation of 'that love of liberty which has signalised our county in the annals of history', had led him in rather different paths:

You have seen me oppose a system of Laws, passed in a moment of panic, artfully created; Laws, which exhibiting no features of the British Constitution, bear a strong resemblance to the despotism of foreign Governments. They were conceived in haste, and adopted with precipitation, but must lead like all beginnings of evil, once neglected or connived at, to mischief no less permanent than extensive.

The response to Honywood's parliamentary conduct, and his pledge '...strenuously to persevere in repelling the open strides of arbitrary power, and the no less dangerous, though more latent, encroachment of corruption', reveals that misgivings ran deep among the Kentish gentry. A meeting at the Fountain Inn, Canterbury, on 11 March published a series of resolutions highly critical of Honywood on grounds of his non-residence in Kent, his adherence to systematic opposition, and his 'insult' to the 'common sense' of the freeholders embodied in recent

1 Kentish Chronicle, 14 Mar. and 29 Feb. 1820.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 12 Feb. 1820.
votes and comments.\textsuperscript{1} Thus, while Knatchbull was entitled to 
'the entire approbation, and warmest thanks of the County'; the 
re-election of the erring member would 'reflect discredit on the 
Freeholders', and should be forestalled by the selection of an 
alternative candidate from the western division.

Additional weight and potency was given to these deliber­
ations by the discovery of the Cato Street Conspiracy. Honywood 
certainly recognised his vulnerability, and composed a revised 
address in which he roundly condemned 'a plot, so foul and mur­
derous, as scarcely to find in our language an epithet adequate 
to its enormous atrocity'. He affirmed his readiness to forward 
those measures 'to trace and rescind all the ramifications (if 
any exist) of this most detestable confederacy'; but could not 
resist the observation that the design had come to light more 
because of the 'compunction of accomplices' than the operation 
of Sidmouth's legislation.\textsuperscript{2}

The county assembled at Maidstone on 18 March, amid scenes 
reminiscent of Ivanhoe's tournament at Ashby de la Zouch.\textsuperscript{3} A 
vast and colourfully adorned crowd thronged the heath, and every 
eye strained for a glimpse of the expected third man. However 
he had not arrived when T. L. Hodges stepped up to nominate 
Honywood, or when Thomas Rider spoke scathingly of 'those dia­
bolic bills, which tended to deprive Englishmen of their rights 
and privileges'. Nor had his mysterious figure arisen in the 
west as a volley of hisses greeted the proposal of Sir Edward 
Knatchbull. He was clearly not coming at all, and perhaps 
cheered by his reception, Honywood seized the initiative. Though 
not a resident of Kent, he pledged eternal fidelity to the county 
and strove to illustrate his independence by recalling his vote 
on behalf of the Cheap Publications Bill. Knatchbull, for his

\textsuperscript{1} Kentish Chronicle, 14 Mar. 1820.
\textsuperscript{2} Kentish Chronicle, 14 Mar. 1820.
\textsuperscript{3} Report in Kentish Chronicle, 21 Mar. 1820.
part, was content to reiterate his well-known views, and cited the evidence of the Lancashire magistrates and the 'horrid plot' by way of justification. Other issues were not altogether forgotten. Both men had something to say on the catholic question, and the freeholders heard speeches in praise of economy, tax cuts and the policies of the 'agricultural interest'. The Kentish Chronicle believed the show of hands had been four to one in favour of Honywood, and the obvious collapse of the tory reaction inspired both relief and ridicule. William Deedes and Mr. Baldock were the butt of many verses and lampoons, and John Calcraft gloated publicly at their evident discomfiture.

V

Although the 'Manchester Massacres' and the ensuing crisis had diverted public opinion from a widespread agitation of economy and parliamentary reform at the hustings, the twelve months which followed the 1820 election restored those issues to national prominence. This was possible, partly because trade and agriculture had not yet fully recovered, and partly because of Queen Caroline.¹

There can scarcely have been a moment in British history when the monarchy came under such detailed and protracted scrutiny as in 1820, and there can have been few occasions when it was worse fitted to meet the public gaze. No election meeting passed without some tribute to the career and virtues of the late King, and the nation's disposition to remember him as the paternal figurehead of the Napoleonic era rather than as the devoted pupil of Lord Bute, only heightened the contrast with his wayward son. George IV's every move was watched and chronicled. His rages, his sulks, his illnesses, his extravagance and his mistresses monopolised the gossip of fashionable society and

¹ See account in Cookson, op. cit., chap. 5; and R. Fulford, The Trial of Queen Caroline (London, 1967), passim.
spiced the pages of the opposition press. Ministers and the entire Establishment were bespattered by the reflected odium of this royal burlesque, and then found themselves cast head-over-ears into the mire by the popular espousal of the would-be Queen. In vice and licentiousness Caroline rivalled even her estranged spouse, but she was a fresh personality in a rather stale political world, and there were those who saw in her cause a precious stepping-stone to power. On 12 February 1820 the Kentish Chronicle was anticipating the return of the prodigal princess, and during June her landing at Dover and progress through Kent was avidly recounted. Readers of Kentish newspapers were well acquainted with Alderman Wood and the other metropolitan radicals with whom Caroline consorted, while the publicity given to her trial can have left few electors in ignorance of her claims and supposed injuries.

The Earl of Darnley, who together with the Earl of Romney and Earl Stanhope had voted for the Queen in the Lords Secret Committee, remarked in the House on 4 July that in his opinion 'nothing but mischief' would arise from its report, and felt it slightly curious that Caroline should suddenly be excluded from the prayer book after having been remembered by congregations for so long as Princess of Wales. But the King’s anger knew no bounds, and compelled a reluctant Cabinet to embark a Bill of Pains and Penalties on its tedious and sordid passage. Out-of-doors public opinion roared its disapproval. Their lordships' deliberations were reviled in violent and often scurrilous articles, while other observers preferred petitioning as the vehicle for their protests. Some inhabitants of Maidstone were moved to address the Queen in the following terms:

1 Kentish Chronicle, 12 Feb. and 9 June 1820.
2 Parl. Deb., New Ser. ii. 49.
But though the most deadly blows have been aimed at your Majesty's reputation and life; though your Majesty's steps have been followed by spies who have not scrupled to resort to the most odious and detestable measures; though it has been attempted to prejudice the minds of the people by the circulation of the basest and most disgusting calumnies, and finally to enact against you a Bill of Pains and Penalties, yet we rejoice in confident anticipation of your Majesty's signal and glorious triumphs.

Other Kentish towns acted quickly to acquaint Parliament with local dissatisfaction, and at the same time resurrected grievances of a more lasting character. On 26 January 1821, for example, W. P. Honywood presented a petition from the freeholders of Margate calling for the dismissal of ministers and the restoration of the Queen to all her rights. Having done so, Honywood warned the Commons 'that if the petitions were treated with neglect, the people would be confirmed in an opinion which they had long entertained, namely, that the House did not speak the sense, or represent the wishes of the country'. On the same day, Ralph Bernal delivered a similar petition from Rochester with 2,500 signatures, and on 12 February Dover signified its concurrence. Bernal claimed not to be motivated by party aims, but by a conviction that the nation was being degraded in the eyes of the world, and hence felt no compunction in declaring it was 'high time that a change should be effected'.

However, the Queen's appeal was not universal in Kent. When a group of Greenwich and Blackheath householders met on 25 January 1821 to draw up a petition, a letter deploring their intention had already been circulated in the neighbourhood, and the meeting itself was marred by frequent disputes. As the Kentish Chronicle put it: 'for 10 minutes the din of war prevailed'; and although the 'enemies' of the Queen were finally ejected, a magistrate was conveniently on hand to read the Riot Act and arrest twenty of the

1 Kentish Chronicle, 24 Oct. 1820.
3 Com. Jour., lxxvi. 12-13 and 63.
combatants. The High Sheriff refused to convene a county meeting, and if Sir Edward Knatchbull is to be believed, his misgivings were widely shared by the magistracy. Knatchbull and many others had boycotted a make-shift meeting at Maidstone's Town Hall, and were confirmed in their suspicion that the voting of a petition was merely the pretext for the launching of the familiar radical programme.

Public interest in the fate of Queen Caroline evaporated rapidly in the spring and summer of 1821, but the revival of concern about the administrative machine was sustained by the continued depression of the agrarian economy. On 14 June 1822 the Commons thus received a petition from Kent stating:

That the Freeholders and Inhabitants of the said county have waited with the utmost anxiety to see what measures of relief would be proposed by the House, in consequence of the representations of distress which have been from time to time urged by them, in common with many others from different counties...

And praying:

That the House will resolve forthwith to enter upon the great work of Reform in the Representation; and further, that they will be pleased to make a just reduction of the Interest of the National Debt.

Knatchbull described the last clause as 'the lamest rider a Whig house ever had to carry'; and attributed its acceptance to Cobbett's influence. However Lord John Russell was probably nearer the mark when he argued:

The truth was, and it was a melancholy truth, that persons not of the lowest orders, nor maliciously inclined, but possessing considerable property in the county, found themselves in a state of approaching ruin, and in the wreck of their fortunes, upon hearing any proposition which bore the appearance of relief, they caught at it, as drowning men catch at straws, without any intention of injuring the government on the constitution of the country.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 30 Jan. 1821.
3 Lords Jour., liv. 12.
Ever since 1809, Kentishmen had laboured tirelessly to impress ministers with the urgent need to ameliorate their economic plight, and, as Russell was not slow to appreciate, the repeated failure of every moderate and reasonable demand had by 1822 led many to contemplate a more radical solution. Only an improvement in trade during the mid-1820's and the nation's pre-occupation with other issues postponed the final reckoning, but when distress returned in 1829, Wellington found that men had not forgotten the lessons so painfully learned in the decades of war and peace.
By 1823 the popular demand for economy and reform had considerably abated. The compelling spur of acute post-war industrial and agrarian distress had been blunted by a welcome up-turn in trade, and there was, moreover, a new and vital issue vying for the attention of public opinion. The catholic question derived part of its monopolising appeal from the reservoirs of hatred and suspicion stored up in the chilling and vividly-remembered tales of Cranmer and Fox's Martyrs, of the Armada and Guy Fawkes, and of Judge Jeffreys, the Bloody Assize and the Popish Plot. However, the debate over Emancipation was able to unite in protest men from all ranks of society, not merely because it touched those prejudices which fed and fostered among the embroidered and sensationalised myths of by-gone centuries, but because it still seemed relevant to daily politics. The most elderly of Kent's electors might perhaps recall stories of the Young Pretender and the march on Derby; the Gordon Riots had convulsed London in 1780; and as recently as 1807, anti-catholicism had materially influenced the personnel of administration and the course of a general election. During the 1820's, Emancipation was inextricably bound up with the tense and potentially explosive situation in Ireland, and represented the principal bone of contention between the more progressive elements in British political life, and those entrenched interests whose sole ambition it was to preserve inviolate the 'Protestant Constitution in Church and State'. The issue excited unprecedented demonstrations of extra-parliamentary feeling on both sides, and in the context of the present study, the momentous decision of 1829 was crucial in achieving a re-alignment of opinion on the eve of the Reform Bill crisis.

Despite the occasional fears of the Kentish Chronicle, the catholic question did not surface in the elections of 1812 or 1818,
and even in 1820 it was of only secondary importance in the county deliberations. Sir Edward Knatchbull, like his father, was a lifelong supporter of the established order in all its branches, and as such was returned by the freeholders. Sir W. P. Honywood, on the other hand, was known to sympathise with the catholic cause, and on 18 March responded to a cry of 'No Popery' from the crowd at Maidstone in the following manner.

The great body of Catholics, who constitute millions of subjects, think that they are aggrieved; and in pursuance of such belief they presented a memorial to the House. I voted that such memorial should be received, to ascertain whether the alleged grievances were well founded; to ascertain whether the Catholics had any claims which ought to be considered... If ever a similar claim be laid before the House; and if ever the feeling of the House and the Anti-Catholic spirit of the County should render such a proceeding necessary, I will cause a County Meeting to be called, for you to have an opportunity to attend; and shall then ask you for your instructions and by such instructions being obtained, I will abide. I will follow them.

By this pledge, Honywood was able to stave off further criticism, and only as the decade progressed did he come under renewed pressure to fulfil its terms.

There is no evidence that borough candidates were similarly catechised in 1820. However the new parliament had not been sitting long before Kentish M.P.s were called upon to make public declaration of their views. On 28 February 1821, Plunket moved for a committee to consider the catholic claims and was victorious by 227 votes to 221. Seven of the thirteen Kentish Members present in the House divided with the anti-catholics - S. R. Lushington (Canterbury), E. B. Wilbraham (Dover), Sir E. Knatchbull (Kent), A. W. Robarts and J. Wells (Maidstone), R. E. Erie Drax Grosvenor (New Romney), and G. P. Holford (Queenborough) - while of the five absentees, J. Butterworth (Dover), G. R. D. Pennant (New Romney), the Hon. J. C. Villiers (Queenborough), and

1 Kentish Chronicle, 29 Feb. 1820.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 21 Mar. 1820.
3 Parl. Deb., New Ser. iv. 1030-34.
J. Marryat (Sandwich), were probably of the same persuasion. They were opposed by Lord Clifton (Canterbury), S. J. Lloyd and S. Marjoribanks (Hythe), W. P. Honywood (Kent), Lord Binning (Rochester), and Sir. G. Warrender (Sandwich), and although forced to abstain in deference to the sentiments of his Rochester constituents, Ralph Bernal may also be numbered among the pro-catholics. While exposing a not wholly unexpected anti-catholic bias in the ranks of Kent's representatives, this analysis also bears witness to the operation of Liverpool's 'open system', and confirms G. I. T. Machin's description of Emancipation as 'the non-party issue par excellence'.

Lloyd, Marjoribanks and the Canningites, Binning and Warrender, had approved ministers' handling of the Queen's business on 6 February, while on this vote and Russell's reform motion of 9 May, the anti-catholic Robarts rejoined his friends in Opposition.

Plunket's motion was the first to pass the Commons since 1813, and was followed by two bills which sought to modify the Oath of Supremacy and to institute 'securities' in the form of a veto on appointments to Irish bishoprics and a check on communications with Rome. As a single measure, these proposals advanced to the Lords, and there perished in a far less hospitable climate. The episode was, however, of lasting significance in Kentish terms not only because it publicised the attitudes of the county's representatives, but because it drew forth the first expressions of organised extra-parliamentary opinion on the catholic question. On 16 March, for example, the Commons received a petition from the inhabitants of Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells making known their 'anxiety' at the efforts being made by the catholics to obtain 'a further enlargement of their privileges'; and praying that

this might not be permitted. The House of Lords was also approached, and on 16 April was acquainted with the anti-catholic sentiments of the Gentlemen, Clergy and Freeholders of Kent, the Rector, Churchwardens, Vestry and other inhabitants of Ashford, and the Mayor, Jurats and Commonality of Faversham. Once begun, the campaign was never allowed to slacken. Canning's bill to give catholic peers a seat in the upper chamber provoked renewed agitation, and during June 1822 hostile petitions were duly presented on behalf of the Minister and other inhabitants of Ashford, the Mayor, Jurats and Commonality of Tenterden, and the people of Marden and Cranbrook.

The foremost authority on the Emancipation struggle of the 1820's has written confidently that: 'There can be no doubt that most of the inhabitants of Great Britain were opposed to civil equality for Catholics, as they had been for over 200 years'. But which specific groups and interests within Kentish society composed the anti-popery movement? The traditionally insular and conservative borough corporations of the county were naturally prominent in resisting any encroachment on their cherished liberties. The unenfranchised corporations of Faversham and Tenterden, as we have already seen, were active from an early date, and their concern was mirrored in the parliamentary boroughs. On 9 April 1821, for instance, the Mayor, Jurats and Common Council of Maidstone, and the Mayor, Jurats and Common Council of Canterbury both petitioned the Lords, and repeated the exercise in 1822. Such bodies were well versed in the techniques of propaganda, and could be relied on to mobilise their local electoral influence behind 'No Popery' candidates.

Across the county as a whole, the Church of England possessed

2 Lords Jour., liv. 348 and 349.
3 Lords Jour., lv. 216, 222 and 258.
4 Machin, The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820 to 1830, p. 5.
5 Lords Jour., liv. 179, and lv. 251 and 222.
immense power to form the ideas and fashion the responses of its congregations. Dr. Machin has shown how the vast majority of Anglican clergymen strove to conform to the wishes of their superiors and potential patrons¹, and throughout the 1820's the closes at Canterbury and Rochester laboured diligently to give an unmistakable lead. On 2 April 1821 the Dean and Prebendaries of Canterbury petitioned the Commons against the scheme of relief then under discussion², and a few days later, the same dignitaries, together with the Archdeacon and clergy of the diocese, made their views known to the House of Lords.³ Kentish parsons took up the refrain with resolution, and were instrumental in procuring dozens of petitions from rural and urban parishes. Frequent references to contemporary politics in the Sunday sermon, intense debate and lobbying at vestry meetings, and the systematic collection of signatures by the churchwardens, proved as effective in the campaign against the catholics as they had been in the anti-Jacobin crusade of 1792, and among the first to unveil the fruits of their endeavours were the Rector of St. Paul's, Dartford, and the Vicar of Goudhurst.⁴

Professor J. H. Hexter has observed, with respect to the catholic cause, that: 'From the top of their ranks to the bottom, from the days of the Protestant Association in 1778 to the bitter day of emancipation, the antipathy of the Methodist Connection to any concessions was outspoken and vigorous'.⁵ Kent had been much affected by the evangelical revival, and John Wesley himself visited the county on numerous occasions. He preached regularly at Mount Sion in Tunbridge Wells⁶, and was well-known in Ramsgate.

³ Lords Jour., liv. 171.
⁴ Lords Jour., lv. 251.
where a sizeable congregation developed during the 1770's and 1780's. 1 By July 1821, the denomination's strength in Kent was estimated to have risen to 5,1492, and when Cobbett made his rural ride through the Weald in 1823 he encountered lively and flourishing chapels in most of the villages and small towns. Farmers, shop-keepers and craftsmen, as well as the Humphry Clinkers of the county's labouring and servant classes, were attracted by the fiery sermons of the circuit preachers, and Dover's Wesleyan M.P., Joseph Butterworth, undoubtedly spoke on their behalf when he declared to Charles Abbott:

The more I know of the Roman Catholics the more deeply I am convinced that... to give them political power... must inevitably lead to fatal consequences.3

The attitude of the dissenting churches to Catholic Emancipation was ambiguous and requires a few words of explanation. To Halévy, the determining factor was strictly theological4, while both Professor Hexter, and more recently R. W. Davis, have preferred a socio-economic criterion.5 Kentish Baptists and Presbyterians certainly had been divided among themselves during the eighteenth century as to the precise nature of the Trinity, and were as disunited in their response to the evangelical spirit of the age as was the Church of England.6 However, those doctrinal

6 It was estimated that there were ten thousand evangelical dissenters in Kent in the early 1820's, and this figure may be taken as representing the strength of anti-catholicism in the county's nonconformist community, Ward (ed.), The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1821-1829, p. 85: Gill to Bunting, 29 July 1821.
disputes should perhaps be regarded as merely the external manifestations of a more fundamental rift in the basic fabric of English nonconformity. By far the largest proportion of Kent's dissenting population was firmly rooted in the rural communities of the Weald and the eastern division, and derived a modest subsistence from agriculture and trade. Often descended from Dutch or Huguenot families, these sober and devout protestants could recount lurid tales of persecution at the hands of catholic princes, and in the 1820's gave vent to their deepest fears through the Protestant Society. Emancipation had to be resisted at all costs, even though it might appear the logical extension of the dissenters' own political aspirations, and hence in the crises of 1825 and 1827-9, petitions from all three major denominations flooded into Parliament.

But if it is reasonable to assume that the majority of Kentish nonconformists looked with disfavour on the catholic claims, it is at least possible to isolate a not inconsiderable body of contrary opinion. Since the 1730's the Dissenting Deputies had represented the interests of congregations within about twelve miles of the metropolis, and in the 1820's were notorious as 'warm friends of Roman Catholic Emancipation'. As the spokesmen of the most prosperous and best educated among their brethren, William Smith and his colleagues could rely upon the support of like-minded men and ministers in the expanding urban hundreds of north-west Kent, and at the same time gave purpose and direction to pro-catholic enclaves in the county's principal towns and ports.

The Deputies apart, however, the catholic cause in Kent could muster none of the persuasive, coercive and organisational advantages afforded to its opponents by the adherence of corporations, clergymen and chapels. This is not of course to argue that

Emancipation lacked its devotees in the county. Grenville's plan of relief had been widely applauded in the press and on the hustings in 1807, and there was no shortage of freemen and freeholders willing to elect pro-catholic M.P.s. Respected politicians like W. P. Honywood, Baron Teynham and the Earl of Darnley were profoundly impressed with a sense of the injustice of the existing law, and publicly admitted ill-foreboding at the deterioration of affairs in Ireland.¹ Yet when a co-ordinated extra-parliamentary campaign was required to forward the designs of their Westminster generals, the Kentish pro-catholics proved both hesitant and fragmented. Contemporaries were undoubtedly too sanguine in calculating the strength of the protestant interest in the nation as a whole, and thus had less justification for their open condemnation of Peel and Wellington in 1829. But if Kent was in any way typical among English counties, the critics of Government may be excused for interpreting silence and inaction, until the eleventh hour, as an admission of weakness.

This conclusion was never more attractive than in 1825, when the alarming progress of the Catholic association in Ireland led Burdett to propose and carry a motion on 25 February for a committee of the whole House.² A bill of relief and safeguards was piloted through the Commons, and only foundered in the Lords after a passionate speech by the Duke of York and the threat of Liverpool's resignation. The reaction in the country, though not altogether unexpected, was remarkable for its scope, its spontaneity and its vigour. Petitions poured into Parliament. One batch, presented to the Commons on 18 April, hailed from places as far apart as Beckenham, Ash-next-Sandwich, Chatham, Rolvenden,

² Machin, The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820 to 1850, chap. iii; and Machin, 'The Catholic Emancipation Crisis of 1825', 468-82.
Aldington and Smeeth, East Peckham, Wye, Canterbury and Lydd, while the people of Birling, Hadlow, West Malling, Wateringbury, Ryarsh, Aylesford and Protterscliffe swelled the throng of supplicants at the feet of the upper House during May. The guiding genius of Anglican and dissenting clergymen was much in evidence, and from every quarter the 'No Popery' refrain was loud and uncompromising.

The Kentish press played a leading role in disseminating information and encouraging popular protest. Copies of petitions, accounts of even the smallest parish meeting, and lengthy reports of parliamentary debates were carried in every issue and readers were given generous space to air their views. The pro-catholic Kentish Chronicle and Kent Herald adopted a strangely subdued tone in their advocacy of Emancipation, but the printer of the tory Kentish Gazette had greater confidence in the disposition of his subscribers, and was congratulated by one Faversham correspondent for: 'The unequivocal manner in which, by your respectable publication, you declare your attachment to the Constitution in Church and State, as by law established of this nation'. At the very outset, the paper warned its readers to beware:

A bill is about to be brought into the House of Commons which is of vital interest to every Englishman, and especially to every Canterbury Freeman. I allude to what is called the Catholic Emancipation Bill. A bill which may place our children, if not ourselves, at the mercy of the professors of that religion, which was planted in ignorance, and maintained in blood! Shall the Freemens of Canterbury stand idly by, while measures are taken which are likely to recall the scenes of Queen Mary's day? On the wall of our City we may stand and look into the very field where our forefathers were butchered - may see the spot in which as our highly gifted young poet has remarked,

The victims of a bigot Queen
And creed more cruel, felt the torturing flame
Wind round their hearts, while things that bore the name
Of men, stood scoffing by!

2 Lords Jour., lvii. 823, 824, 827 and 830.
4 Kentish Gazette, 28 Mar. 1825.
And having thus conjured up the smoke-shrouded spectre and deathly lament of the martyred host, the *Kentish Gazette* went on to a possible method of self-preservation:

> From the numerous visitations of Catholic Intolerance which our City has suffered, we are therefore called on more than any others to exert ourselves against the friends of emancipation. This cannot be more effectually accomplished than by watching the conduct of our Representatives in the present Parliament, and withholding at any future Election, our support from that Member who shall vote for the Catholic Claims.

**II**

The *Kentish Gazette* was encouraged to broach the subject of electoral retribution on delinquent M.P.s, because it was widely predicted that the Ultras at Court and in the Cabinet would persuade Liverpool to call a snap general election and thereby capitalise upon the country's apparent 'No Popery' fever. Wellington seems to have favoured this policy, but at length the Prime Minister was won over to Canning's preference for a delayed dissolution. Opposition's promise not to agitate the catholic question in the interim allowed passions to cool, and as R. W. Greaves has discovered at Leicester, it was not long before electors were once more busily engaged in local intrigue. The renewed on-set of depression after the collapse of the South American market and Government's tampering with the sanctity of the Corn Laws diverted public attention into different channels and ensured that future parliamentary candidates would be judged on a whole range of issues. Furthermore, while dissensions among ministers and Agriculturists disrupted the once unified front of the protestant party, the pro-catholics were able to launch a stealthy counter-offensive. 'A TRUE BLUE', for example, was emboldened to declare in the *Kentish Chronicle*:

> The infatuated pertinacity with which the editor of the *Kentish Gazette* maintains the admission of the Roman

1 *Kentish Gazette*, 11 Apr. 1825.
Catholics to power, as destructive of 'Protestant Ascendancy' is every day strongly developed. When will this hereditary prejudice march off the stage? When will this towering load of superstition dissipate before the dawn of a brighter atmosphere? When will the 'march of the intellect' overtake the reason of the mind? Surely in the nineteenth century, we have nought to fear from the admission of Romanism to power, than from dissenters of other description? Flimsy, indeed, must that man's faith be, who imagines Catholicity would immediately invert 'Protestant Ascendancy' - weak must be his opinion of the dogmas of the latter to fear its overthrow by the admission of five or six Catholic Peers in England into the upper House of Parliament, or the return from Ireland of double so many Catholic Commoners.

Hence, when the keenly anticipated dissolution finally came about in June 1826, an anti-catholic landslide was no longer to be expected.

The freemen of Canterbury had not been deaf to the Kentish Gazette's strictures against Burdett's bill, and as early as April 1825 a group of metropolitan non-residents had resolved to confer quarterly after listening to an harangue on the catholic question. S. R. Lushington was the obvious man to harness this popular concern, and at a meeting at the Black Lion, Bishopsgate, on 15 May 1826 he was toasted for 'his conduct in opposing any further concessions to the Roman Catholics, whereby he has evinced his regard for their Archiepiscopal City, and the general safety of the Kingdom in Church and State'.

Lord Clifton, on the other hand, had aroused the wrath of the tory press, and his supporters could only remind their fellow electors of the noble Member's 1818 and 1820 assertions of independence when seeking to excuse his pro-catholic votes. Nevertheless, both candidates seemed reasonably confident of success, and for some weeks a contest appeared unlikely.

However, the two major parties had overlooked a growing feeling among a section of the freeman body that somehow their interests were not being adequately represented. The non-residents

1 Kentish Chronicle, 16 June 1826.
2 Kentish Gazette, 8 Apr. 1825.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 23 May 1826.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 6 June 1826.
were particularly sensitive to rumours of a coalition between Lushington and Clifton, by which they might be excluded from borough politics, while on 31 May 1826, some 200 persons, 'chiefly mechanics', assembled at the City Arms, Northgate, in the hope of securing two entirely independent candidates. Thomas Hather was anxious to prevent his city becoming a rotten borough, and John Chapman argued forcibly that Lushington had disqualified himself from their service by accepting a government office. The Kentish Chronicle took up the same theme on 2 June, and advised all electors to disregard party labels and the current flourishes of oratory. What the nation required was the return of M.P.s like Joseph Hume:

... who will watch the billframers closely - who will divide the House over and over again, before they let stupid, crude, barbarous motions pass into laws - who will, without respect to persons or parties, fall foul of all jobs, great and little, and not fear to carry a lighted candle into all the recesses of corruption.

To the Kentish Chronicle, taxation, poor rates and the Civil List were the critical issues at stake in the election, and as polling day approached, public discussion of these ever-green topics rivalled even the debate on the catholic claims.

By 13 June a contest was assured, and although it proved weak and ineffective, the challenge offered by a discontented minority did reflect in embryonic form many of the conflicts which were to prove decisive in 1830. As on previous occasions, Dean John Parker urged that Lushington should be judged on the record of the administration of which he was a member, and the candidate himself drew his audience's attention to the £12,000,000 cut in expenditure and the beneficial effects of changes in the commercial code. But some freemen were not so easily impressed. Lushington was closely questioned by Mr. Chapman who was convinced that the country's

1 See reports of meetings in Kentish Gazette, 8 Apr. 1825; and Kentish Chronicle, 23 May 1826.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 2 June 1826.
3 Ibid.
4 For report Kentish Chronicle, 16 June 1826.
distress was due to those sinecures which were pocketing large sums annually from the public purse; and later came under heavy fire from Charles Larkin who bitterly attacked the great number of placemen and pensioners at Westminster. Larkin poured scorn on the notion that 'the people of England were prosperous, that they were heaping gold in the day, and reposing upon a bed of roses at night'; and listed the Corn Laws and high taxes among the prime causes of national hardship.

To Mr. Brent, Lord Clifton was 'a staunch friend to liberty' who would faithfully represent the 'popular cause', while to Alderman Cooper his conduct had exceeded the 'sanguine expectations' of his supporters, especially by his votes in favour of reform and retrenchment. Here too, however, a chorus of voices were raised in angry protest, and it was in the hope of unseating Clifton that the Hon. Richard Watson (the brother of Lord Sondes) was put in nomination. The Kentish Chronicle believed that this opposition originated in a local conviction that his lordship did not 'go far enough in his political doctrine'; and the radical Kent Herald saw the move as necessary in order to end the practice of compromise between the parties.¹ The desire for an 'independent third man' certainly testifies to a considerable disillusionment in the borough, although Watson's unwillingness to appear on the hustings and his failure to attract more than 107 votes against Clifton's 436 and Lushington's 665, suggests that the scheme was premature. In 1830, Watson's star was visibly in the ascendant, so that his noble opponent had no hesitation in stepping hastily aside; but in 1826 even Charles Larkin felt that the opposition groups would do better to unite and 'husband their resources'. The introduction of financial and commercial issues into the contest, coupled with the excitement of Watson's appearance in the race, had, however, entirely over-shadowed the

¹ Kent Herald, 15 June 1826.
catholic question, which was scarcely mentioned on nomination day.

The same preoccupation with local affairs is to be found in most of the other Kentish constituencies. At Sandwich, for example, the younger Joseph Marryat came forward to recapture the seat formerly held by his late father, and did so with many professions of personal independence and support for the borough's harbour project. The only hint that the Sandwich freemen felt strongly about Catholic Emancipation is given by the retirement of Sir George Warrender on grounds of ill health. Warrender was a Canningite and a pro-catholic, and his immediate acceptance of one of Lopes's seats at Westbury implies either a miraculous recovery, or a calculation that a renewed candidature at Sandwich would not be greeted with universal acclamation, and might even damage the remaining ministerial interest. His chosen successor, Sir E.W.C.R. Owen, was thus an unswerving anti-catholic, who was to cause something of a furore by his resignation on principle early in 1829.

The election at Rochester reveals more explicit evidence of anti-catholic sentiment, inspired, no doubt, by the cathedral and corporation interests. The candidate nominated with the avowed backing of Government was the Hon. Henry Dundas, who openly declared himself 'totally averse' to the catholic claims. The pledges demanded from Ralph Bernal are even more instructive about the character of local opinion. Votes from Lord Clifton and James Barnett, his advocacy of reform and retrenchment, and his belief in the need for a revision of the Corn Laws, mark him out as the spokesman of the city's anti-ministerialists; - yet on the hustings Bernal unconditionally 'assured his constituents that as they were decidedly averse to the measure [Emancipation], he would remain entirely neuter, unless he received their further instructions'. Having dutifully accepted this constraint upon his freedom of

1 Kentish Chronicle, 23 May 1826.
2 Ibid.
3 Reports in Kent Herald, 15 and 22 June 1826.
action, however, there was little prospect of so well respected and active an MP being defeated by the third contestant, General Armstrong, despite that gentleman's self-confessed admiration of 'the form of the British Constitution, and the way in which the King's ministers conducted the affairs of this great Empire'. The traditional division of seats was thus preserved, albeit by a unique compromise.

At Dover, the 1826 election was the first in a series of inter-factional disputes that was to convulse the borough on four occasions before the passing of the Reform Bill, and in which, as at Canterbury, the catholic question had only a superficial and transitory importance. The manoeuvrings among the freemen began as early as 30 March at a meeting in the Guildhall. One group proposed to invite Colonel Fitz-Clarence to seek nomination on account of his strong maritime connections; another urged that the sitting Members should not be disturbed; while a third party suggested James Morrison and Charles Poulett Thomson as likely to advance the liberties of the town. The final resolution went in favour of Fitz-Clarence, but the day's proceedings had sparked off a furious debate in the county press. A correspondent in the Kentish Gazette, for example, strove to rally 'All friends of the Constitution' behind Wilbraham and Butterworth, and violently denounced Lieut. Charles Pybus Ladd and his fellow liberals. 'Under his auspices', ran the letter, 'with their open declaration of most radical principles, and their avowed intention to support Catholic Emancipation, these silk-mercers make their appearance here'.

In this manner, the various borough interests jockeyed for position during the next few weeks. Wilbraham was reasonably safe in the colours of administration and the corporation, while Thomson gradually came to the front as the selection of the

1 Kentish Gazette, 4 Apr. 1826.
2 Kentish Gazette, 8 Apr. 1826.
progressive independents. The maverick in the field was John Halcomb, who, according to the hostile Kent Herald had been 'brought forward on Ministerial interest, by a party of the inhabitants of Dover who were stated to be a little jealous of the exclusive patronage which a junta of Mr. Milbraham's friends have long enjoyed'. Having been approved as a fit candidate on 13 May, Halcomb undertook an extensive canvass, and when at the Two Brewers public house in Canterbury he was at pains to assure the assembled non-residents that he had neither been sent down by Peel, nor was in league with the Lord Warden. On the contrary, Halcomb wished 'to protect and watch the liberties of my countrymen, and to act on pure independent principles, courting no favours, nor fearing the frowns of any man in power'. Consequently, as the winning post approached, it was Joseph Butterworth that came under greatest pressure in maintaining his place, for as a Methodist, an anti-catholic and an anti-reformer, he somehow lacked the essential pedigree of a thorough-bred champion of Dover's uninfluenced freemen.

Butterworth was slow to respond to the dangers which beset him, and thus allowed his rivals to benefit from an extended appeal to public concern at the state of national politics. While at Canterbury, Halcomb announced his sympathy towards a modification of the Corn Laws, and made frequent references to a pamphlet which he had himself penned on the subject. 'I do think that the farmer ought to be protected', he agreed, 'but at the same time am of opinion, that means ought to be adopted for the poor man to get his bread as cheap as possible'. He also called for a 'total alteration in the Poor Law', which at present 'placed virtue in a worse situation than vice, and discouraged all feelings of independence in the minds of the poor'; and advocated

1 Kent Herald, 22 June 1826.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 16 May 1826.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 23 May 1826.
adequate provision for the care of orphans and the elderly. As to the current religious controversy, Halcomb publicly nailed his colours to the 1689 compromise between an Anglican establishment and toleration: 'I am for granting to the Catholics every advantage that a Protestant government could give them, with safety to the crown, but certainly would oppose the Catholics having the privilege of a seat in the British Parliament, as being contrary and dangerous to the British Constitution.'

And if Halcomb had in this way been enabled to steal Butterworth's anti-catholic thunder, C. P. Thomson was making every effort to carry off the anti-ministerial vote. When seconding Thomson on nomination day, Mr. Beecham recalled Butterworth's support for the suspension of Habeas Corpus, and the hopeful young candidate himself argued vehemently for an end to protection, a rigid policy of retrenchment, and a measure of parliamentary reform. Butterworth tried to fight back. He had steadfastly endeavoured to retain his independence, he was eager to assist the commercial interest by a change in the Corn Laws, and no doubt sought to profit from Thomson's vague and guarded comments on Emancipation, by restating his commitment to the House of Brunswick. But it was not enough; and when the polls finally closed after a stormy and often violent contest, the figures were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilbraham</td>
<td>1175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson</td>
<td>746</td>
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<tr>
<td>Halcomb</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterworth</td>
<td>198</td>
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<td>Finch</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Kingsford</td>
<td>8</td>
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In a sense, Butterworth was correct when he spoke of 'a contest of party feeling rather than principle'; while Thomson penetrated to the heart of the matter when he congratulated the freemen 'on having rescued their town from the disgrace of becoming a Government Borough'. Wilbraham triumphed in spite of his aloofness.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 23 and 30 May 1826.
2 Kentish Gazette, 13 June 1826.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 16 May 1826.
throughout the election, and Thomson chased him home because a sizeable body of the voters was in agreement with his abhorrence of ministers and all their works. Emancipation engendered much sound and fury, but in the end, for Butterworth and Halcomb, it signified nothing.

Maidstone had been divided on the subject of catholic relief in 1825, and furnishes us with the only example of a Kentish M.P. to change his stance during the lifetime of the 1820 parliament. Having watched John Wells present the borough's anti-catholic petition to the Commons in 1825, A. W. Robarts rose to declare that:

...although the petition was carried at a very respectable meeting of the inhabitants of Maidstone, he was able to state that a great number of the people of that town entertained opposite sentiments with respect to religious toleration. He had formerly been averse to what was commonly called Catholic Emancipation, but having heard the speech of the Attorney-General for Ireland [Plunket] and of the Secretary of State for foreign affairs [Canning] his views had been entirely changed, and he much regretted that he had ever voted against the Catholic claims.

It remains to be seen, however, whether or not the divisions and soul-searchings prompted by Emancipation were still at work in 1826.

Both the newly pro-catholic Robarts and the protestant stalwart, John Wells, came forward for re-election at the dissolution. Their only opponent was Windham Lewis, the proprietor of 'an iron establishment' in Glamorgan, which, as the proud owner conceded, 'was the largest in the world'. On the hustings, Lewis admitted that Emancipation was 'a question of vital importance'; and went on:

I am a steady friend to civil and religious liberty, particularly as it respects Protestant Dissenters, but I cannot reconcile my mind to the idea of giving political power to the Roman Catholics.

Unfortunately for the aspiring industrialist, these words brought no immediate avalanche of grateful votes from the borough's

1 Parl. Deb., New Ser. xiii. 175.
2 Kent Herald, 15 June 1826.
nonconformists, neither was he caught up and borne aloft by the quondam adherents of the apostate Robarts. In fact, he could only attract ninety-five votes, and soon retired from the fray, grumbling as he went, that he had been 'most deeply imposed upon'.

The two principal local interests were so well entrenched and evenly balanced that no single issue could break the electoral stalemate, and it must therefore be concluded that Lewis had been induced to stand simply to ensure the spending of money. The Kentish Chronicle's verdict on the contest clearly indicates that for the moment both sides had cheerfully accepted this impasse:

Few elections have taken place at Maidstone with such perfect good feeling between the parties as the present, and the result shows the late members being again returned that they had obtained the good opinion of the electors in general.

At Hythe the two leading candidates were similarly inclined towards a tranquil election, and thus carefully avoided any inflammatory statements. Although a pro-catholic, Stewart Harjoribanks did not elaborate upon the motives behind his votes of 1821 and 1825 in his published address\(^2\), while Sir Robert Townshend Farquhar responded in guarded tones to the questioning of William Deedes:

he was not the advocate for indiscriminately conceding every demand made by the Catholics; but was desirous of seeing that important subject, like other great leading questions of the day, settled by the mature deliberation of Parliament upon grounds of justice and expediency.

However, if the persecutor of S. E. Sawbridge at Canterbury in 1807 had somewhat moderated his language, there remained zealots in both camps resolved to thrust the catholic issue before the electorate. Writing in the Kentish Chronicle in April 1826, 'J. W.' argued the case for Emancipation:

The great question of Catholic Emancipation, has undergone the ordeal of Parliamentary investigation. It is not for me to object to the decisions of the 'Collective Wisdom', but, when I see a great portion of the inhabitants of this

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1 Kentish Chronicle, 16 June 1826.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 6 June 1826.
3 Kent Herald, 15 June 1826.
and the Sister Kingdom disabled, and unable to participate in legislating for so great a portion of their brethren, every feeling breast must irrepressibly heave for the time, when the march of intellect shall preponderate over bigotry, and the dawn of reason dissipate the cloud of oppression.

Then, on the very day of nomination, the borough was excited by a letter from Sir Egerton Brydges, which, having warned that 'a false step at this crisis' would 'render the agricultural, commercial, and financial decline of this country irrecoverable'; went on to hint at the dangers to persons and property from the impending changes in 'the grand provisions of Magna Carta'. The intentions of both authors were plain enough, yet they entirely failed to provoke either a contest or an extensive public debate. Marjoribanks and Farquhar could be relied upon to attend tirelessly to the day-to-day business of administration, and for the voters of Hythe this was a recommendation more durable than passionate and intractable commitment to a single cause.

Finally to the county constituency, where the opinions of the likely candidates were summarised by 'A TRUE BLUE':

Sir E. Knatchbull is well known to have voted in opposition to Catholic claims, on every occasion when the subject was brought before the House of Commons, His coadjutor (Mr. Honywood) diametrically opposing every act bearing a feature of illiberality, conceded his wishes to the measure, by adding his support to that of many other honourable gentlemen, whose fears were not roused by the prospect of burnings, scaldings, nail-drawings and scalplings, and although up to the time I am writing, unsuccessful in his endeavours to emancipate a greatly injured class of beings, I have no doubt, ultimately, the point will be yielded.

The propaganda battle was entered into with alacrity by the printers and correspondents of the rival Kentish newspapers, but a serious challenge to either of the sitting Members was always improbable. The Kentish Gazette demanded that all candidates be thoroughly interrogated 'with reference to those two great and momentous questions, the claims of the Roman Catholics, and the state of the Agricultural interest'; and the Kentish

1 Kentish Chronicle, 21 Apr. 1826.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 13 June 1826.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 16 June 1826.
4 Ibid.
Chronicle retorted:

The thread bare cry of 'No Popery' has been raised against Mr. Honywood, but the enlightened men of Kent, with whom he is a great favourite, receive it as the offspring of interested persons; the attempt will therefore recoil, with more force, to the mortification of those who advanced it.

On election day, Hodges and Rider did their utmost to eschew specific mention of Honywood's pro-catholic sympathies, and concentrated instead on his efforts to curb extravagance. However when Mr. Hatton rose to propose Knatchbull, he called for definite pledges on slavery, catholic relief and the Corn Laws. Sir Edward naturally deplored slavery and associated himself with the resolutions of 1823 which looked forward to the granting of freedom as soon as the interests of all concerned had been safeguarded. He restated his commitment to agriculture and his determination to resist any further erosion of its prosperity, and left the freeholders in no doubt that he believed a strong landed interest held the key to the nation's well-being. Finally, Knatchbull echoed Hatton's panegyric on the blessings and excellence of the existing Constitution, and alerted his audience to the potential strength of a united body of thirty or forty catholic M.P.s in a future parliament.

But if Knatchbull had done all that was requested of him, Honywood was not to be over-awed.

If he supposed that the Protestant Establishment would be endangered by the admission of thirty or forty Catholic Members into the House of Commons, he would not support the claim - but he considered that the required concession would have the effect of giving strength to the Institutions of the country. Painful as it was to differ in opinion with so many of his friends, yet believing that the safety of Ireland, and perhaps that of England, depended upon the concession, his conscience compelled him to support the measure. At the time when Catholics were excluded from political power, no measure could be too strong on that point. Nearly the whole of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales was attached to the cause of the Pretender, and nothing but strong measures would have prevented the Catholics from voting out Protestantism; but now the reason for restriction had ceased to exist, these restrictions ought to be removed.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 6 June 1826.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 23 June 1826.
A few dissentient voices were raised. Referring to Honywood, J. P. Plumptre declared: 'Many of his friends who had supported him and his family before him, would, if there had been an opportunity, have come in large bodies against him'. But for the most part, the freeholders seemed ready enough to acquiesce in the return of both men without resort to a poll.

III

The preceding survey strongly suggests that in 1826 Catholic Emancipation did not exercise the exclusive fascination which contemporaries expected or feared.¹ Its limited influence is revealed by comparing division lists from before and after the election. On 28 February 1825, seven Kentish M.P.s voted for Burdett's pro-catholic motion, and nine opposed it.² Of the former group, Warrender and Lord Binning may have been induced to retire by the hostility of freemen at Sandwich and Rochester, but Clifton, Marjoribanks, Robarts and Honywood were all re-elected without much difficulty, and together with C. P. Thomson were in the minority when Emancipation was defeated in the Commons on 6 March 1827.³ Five of the six anti-catholics who came forward again were successful, and in the new House their strength was augmented by the addition of Owen, Dundas, and Capel. With Bernal still neutral, and the absent Farquhar, Marryat, Tapps and Lord Downes likely to follow the lead of ministers, the balance had tilted slightly in favour of preserving the status quo, although by no means so dramatically as some had predicted.

Why should this have been so? In the first place, the 'No Popery' movement was not well suited to satisfy the special requirements of electoral politics. Kentish clergymen might achieve much from the pulpit and in the vestry, but there is no evidence that they could organise troops of voters in the style

1 Compare Machin, The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820 to 1830, p. 87.
of the Irish priesthood. Likewise, Professor Hexter has demonstrated the very insignificant role of evangelical protestantism in the open constituencies. Anti-catholicism was essentially an extra-parliamentary creed, and one designed to denounce innovation, rather than to take opinion by the nose or to win converts. Founded upon fear, prejudice and the values of a former age, its existence and vitality demanded a central focus for its protests, and the undivided allegiance of conservative propagandists. Consequently the silence of the parliamentary pro-catholics after mid-1825 had the effect of halting the momentum gathered by the protestant interest since 1821, while in the subsequent election, potential supporters, as well as the tory press, were fatally side-tracked by the more immediate attractions of agricultural issues.

Inter-factional strife within Tory ranks was to play an important part in shaping the future of Emancipation in the next few years, and even in 1826, the Kent Herald recognised its debilitating effect on the protestant cause:

As far as we have observed, the present elections have been less distinguished than any we recollect, for the display of political feeling. Where the contest has been severe, it has been chiefly from personal considerations; public principle has been made of little account. Is this to be attributed to the peaceful, contented, and flourishing state of the country? — it cannot be — since domestic disasters have pressed on us unceasingly of late, some yet prevail, and others are anticipated. Manufacturing distress and agricultural apprehension, one might have imagined to call forth a greater intensity of interest in the choice of those who are to preside over our future destinies. Disgraces have so often knocked at the door of administration, that no great confidence can exist in its wisdom or competency; but its good intentions are not so much questioned as formerly. In a word, we believe the secret to be in the altered policy which a portion of the ministry has succeeded in adopting. More liberal views seem to actuate the ruling powers — they accede to, they act upon, in some degree, the principles which the Reformers — the Liberals — have so long advocated. They have, in part, renounced the errors of tyranny, bigotry, and Slavery — they have approached towards the standard of an enlightened age — and shew (sic) a disposition to advance on it. This disarms opposition from the popular party — and the greatest dissention that exists, is between the new and old factions into which Toryism is divided.

1 Hexter, 'The Protestant Revival and the Catholic Question in England 1778-1829', 208-12.
2 Kent Herald, 29 June 1826.
The anti-popery campaign laboured under further disabilities throughout much of 1827. The protestant party had managed to draw some comfort from the overall election returns, and was encouraged to offer stiff resistance to a renewed application for catholic relief. On 5 March the Commons received petitions from the corporation of Maidstone, the diocese of Rochester, numerous parishes in Canterbury, and small rural towns such as Biddenden and Smarden, while another entry in the Journals for the same day records no fewer than sixty-five petitions from assorted Kentish parishes. But jubilation at the frustration of Burdett's motion was short-lived, and was succeeded by a period of uncertainty and enforced inactivity. The sudden removal of Liverpool's stabilising presence threw the political world into chaos, and absorbed the attention of M.P.s and pundits alike. Canning caught briefly at the reins of power, but on 14 August the Kentish Chronicle reported the 'dismal tidings' of his premature death. For a few hectic months Goderich strutted and fretted his painful hour upon the national stage, and then, by the turn of the year, he too was gone to be heard no more. Not until Wellington and Peel returned to office was the semblance of sanity restored, and for many anti-catholics the eclipse of the Canningites no doubt presaged the end of their torments. Yet these hopes were soon to be disappointed, for, in the very hour of apparent victory, two events - the repeal of the West and Corporation Acts and the County Clare election - precipitated the crisis of final reckoning.

The surrender of full civil rights to dissenters came about as the result of no nationwide agitation, and it was as surprising to their leaders as it was displeasing to the partisans of the Church of England. No immediate attempt was made to capitalise

1 Com. Jour., lxxxii. 272 and 271.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 14 Aug. 1827.
upon the precedent thereby established¹, but the integrity of the Constitution had been irremediably violated, and its ancient mystique rendered as vulnerable as mist before the rising sun.² O'Connell's celebrated return at a County Clare by-election in July 1828 greatly accelerated the process set in motion by Russell's unexpected victory, and finally convinced Wellington that Emancipation could no longer be postponed. The House of Commons again boasted a pro-catholic majority which it was now impossible to subdue by the threat of a dissolution, since a general election would allow the Catholic Association to repeat its recent success and provoke violent uproar throughout Ireland. Faced with the imminent prospect of civil commotion and the paralysis of the administrative machine, the Cabinet prepared to sacrifice principle on the altar of expediency, and only delayed an open declaration of intent until a viable scheme could be worked out.

While ministers strove to convince the King of the inescapable logic of their policy, rumours of their impending volte face incited a group of ultra protestants to attempt a last-ditch defence of the old Constitution.³ In July 1828 a Brunswick Club was established in London, and in August the Earl of Winchilsea informed Lord Chandos of his plan to organise a similar institution in Kent.⁴ During the next few weeks Winchilsea laboured hard to implement his proposal, but having corresponded with most of the influential figures in Kentish politics, he must have been dismayed at the apparent coolness of the general response. Though 'a decided Staunch Protestant', Viscount Sydney preferred not to

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⁴ Finch Hatton Papers FH.4608: Winchilsea to Chandos, 26 Aug. 1828.
commit himself until he knew exactly what the Government meant to do, while the Marquis Camden argued that the whole matter should be left to Parliament 'where I conceive those who have seats in either House, can with more effect & propriety declare their sentiments'. Viscount Bexley wished to await further developments before speaking out publicly, and Earl Stanhope told Winchilsea that 'the greatest prudence is requisite at the present moment'. The master of Chevening explained:

that an awful responsibility with respect to Ireland rests with the Executive Government, & that I should be very unwilling either to share that responsibility or to take any measure by which I might appear to be implicated in the calamities that may ensue in that Country & you must have observed how much every Government is disposed to shift upon others the blame which may justly be ascribed to itself.

He was also anxious to prevent conflict nearer home:

There does not appear to exist in this or in any other County of England any popular feeling in behalf of the Catholics, but it would, I think, be excited through a necessary reaction by such measures as you have in contemplation, & for the Protestants in this Country the wisest maxim appears to be quieta non movere & to avoid throwing any sparks which might lead to a mighty conflagration.

The Earl of Romney raised another objection, with which his father had been confronted in 1780:

The principle of a self constituted, permanent, political body I consider to be very objectionable. Different as the practice has been, the principle I consider to be uniformly bad, whether it originates a Whig Club, a Pitt Club, a Jacobin Club, a Corresponding Society, an Orange Lodge, a Catholic Association, a Brunswick Protestant Club.

Undeterred, Winchilsea replied:

I perfectly agree with you, as to the general objection to political Clubs, where they are intended to support any party question, but surely a Club established to guard against the attempt of Associations formed for the avowed

1 Finch Hatton Papers FH.4565: Sydney to Winchilsea, 2 Sept. 1828.
2 Finch Hatton Papers FH.4595: Camden to Winchilsea, 31 Aug. 1828.
3 Finch Hatton Papers FH.4567: Bexley to Winchilsea, 2 Sept. 1828.
4 Finch Hatton Papers FH.4508: Stanhope to Winchilsea, 3 Sept. 1828.
5 Finch Hatton Papers FH.4572: Romney to Winchilsea, 7 Sept. 1828.
purpose of subverting our Protestant Constitution cannot be liable to that objection & it must be important that the Government, who are entrusted with the Maintenance of the Constitution, should be made acquainted with the real sentiments of the Protestants of England at this momentous crisis.

And in this view he was upheld by the Earl of Guilford, who wrote on 24 August:

... altho' in ordinary times I certainly think political clubs unconstitutional, & that the regular mode for us to express our opinions is in Parliament, & for the community at large by petition; still as such associations of our Enemies are not suppressed by law, we should not be upon equal terms with them were we not permitted to use their weapons in self defence, & upon this ground alone they are justifiable.

Thus, despite the apprehensions of many Kentish tory aristocrats, Winchilsea pressed ahead with the arrangements for a meeting at Maidstone on 16 September 'to take into consideration the best means at the present crisis of expressing the determination of the Protestants of the County to uphold the principles which placed the House of Brunswick on the Throne of these realms.'

With Colonel Wingfield-Stratford in the chair, Winchilsea opened the debate at the Bell Inn by proposing the creation of a Kent Brunswick Constitutional Club, and was seconded by Sir John Brydges, who, having urged all men to 'rally round the Throne', attempted to explain something of the philosophy which underpinned the awakening of militant protestantism.

They had not met to discuss the merits of the Protestant and Catholic religions but whether the Roman Catholics should take the lead as they had attempted to do, and whether Protestants should be compelled to yield to them. The Roman Catholics had shown the cloven foot; the sooner the expression of attachment to the Protestant Constitution was made the better.

And went on:

In the present day when liberty prevailed, and the cant phrase of 'Civil and religious liberty' was in too many mouths, but with the real meaning of which very few who used it were acquainted, should he join with those who desired such boasted liberty which really meant revolution?

1 Finch Hatton Papers FH.4513: Winchilsea to Romney, nd.
No! God forbid! There could be no injustice in refusing to the Catholics further political power; it being part of the compact at the period of the Revolution of 1688.

The motion was warmly applauded by Lord Bexley and Sir Edward Knatchbull, but did not pass entirely unchallenged. The principal pro-catholic speaker was Lord Teynham, who felt 'deep regret that the question had been brought forward'; and called upon Kentishmen to remember that:

Ireland had served this country with great ardour, she had fought our battles, and the blood of her sons had been shed in our defence, even the very hero who was now at the head of the government witnessed this, and seemed, as he should presume, deeply impressed with the necessity of reconciliation between the two countries.

Teynham believed 'the present proceedings were altogether premature'; and feared that 'agitating a question which required so much prudence and caution, was little short of agitating civil commotion'. A conciliatory approach, on the other hand, might have considerable advantages. Peace in Ireland would permit sizeable savings in army expenditure, and the recovery of Irish agriculture would reduce England's dependence upon foreign corn in bad seasons. Hence, despite loud hissing, Teynham moved the indefinite adjournment of the meeting.

The motion was supported by Major Waithe, who asserted the 'just rights' of the catholics, and strove to invoke the spirit of the treaty of Limerick. However, the hearts of the assembled Kentish gentlemen were not to be melted by appeals to expediency, equity or self-interest, and with reluctance Teynham withdrew his resolution. The way was therefore clear for the formal inauguration of the Brunswick Club by Sir W. J. Twisden and Mr. Dering. Letters asking for enrolment from Lords Abergavenny, Guilford and Harris, Sir Brook W. Bridges and Sir Egerton Brydges were read out, and anti-catholic speeches were delivered by John Wells, W. Martin of Leeds Castle and J.P. Plumptre. Sir Edward Dering probably spoke for them all when he declared:

it was not his wish to join in dictating to the Government of the country, but he thought if they were put in
possession of the feelings of the great body of Protestants, it would have the effect of making them more decided on the great question at issue, and it was due to them to make them acquainted with the public feeling; and he trusted the example of Kent should be followed throughout the kingdom.

Dering's concluding observation leaves no doubt that it was the primary intention of Winchilsea and his friends to use the Kent Brunswick Club as a model to encourage concerted action elsewhere. A county meeting was to be summoned in the near future to give added impetus to the anti-catholic campaign, and in the meantime every sort of propaganda was to be employed to ensure an impressive display of popular enthusiasm. The Kentish Gazette acclaimed each new demonstration of protestant solidarity, and by 3 October was able to rejoice that:

The spirit of Protestantism is awake. The Papist may menace - the Saint may cant - the Whig (if there be one) conciliate - the Radical Atheist may abuse - but the true spirit of Protestantism is, thank God, at last awake. The long slumbering energies of that mighty engine, so long supine to its danger, but so powerful in action when brought into play, is at length aware of its own peculiar position. It sees that it is no longer the time to stand on the defensive - it must act. And act it will.

Writers like 'PRIVATUS' searched the scriptures to illustrate the evil designs of the Holy See, and ransacked the annals of European history for instances of catholic intrigue, brutality and oppression. The public was warned that, despite claims to the contrary, the catholic religion had not departed from the practices and objectives of the Counter-Reformation, but was as intolerant and ruthless as ever. Hysterical fears were thus aroused for the safety of private property and the survival of the Church of England, which, as a score of polemicists were at infinite pains to point out, could never be allayed except by a resounding show of strength and determination.

It was with these dire forebodings ringing in their minds that the freeholders of Kent gathered at renenden Heath on

1 Kentish Gazette, 3 Oct. 1828.
2 For example, Kentish Gazette, 17 Oct. 1828.
24 October. The admittedly not impartial Kentish Gazette recorded with pleasure at the beginning of its report that: 'It is supposed at no former time were congregated so large a portion of the nobility, gentry and freeholders of the county'; and by any account the scene must have been an impressive one. Both the pro- and anti-catholic parties were mustered in force, and were keenly aware that their every word and deed would be weighed by the entire nation. The High Sheriff having stated the purpose of the meeting, George Gipps stepped forward with a petition which he trusted would help settle the catholic problem once and for all. He had no wish to revive the memory of Queen Mary, but solemnly counselled his audience that 'if you do consent to admit catholics to power, the threshold of the Constitution will be passed, and a doorway will be opened to struggle and innovation'. Gipps, like J. P. Plumptre, Sir Edward Knatchbull and the Earl of Winchilsea, could not ignore the tense and delicate situation in Ireland, yet the petition, on behalf of which all four Brunswickers spoke with eloquence and vigour, was boldly content to re-affirm the familiar constitutional platitudes.

The day was most remarkable, however, for the spirited opposition put up by the opponents of the Brunswick Club. The pro-catholic interest had been thrown into temporary disarray during the confused months of 1827, and could do little to stem the torrent of hostile propaganda unleashed in the autumn of 1828. Nevertheless, on 24 October a very formidable arsenal of heavy oratorical artillery was on parade. As a former Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Marquis Camden spoke with authority and a profound concern for the welfare of the Irish people. He deplored the excesses of the Catholic Association as much as any man, but was convinced that 'the strength and security of this united kingdom depended upon the tranquillisation of Ireland'. Since 1797 Camden

1 For reports Kentish Gazette, and Kentish Chronicle, 28 oct. 1828.
had regarded Emancipation as the logical and necessary sequel to the Union, and only wished he had done more to discourage the formation of so dictatorial a body as the Kent Brunswick Club. Another Kentish peer with Irish connections was the earl of Darnley, who confidently dismissed all suggestion of divided catholic loyalties, and denied that they any longer harboured treasonable or arbitrary ambitions. 'Be just and fear not', he concluded, 'Give her [Ireland], then, what you can, in safety now, or it may yet be too late to give'. Mr. Shea recalled the honour and respectability of English catholic families like the Howards, the Cliffords and the Talbots, while Lord Teynham declared against the petition as he felt the catholic claims to be 'just', 'expedient' and 'necessary'.

Most loquacious of all the pro-catholics was the Irish orator Shiel, who, despite frequent taunts and abuse, harangued the crowd with the fluency proverbial among his countrymen. 'I come to show cause', he announced, 'why sentence of eternal discord should not be passed upon my country'. Winchilsea had stressed the foresight and wisdom of King Alfred, the Barons at Runnymede, Edward I and Edward III in establishing parliamentary liberties, but, asked Shiel, were these heroes not princes of papal Christendom? Then, by way of contrast, he enquired 'whether the cradle of the Reformation was not rocked by a bloody and an iron hand'; and very unfavourably compared the conditions in protestant Prussia, Sweden and Denmark, with the freedoms enjoyed in Venice, France and South America, where Rome still predominated. Neither were persecution and inquisition characteristics unique to catholicism. Calvin's Geneva and Cranmer's England had never scrupled to enforce strict conformity, whereas to Shiel, the toleration then prevailing in France was sure proof that the catholic attitude had markedly softened in recent years. Hence, with the ghostly throng of Pitt, Burke, Fox and Canning at his shoulder, Shiel
looked forward to the eventual triumph of a cause which the men of Kent with their boughs of oak would be powerless to resist.

In the short term, however, the meeting of 24 October proved a valiant attempt to check the increasingly inevitable progress of events. T. L. Hodges and the Earl of Radnor moved the adjournment of the proceedings to enable the Government to deliberate without duress, yet when the question was finally put, Gipps' petition was adjudged victorious. Estimates of the majority differed widely. The Kentish Gazette agreed with the Times that two-thirds of the freeholders had voted with the Brunswickers, the Morning Journal claimed that three-quarters of them had done so, and the Standard rejoiced in the support of nine-tenths of the assembly. All agreed that the Protestant Constitution had won an overwhelming vote of confidence, and were loud in urging a comparable response throughout the nation.

Celebrations were immediately organised in order to extract every ounce of publicity from so apparently decisive an expression of public opinion. A Kent Brunswick Club dinner at Maidstone on 31 October, attended by two hundred of the county's most distinguished inhabitants, was the occasion for much mutual congratulation, and afforded an opportunity to rebut the arguments of the pro-catholics. To Sir Edward Knatchbull, the verdict returned on Penenden Heath had for ever refuted the charge that the protestants were compelled to skulk in 'holes and corners'; and both Lord Winchilsea and Mr. Hammond were resolved that 'the honest assertion of the public opinion of the Men of Kent, on this important question', was not 'to be stigmatised as an attempt to dictate to the government of the country, and to be cried down as illegal and unconstitutional'. The tory press endeavoured to keep popular interest alive by highlighting each new advance in the anti-catholic campaign, and the Kentish Gazette devoted space

1 Kentish Gazette, 4 Nov. 1828.
to open letters from Lord Kenyon and the Bishop of Salisbury.\

But if the Brunswickers were in buoyant mood in the closing months of 1828, their opponents were not ready to acquiesce meekly in defeat. The Kentish Chronicle detected evidence of sympathy towards Emancipation at Hythe, New Romney, Rochester, Canterbury and in the Isle of Thanet, and declared defiantly on 28 October that 'what ought to be called the sense of the county, can never be collected from such assemblies as had just been summoned'.\(^2\)

A counter-petition was drawn up and circulated for signature, and a dinner was held to give Shiel a platform from which to defend his conduct.\(^3\) Handbills, satires and fiercely anti-clerical paragraphs in the Kent Herald could hardly fail to claw back some of the ground lost in the great set-piece debate, and at the end of December a convivial meeting, which included Lords Torrington, Thanet, Sondes and Beynham, as well as Sir J. M. Tylden, T. L. Hodges, Thomas Rider, Charles Larkin, S. E. Sawbridge, Richard Watson, J. Brockman and E. Darell, listened with pleasure as Lord Clifton cast a new interpretation upon the events of 24 October:

\[...\text{what would be the result of that and similar meetings? Men would begin to consider the subject. Not long ago, he believed that nine-tenths of the Men of Kent were wholly ignorant of it; but now it was under discussion all over the county.}\]

Both parties were thus in good heart as the theatre of conflict switched from the provinces to Parliament. Anti-catholic petitions had been trickling into Westminster from all parts of Kent since the spring of 1828, and perhaps because of the Brunswickers' example, this stream had swollen into a mighty flood by the beginning of the 1829 session. Ramsgate, New Romney, Ashford and Wye, the Protestant Dissenters of Woolwich, the Baptists of Chatham, the clergy of Rochester and the Baptists and Methodists of Maidstone, and the townspeople of Chatham, Gillingham, Bromton,

1 Kentish Gazette, 17 Feb. 1829.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 11 Nov. 1828.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 30 Dec. 1828.
Queenborough and Tunbridge Wells, were just a few of the Commons' petitioners as the crisis mounted to its climax. Yet, in the final instance, it was Government rather than the weight of public opinion that determined policy, and in the King's Speech ministers announced to the world their conversion to immediate Emancipation. Hence when Knatchbull and Winchilsea presented the Kent petition to their respective Houses on 12 and 13 February, they found Lord Clifton and the Earl of Darnley in ebullient spirits, and were reduced to lamenting that the Cabinet had chosen to act in opposition to all their former principles. Wellington and Peel were unrepentant, however, and having plunged their knives deep into the vitals of the Constitution, it now only remained to administer the last rites to the fast-expiring colossus. In the division of 6 March, Owen, Marryat and Farquhar joined Clifton, Robarts, Thomson and Marjoribanks in the pro-catholic lobby, and on 13 April the proposals received the Royal Assent.

Suddenly and dramatically the controversy which had dominated politics in the recent past was over. But the admission of Catholics to Parliament and the disfranchisement of the Irish 40/-freeholder held out little prospect of enduring peace on either side of St. George's Channel. In England, Opposition had tasted success, while Wellington's apparent capitulation had created, both at Westminster and in the country, an unpredictable body of embittered anti-catholics who thirsted to avenge their betrayal. Moreover, the Emancipation debate of the 1820's had accustomed electors and the unrepresented to the working of national institutions, and developed their ability to manipulate the means of extra-parliamentary protest. Consequently it should come as no surprise to discover that within a very few months of the Bruns-wickers' humiliation, a new issue and a fresh agitation were attracting the attention of Kentish public opinion.

Chapter Nine

Public Opinion and the Reform Bill, 1830 - 1832

The undisguised hostility of George IV and his leading Tory counsellors, an improvement in the economy under the skilful guidance of Huskisson and Robinson, and a public opinion involved heart and soul in the passions of the catholic debate, had conspired during the 1820's to impose a temporary eclipse upon the cause of parliamentary reform. But the constellation launched by Wilkes and Lord Mahon, and pursued throughout the 1790's and the bleak years immediately before and after Waterloo by a faithful band of Foxites and radicals, was never far below the horizon, and as soon as attitudes and allegiances began to change, it re-emerged with enhanced brilliance. This element of continuity was crucial in the eventual success of reform. 'At length in 1830', wrote J. R. M. Butler in his classic account, 'the fuel is ready for the sacred spark which the Whigs have carried through their wanderings of forty years in the wilderness of distrust'; and there is a sense in which the Reform Bill conflagration in Kent was kindled upon the still smouldering embers of innumerable smaller fires scattered across the previous sixty years. Reform had developed hand-in-glove with popular consciousness, and it was therefore wholly appropriate that extra-parliamentary agitation should achieve its greatest triumph in the advocacy of an issue, with whose merits Kentishmen had gradually been familiarised by their reading of the local press and regular attendance at parish, borough and county meetings. It remains, however, for the following chapter to explain why and how reform was adopted and brought to fruition after 1830 rather than at some earlier date.

In previous decades, parliamentary reform had always been one among a number of national issues jostling for the attention of

public opinion, but by 1830 the majority of these questions had either been settled, or postponed to the consideration of more conducive times. Moreover, the political contortions and economic hardships of the post-war period had discredited the personnel and constitutional bulwarks of the tory-dominated Establishment in the eyes of its traditional propertied adherents, and persuaded them to regard a change in the representative system as an essential prerequisite to the immediate restoration of due weight and importance to their appeals and interests. Once these new and prestigious converts had joined the ranks of the protesters, the forces defeated in 1810, 1817, 1819 and 1821 became overwhelming and irresistible.

This process of alienation among Kent's landed classes was greatly assisted by the Government's controversial acceptance of Catholic Emancipation in 1829. The schemes of Sir Richard Vyvyan and fellow anti-catholics to capture the closet and piece together an alternative administration were never seriously practicable, but they sprang from a deeply rooted conviction that Wellington was, as the Duke of Newcastle declared, 'the most unprincipled, most artful, most heartless, most ambitious, and most dangerous man, not excepting Cromwell, that this country has seen for many a long year'. Sir Edward Knatchbull, described by Dr. Machin as: 'The most critical and objective of participants in this intrigue', agreed to accept office, although he preferred to vent his anger upon 'Peel and Co', rather than the Duke with whom he was still prepared to co-operate. Writing to Vyvyan in Sep-

2 Knatchbull-Hugessen, op. cit., p. 179: Newcastle to Vyvyan, nd. 1829.
tember 1829, Knatchbull expounded his hopes and fears for the future.

A Whig Government I should not like — that is the worst state of all — the next bad state is the present Government — in the stead of this I would have an old Tory — a Church and State Government.

If this cannot be completely obtained, I would keep as much as I could of the present Government, with as large an infusion of good principles as possible. Peel and all belonging to him I will never support.

Far from strengthening the tory interest, however, these clumsy manoeuvrings had the effect of fatally weakening its power of resistance, both nationally and in the provinces, on the eve of its greatest challenge.

Knatchbull and Vyvyan strove to oust the apostate ministers in 1829 in order to forestall concessions to reformers and free-traders. To Tories like the Marquis of Blandford, on the other hand, the granting of Emancipation argued strongly that further constitutional change was urgently required. Speaking in the Lords, the Earl of Winchilsea felt compelled to announce his espousal of parliamentary reform, and was particularly harsh upon the proprietors of close boroughs, whom he accused of 'sacrificing their principles, in order that they might be able to patch up fortunes which had been broken and ruined by their vices'.

To those gentlemen and freeholders of Kent who could recall the stirring scenes enacted upon Penenden Heath and the Commons' subsequent rejection of so many respectful petitions, the time must have seemed severely out of joint, and that some sort of reform was necessary if the House was ever again to speak the sense of the nation. Even Sir Edward Knatchbull was not immune to this line of reasoning, and on 29 March 1830 told the Commons that although he remained the adamant foe of 'speculative and indefinite proposals of reform', he would henceforward 'be ready to assist in the exposure and redress of any specific abuses which were proved to have occurred

1 Knatchbull-Hugessen, op. cit., p. 186: Knatchbull to Vyvyan, 11 Sept. 1829.
in the representation. By such statements, the new tory recruits breathed fresh vigour into the old cause, and considerably broadened its social appeal.

While angry protestants plotted and threatened swift retribution, the winter of 1829/30 also saw the renewal of agrarian distress, from which neither gentlemen, farmers nor labourers were exempt. A county meeting was held at Maidstone on 12 March 1830 to discuss the prevailing hardship, which Earl Stanhope regretted most of all:

because it affected so much the happiness and comfort of the labouring classes who, above all others, contributed to the welfare of the state, and therefore had the best claim upon the support and protection of Parliament.

In his proposed address to the King, Stanhope attributed the nation's problems to the lack of protection given to agriculture, and to the alterations in the currency which had reduced the price of manufactures and raised the value of taxes; and was seconded by Lord Teynham who condemned the adoption of Peel's report 'without any reflection upon the evils consequent upon such a change'.

A number of petitions to the House of Commons were then brought forward, each of which attempted to analyse the causes of distress and to suggest likely remedies. In supporting the petition of Mr. Bradley, Sir William Crosby declared:

The farmers, as a class, were ruined; their last capital was expended. The labourers could no longer live by the sweat of their brow; the productive classes paid far too great a proportion of the public burthen.

The petition spoke of high taxes and poor rates, and Sir William echoed previous speakers in citing the late currency policy to explain the slump in corn prices from seventy to fifty shillings a quarter since 1825. Mr. Gipps and the Earl of Winchilsea recommended the reduction of duties on basic necessities such as hops, malt, soap and leather, with the lost revenue being recouped by a

1 Parl. Deb., New Ser. xxiii. 988.
property tax; while Major Waith launched a blistering attack on tithes and demanded state regulation of clerical incomes. Finally, on the advice of Sir Edward Knatchbull, Gipps withdrew his petition, and thereby enabled the majority of the assembly to unite behind that of Mr. Bradley.

All the arguments employed by the agricultural lobby since 1815 were thus voiced in rapid succession, and were repeated in a host of petitions and addresses from every part of Kent. However in 1830 the pleas for relief were more urgent than ever before, and it is possible to detect a much stronger popular disposition to isolate Government as the prime author, or at least the passive spectator, of the country's misfortunes. As in the case of Emancipation, ministers had ignored the many unmistakable expressions of public opinion, and had even dared to weaken the protective shield of the Corn Laws by the introduction of a sliding scale. Conscious of the desperate plight of his constituents, Sir Edward Knatchbull reacted sharply to the very half-hearted lamentation in the King's Speech that 'Distress should exist among the Agricultural and Manufacturing Classes in some parts of the United Kingdom', and the almost casual reference to the 'Pressure of temporary Difficulty'. His amendment to the Commons' Address was an out-right rejection of the claim that distress was due to 'the Effect of unfavourable seasons, and to the operation of other causes which are beyond the Reach of Legislation to Control or Remedy'; and was seized upon by those numerous discontented groups to whom Wellington's administration appeared quite unaware of the realities of provincial life and incapable of rendering the necessary assistance. ¹

In Kent itself, this sense of frustration and disillusionment at the ineffectiveness of Government led freeholders to accord parliamentary reform a new prominence in their deliberations. End

¹ Parl. Deb., New Ser. xxii. 3-4.
Stanhope gave the subject his cautious support on 12 March:

He was proud to say that for a reform founded upon proper principles, and conducted upon a sound basis, he was a strenuous advocate. But he thought that a reform would not be affected time enough to act as a cure for present distresses.

Charles Larkin, on the other hand, believed that in reform the country possessed the key to its relief and future prosperity. National expenditure had risen from £6,000,000 to £24,000,000 between 1792 and 1828, and in the period 1810 to 1827, the amount paid out in pensions had swollen from £94,000 to £484,000. Little wonder then that taxes were so high and the nation so poor, and to Larkin this trend would only be reversed by fundamental change in the constitutional basis of Church and State. The assembled men of Kent agreed, and after a show of hands the High Sheriff announced that Larkin's more radical address should be presented to George IV on behalf of the county.

Thus, with anti-catholics and Agriculturists in the van, the reform movement was rapidly gathering momentum in the spring of 1830, and a series of letters published in the Kentish Chronicle indicates that every effort was being made to educate and refine public understanding of the national panacea. In 'Practical Reform', the author sought 'a middle path' suited 'alike to the state of our foreign relations - our regrets for the past - our present sufferings - and our best hopes for the future'.

With an eye, perhaps, to the still conservative attitudes of the Kentish landed classes, he dismissed as equally irrelevant the American model and the plan of universal suffrage so often trumpeted in the Westminster Review, and proposed instead a scheme founded on the principle of 'equal representation to all the payers of direct

1 Kentish Chronicle, 16 Mar. 1830.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 2 Mar. 1830: 'Practical Reform Letter II Equal Representation'.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 23 Feb. 1830: 'Practical Reform Letter I Common Sense versus Universal Suffrage - Annual Parliaments and Vote by Ballot'.
Constituency boundaries were to be redrawn in accordance with the distribution of the new voting population, and it was anticipated that each M.P. would be returned by 23,350 electors. Under this system, Cornwall's share of seats would fall from 42 to 11 and Lancashire's rise from 14 to 45, while Kent's quota of eighteen representatives would remain the same, and simply be redistributed to Canterbury, Margate and Ramsgate, Sandwich and Deal, Dover, Hythe, Romney, Ashford, Tenterden, Tonbridge, Lenham, Stroud, Maidstone, Wrotham, Rochester and Chatham, Sheppey and Sittingbourne, St. Mary Cray, Deptford, and Gravesend. Voting was to be carried on in each parish in order to permit the use of local taxation registers, and it was hoped that the creation of single-member constituencies would deter the practice of compromise so often resorted to at Dover and Rochester. Annual parliaments were not to be adopted, since an electorate of over a million would involve candidates in enormous expense, while the ballot was rejected as 'something repugnant to the feelings of an Englishman', and quite unnecessary in a well-administered electoral system.

The series of letters had begun:

The enemies of Reform have long objected that its advocates have never submitted any practical plan for a change in the Representative System, to which a considerable number had previously agreed.

And having answered his critics, the author reflected on the purpose of his proposals:

They are not put forth with the presumptuous idea that such particular arrangements only can save the country; they invite the exercise of reason and of common sense, in declared hostility to empty theory and mob declamation.

1 Ibid.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 2 Mar. 1830: 'Practical Reform Letter II'.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 23 Feb. and 9 Mar. 1830: 'Practical Reform Letters I and III'.
5 Female electors were, however, to be permitted to vote by means of a letter to the returning officer.
6 Kentish Chronicle, 23 Feb. 1830: 'Practical Reform Letter I'.
7 Kentish Chronicle, 23 Mar. 1830: 'Practical Reform Letter IV'.
Such a statement well illuminates the aspirations of those gentlemen and farmers so eagerly enlisting under the banner of reform. There was a general realisation that changes were essential and even desirable, but these would have to be controlled within strict limits. 'Practical Reform' thus set out to restore equality to the representative system and to ensure its effective operation, while at the same time emphasising the continuing rights of property and avoiding the most contentious elements in the radical programme. Moreover, if this cautious strategy was to be successful, all haste was required in its prosecution. As 'Letter IV' warned on 23 March:

...the apostles of Universal suffrage and its attendant follies, are in the field, assembling and animating their deluded disciples; it behoves the friends of efficient, consistent, and moderate reform, now to stand forward en masse, to open channels of communication, and arrange the plan of the impending campaign, in which they have a Judas faced enemy to encounter.

II

The partisans of reform did not have to wait long for an opportunity to express their discontent, since the death of George IV was followed at the end of July 1830 by a snap dissolution. The Kentish Gazette spoke on behalf of the ultra-tory press when declaring that the catholic question would be the determining factor among electors whose oft repeated petitions had been ostentatiously spurned, but in Kent, at least, the results seem to indicate that Emancipation had already become a dead-letter. 2 Wellington probably calculated as much, and must, therefore, have been dismayed to discover, as the returns trickled in, that economy and reform had assumed an electoral significance far greater than the anti-catholic party had ever been able to muster. 3

A contest was expected at Sandwich, where a by-election early in 1829 had revealed considerable opposition to Wellington's newly

1 Ibid.
2 Kentish Gazette, 2 July 1830.
announced pro-catholic policy among the traditional supporters of administration.¹ Samuel Grove Price was a candidate well suited to capitalise upon any such lingering dissensions, and was at some pains to point out that:

With respect to the Catholic question he contended that it was impolitic to allow any set of men to legislate for British interests and British people who would not tolerate any vote but their own.²

Though Emancipation had been granted, Grove Price assured the free-men that his principles 'were not likely to be swayed by motives of temporary expediency'; and no doubt with reform in mind asserted resolutely: 'I am no convert to that policy which yields to far what is not granted from a sense of justice'.³ Nevertheless, even the uncompromising Grove Price felt compelled to pledge support for measures 'to alleviate the burthens of the people by a just economy, consistent with honour and public faith'. The pro-catholic Joseph Marryat came forward once again with a commitment to retrenchment and personal independence, but in the end, the withdrawal of the official ministerial candidate forced neither man to undergo the uncertainties of a poll.

At Dover, the Kentish Chronicle saw 'every prospect of a most severe contest'⁴; especially since John Halcomb's defeat in the 1828 by-election and the subsequent petitions had revived non-residence and the state of the franchise as major issues in local politics.⁵ Like Grove Price, Sir John Rae Reid made no secret of his 'Strong attachment to the Constitution in Church and State as by law established, the maintenance and dignity of the Crown, and the honour and Independence of the Country'; while C. P. Thomson's principal claim to the renewed mandate of the freemen was his diligence in the parliamentary struggle for economy, tax cuts and

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1 See the collection of handbills among the Sandwich corporation records, Sa. Z 2.
2 Kentish Gazette, 20 July 1830.
3 Kentish Gazette, 2 July 1830.
4 Kentish Gazette, 13 July 1830.
6 Kentish Chronicle, 13 July 1830.
freer trade. However, the most hotly debated topic in an election already enlivened by the re-appearance of the persistent Halcomb was colonial slavery. A barrage of rumour and open accusation led Reid to deny publicly any direct involvement in slave ownership, despite his possession of a West Indian mortgage, and to promise rather evasively:

Whenever the time shall arrive at which circumstances may justify the Emancipation of the Slaves, with a view to the augmentation of their happiness, conjoined with a proper protection of the interest of persons who may have embarked their Capital in the Colonies in question, I shall not be absent from my post to give the matter attentive consideration.

The controversy rumbled on until nomination day, when Sir John was proposed amid cries of 'No Slavery', but ultimately proved quite unequal to the task of repelling the 'Treasury and Lord Warden's candidate', who was duly returned along with Thomson.

Anti-slavery, though never an electoral issue of more than secondary importance, was also prominently agitated at Rochester. As a West Indian proprietor, Ralph Bernal was closely questioned on election day by Mr. D. B. Lewes, and could only defend himself in the time-honoured manner by affirming his readiness to countenance emancipation so long as the interests of the owners were not forgotten. However, both Charles Larkin and the most radical of the hopeful candidates, John Hills, were quick to remind voters that there were slaves in England as well as in the Caribbean, and it was upon domestic issues that the contest was eventually settled. As the son of the Earl of Jersey, Viscount Villiers was well-known in the borough, and in his published address declared that: 'the line of my conduct in Parliament will be to support a Government acting on the principles of the present beneficial Policy'.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 20 July 1830.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 13 July 1830.
Eagle Tavern, 'advocate every measure of economy compatible with the dignity of the crown'; and despite the somewhat hackneyed ring of his rhetoric, the promise probably secured his election. Ministerial influence in the dockyards was still extensive enough in 1830 to restrict the popular party to a single seat, and after a decade of faithful adherence to his constituents' wishes on retrenchment and the Catholic question, Bernal was not to be denied.

In an election in which both the friends of Government and Opposition took every opportunity to associate themselves with the crusade against waste, an enlightened attitude on slavery was insufficient to break asunder long-standing voting patterns at Dover and Rochester. Only parliamentary reform had the potential to accomplish this mighty labour, and in 1830 there were indications that its power was already at work in the political arena. The first man to step into the fray at Maidstone was Philip Rawlings, an ex-commissionary-general, who announced his intention 'to defend the rights and privileges of the freemen, not to buy and sell them like so many sheep'.

'He came', Edward Russell informed the electors, 'from no other Treasury than the treasury of his own mind'; and when pressed to explain his views, Rawlings observed that 'he had a convincing proof from his personal canvass that a reform in Parliament was absolutely necessary'.

The lot of a reforming 'third man' in a borough renowned for its venality was not likely to be a very happy one, but Rawlings' presence did at least inject new vitality into the popular debate. In his bid to succeed the retiring John Wells, Alderman Henry Winchester of the City was vigorous in denying that he was 'an ambassador from the Treasury'; and in describing himself as 'an enemy to any thing like a useless or prodigal waste of the public money'; although when requested to be more specific, only replied

1 Kentish Gazette, 16 July 1830.
2 Maidstone Gazette, 3 Aug. 1830.
3 Reports in Ibid. and Kentish Chronicle, 3 Aug. 1830.
that 'he was determined to vote for any kind of reform which seemed to him to have a beneficial tendency'. A. W. Robarts, on the other hand, had always been 'the uniform and consistent supporter of every fair proposition made in favour of reform and retrenchment'; and to Charles Ellis, 'it was to be hoped that he would continue his exertions until the second House of Parliament was made what it ought to be made - the people's house'.

With party feeling running high, there was never sufficient likelihood of Rawlings being returned to justify his rather reproachful exit from the lists. However, the future of reform was far from bleak, since, as the Kentish Chronicle noted: 'The non-freemen who are strong in their numbers, wealth, and respectability, take every opportunity of expressing their dissatisfaction with the present state of things'. On the second day of polling these unenfranchised rate-payers were responsible for nominating G. W. Tyssen, and although refusing to accept many of the votes tendered for this 'fourth man', the Mayor was not slow to recognise that the presence of a London lawyer presaged the trial of the freemen's privileges by a parliamentary select committee.

John Halcomb had tried a similar stratagem at Dover, where he announced his willingness to accept the votes of the payers of scot and lot, of the former owners of freeholds in the borough, and of those men whose freedom had been derived from now deceased wives, and used the inevitable petition to catalogue local grievances against the corporation. Neither did New Romney, where the Dering writ had run unchallenged for seventy years, escape altogether unscathed from the new tide of public discontent. Though dutifully returned by the Mayor, even the Kentish Gazette was forced to record that the great majority of the nomination meeting was against Miles and Trevor, and in favour of the gate-crashers,

1 Kentish Chronicle, 3 Aug. 1830.
2 Com. Jour., lxxxvi. 9, 100 and 385.
The best example of this new current of popular unrest is, however, afforded by events at Hythe. Fearing some impending curtailment of its municipal privileges, a meeting at the Guild-hall resolved on 8 July:

That the Rights of the Freemen of the Town and Port of Hythe to vote in the election of members to serve in Parliament, having been publicly threatened with an attack by some of the Inhabitants of Hythe, for the purpose of obtaining their Freedom of the same Town and Port, it behoves every Freeman to adopt such measures as will best ensure to him a continuance of those Rights and Privileges which he has, from time immemorial, so justly enjoyed.

Particularly vulnerable were the non-residents who made up half the borough's electorate of 390, and it was finally agreed to seek the help of the sitting Members, Loch and Majoribanks, in return for votes in the expected poll. Groups at Deal, Dover and in London seized on the idea, and were gratified to hear from the two candidates that 'should any attempt be made to invade those rights, we shall cheerfully undertake their defence'.

'There has never been known an election here', ran the report in the Kentish Chronicle, 'which has excited as intense an interest as that which commenced on Wednesday, 2nd August'. Before the candidates were presented, about thirty non-residents were admitted to their freedom, while a body of scot and lot payers and freeholders headed by Captain Hart was turned away. Fitzroy Kelly and William Fraser were, however, on hand to champion this aspiring 'popular interest', and on the second day tempers had become so inflamed that both sides were called to put their case to a committee presided-over by the Mayor and the Recorder. This tribunal could not be persuaded that the charter really invested all the inhabitants with the franchise, and at length Majoribanks

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1 Kentish Gazette, 3 Aug. 1830; and Com. Jour., lxxxvi. 536.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 13 July 1830.
3 Ibid., and Kentish Gazette, 20 July 1830.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 10 Aug. 1830; and G. W. Wilks, The Earls of the Cinque Ports and the Parliamentary Representation of Hythe (Folkestone, 1897), pp. 120-2.
and Loch were declared the victors by 270 to 8. Nevertheless, the 263 invalid votes cast for Kelly and Fraser provided ample grounds for yet another petition.¹

Much had happened at Queenborough in recent years to banish forever its century-long role as the compliant slave of the Boards of Admiralty and Ordnance. Dissensions first began to ruffle the once tranquil waters of borough politics when a by-law of 1820 gave to the Mayor, Jurats and Bailiffs sole rights to exploit the oyster and other fisheries. This usurpation seems to have been inspired both by the desire for economic advancement, and by a hope, on the part of the corporation, that by destroying the livelihood of the inhabitants, it would be left in full enjoyment of the fruits of ministerial patronage.² But the starving fishermen of Queenborough were not to be so easily dismissed. Their plight was seen and to some extent relieved by John Capel, and in the election of 1826 he was placed at the top of the poll.³ Meetings on 22 December 1827 and 13 February 1828 resolved to petition Parliament for redress⁴, and failure to win a favourable response only strengthened determination to carry on the struggle for local supremacy.

In the election of 1830 both parties made tremendous efforts to achieve outright victory, and if the petitions which appeared in its wake are to be believed, few methods of influence, intimidation or corruption were left untried.⁵ Capel and his partner Thomas Gladstone, were said to have received many illegal votes through the partiality of the returning officer, while the ministerialists, Sir Philip Durham and William Holmes, apparently made extensive use of the patronage of the Ordnance, of which the

¹ Com. Jour., lxxxvi. 75-6.
² Kentish Chronicle, 8 Jan. 1828.
³ Kent Herald, 15 June 1826.
⁴ Kentish Chronicle, 8 Jan. and 19 Feb. 1828.
⁵ Com. Jour., lxxxvi. 50-1 and 90.
latter was Treasurer. Heralded by the band of the Royal Artillery and flanked by a gang of 'prize-fighters and boxers', Durham posed as the post-admiral of Sheerness in order to hold out empty promises of preferment to gullible freemen, and when the polls finally closed both he and Capel had attracted 130 votes, eight fewer than Holmes and seven more than Gladstone, Holmes eventually chose to sit for Haslemere, and then, on 6 December, a select committee disqualified Durham.1 Hence, on the eve of the Reform Bill crisis, Queenborough was no longer the dependable government constituency of Captain Evans or Sir Charles Frederick.

The freemen of Canterbury also had specific local grievances which seemed to demonstrate the malfunctioning of both Government and Parliament. After his election in 1826, S. R. Lushington had been appointed to a post in Madras, but on leaving England, he had declined to vacate his seat. Repeated petitions for a new writ were ignored by the Commons2, and having noted one such rebuff, the Kentish Chronicle commented bluntly: 'After this, we think representation is a farce'.3 London non-residents were active in shaping a bill to compel resignation on acceptance of office in India4, while at a Common Hall in March 1828, Mr. Davy told an angry crowd:

He was satisfied the system of corruption would continue till anarchy and confusion would so far insinuate itself, that distress would generate despair, and end in universal anarchy. The only way to effect a Reformation, was for the Electors to unite and return to Parliament such men as were not contaminated by intriguing and designing men, or influenced by Ministers, and who would see that the powers of government were not applied to the injury of the people.5

However, two frustrating years were to elapse before this advice

2 See Parliamentary Papers 1829, iii. (307): 'Report from the Select Committee appointed to examine the petitions of Electors of Canterbury, relating to the seat of Stephen Rumbold Lushington, esq., to search for precedents in respect of Members of this House accepting offices abroad vacating their seats'.
3 See correspondence with Lord Clifton in Kentish Chronicle, 10 June 1828.
4 See Kentish Chronicle, 10 June, 1 July, 7 Oct. and 23 Dec. 1828.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 15 Mar. 1828.
could be acted upon.

On 13 July 1830 the Kentish Chronicle was expecting 'a phalanx of candidates', and counselled electors to enquire of each:

Will you exert yourself in reducing the national expenditure to the circumscribed means of the people? Will you endeavour to obtain a reduction of the taxes by lopping off useless places and pensions. Will you assist in restoring to the people a more fair and free representation? In short, do you mean to protect the rights of those by whom you wish to be delegated?

Lord Clifton seems to have offended many of his constituents by his long absence in Ireland during the previous session, and thus stepped down in favour of Viscount Fordwich, who was known to approve economy and moderate reform. The Hon. Richard Watson's appeal was founded upon an attack on sinecures, a readiness to help combat 'whatever blemishes and imperfections the lapse of time may have introduced into our excellent constitution', and, rather significantly, a pledge to resign his army commission; while from the Tory camp, Henry Baring strove to offset the crippling legacy of Lushington's misconduct by recalling Wellington's positive measures of retrenchment and by promising to resign his seat should duty summon him abroad. Once polling had begun, the outcome was not long in doubt, and with the Kentish Chronicle and the Kent Herald cheering them on, Watson and Fordwich romped home to notch up the anti-ministerial interest's greatest triumph since 1796.

There were many reasons why W. P. Honywood did not attempt to seek re-election in the county constituency, not least of which was the fury inspired in the breasts of anti-catholic freeholders by his refusal to honour an undertaking made in 1820 to be guided by the sense of public opinion. The Kent Herald suggested Lord Clifton as a suitable replacement, but on nomination day it was

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1 Kentish Chronicle, 13 July 1830.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 13 and 20 July 1830.
4 Kentish Gazette, 30 July 1830.
5 For example, in Kentish Gazette, 12 Dec. 1830.
6 Kent Herald, 5 and 12 Aug. 1830.
Thomas Law Hodges, the nephew of Major Cartwright, who was proposed by Thomas Rider and W. Darell. He hoped 'to abate the taxes, and promote Parliamentary Reform', and later in the day added that without reform 'this country can no longer be independent'. Sir Edward Knatchbull, on the other hand, laboured under none of the disadvantages which had compelled the retirement of his former colleague. He had remained in step with Kentish sentiments through all the twists of recent politics, and as William Deedes observed, he had worked hard 'to alleviate the general distress'. Moreover, though 'no friend to annual elections, nor to universal suffrage', he could reply with conviction to the questioning of Charles Larkin that he was 'a friend to every reform that tended to the good of the country'. In 1830 these credentials were sufficient to convince the freeholders, and in consequence no opposition was forthcoming.

III

At a national level the 1830 election may have been 'unremarkable', but in Kent it was quite the reverse. Contests took place in seven of the nine constituencies, while of the eighteen men returned to Parliament, no fewer than eleven were new to the Commons. Economy was undoubtedly the principal topic of debate on the hustings, but parliamentary reform was widely discussed and occasionally showed signs of the furore which it was soon to unleash. Under the headline 'THE TRIUMPH OF LIBERAL PRINCIPLES', the Kentish Chronicle summed up the results thus:

The progress of the Elections throughout the Empire furnish at the present moment, perhaps, one of the most unequivocal indications of the spirit and feelings which pervade the great body of the people in favour of liberal principles. Whenever a Candidate has presented himself as the steady and unflinching supporter of national economy and legislativ e integrity - whenever a decided avowal has been manifested to oppose that shameful and profligate waste of public revenue which has tended to perpetuate Taxation;

1 Reports in Kentish Chronicle, 10 Aug. 1830 and Maidstone Journal, 10 Aug. 1830.
2 Cannon, Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832, p. 197.
there we have almost invariably marked a resolute determination on the part of electors to return such members to Parliament.

This sensitivity to current political issues had, as we have seen, been developing over many months, and was thus in no way the spur-of-the-moment reaction to events in France which Halévy once described. Nevertheless, the importance of the July Revolution should not be under-estimated, since it is clear that news of the convulsions in Paris did much to accelerate the reform campaign both during and after the election. The Kentish press maintained a lively and well-informed interest in French affairs, and was never reluctant to make comparisons with ideas and practices prevailing in Britain. When examining the French electoral system in June 1830, for example, the Kentish Chronicle noted admiringly that 'the Chamber of Deputies has more of the popular influence and less of the aristocratic in it than the House of Commons'; and pointed out that the cheapness of contests threw open the public service to men with as little as £500 a year. Hence, when Charles X angrily dissolved this freely elected assembly after its first clamorous sessions, it was impossible to contain public fears that such arbitrary proceedings might be infectious. The Kentish Chronicle believed that the French King had hoped to obtain the assistance of William IV and his ministers, and drew its readers' attention to the close links between Wellington and Polignac. Reform at home consequently became even more essential, while the speed and apparent ease with which 'We have seen a despot driven from his throne', gave radicals and conservative country gentlemen ample food for thought in the autumn of 1830.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 24 Aug. 1830.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 8 June 1830.
4 'How will the Late Great Change in France Bear upon England?' in Kentish Chronicle, 10 Aug. 1830.
For the reformers gathered at the London tavern, the 'triumph of Constitutional Liberty' in France announced that a mighty juggernaut had begun its irresistible progress. To more cautious spectators like Sir Edward Knatchbull, on the other hand, it was the relatively peaceful manner in which reforms had been effected and the Bourbon monarchy finally swept away that made the deepest impression.

See, ...what is doing in a neighbouring country, where a despot has been hurled from his throne, and the liberties of the people asserted. I rejoice this has been done - and I am not less rejoiced, that in the events which have taken place, moderation has prevailed, and all parties are satisfied with the arrangements which have taken place. It must be a matter of universal congratulation, when one thinks of the former Revolution, which took years to finish, and to reflect that the present has been accomplished in one short week.

If moderate constitutional change could be introduced and carried at home with as little danger to life or property, then perhaps it should be welcomed and prosecuted with the utmost dispatch.

As August wore on, moreover, the full extent of the benefits which the French people had won by their courage began to emerge. The Kent Herald wrote on the 14th:

France is now essentially a commonwealth; the real sources of power being vested in the representatives of the People fairly chosen - which is sufficient to ensure freedom. The extension of the suffrage is now alone required to impart a more purely popular character to the form of government adopted - and no doubt this will follow, bringing necessarily with it such other modifications and improvements of the Charter as shall soon render it entirely worthy of the intelligent and free spirit which pervades the noble population of France.

The new King had ascended a 'constitutional throne' and 'priestcraft' had 'received a mortal blow'. In short, as the Kent Herald went on to declare: 'A new era of human happiness may be fairly said to have commenced'; and in 1830, Kentishmen were understandably eager to share in this rosy future.

The atmosphere of common-sense, optimism and restraint which

1 Kentish Chronicle, 24 Aug. 1830.
2 Maidstone Journal, 10 Aug. 1830.
characterised the July Revolution, contrasted sharply with the simmering rural distress in southern England which erupted into open sedition in the last months of 1830. Rioting was reported near Canterbury in August, and then spread uncontrollably through the eastern division and the Weald during October and early November.¹ Sixty-one cases of arson and twenty-nine wage riots were recorded in the county, eleven threatening 'Swing letters' were received, and thirty-seven threshing machines destroyed², in a wave of intimidation and mob violence unknown since the seventeenth century, and in the subsequent restoration of order, twenty-five men were sentenced to transportation and four to the gallows.³ Confronted with a challenge to property and the spectre of a Jacobin deserter at the head of a tricolour-brandishing gang⁴, the gentry acted swiftly, but their repression was always tempered with genuine compassion for the miserable conditions endured by the labourers. After all, gentlemen and farmers were themselves victims of the agrarian depression, and once the rule of law had been re-established, were as anxious as their tenants and workmen to seek relief, and if necessary, vengeance. Agriculturists like Stanhope and Knatchbull had repeatedly warned ministers of the incubus fermenting in the provinces, and now, a night sky painted crimson by the rick-burning orgies of Captain Swing seemed to symbolise the wanton and near criminal folly of Government's disregard. Hence, when Wellington made public his hostility to reform, he found his opponents in massed ranks on every side and thus sought refuge in resignation.

Speaking in the Lords a month after the formation of Earl Grey's ministry, the Earl of Darnley voiced the feelings of a great proportion of his countrymen:

He always felt convinced, that there was much in the representation of the people in the other House of Parliament which

² Ibid., App. 1.
³ Ibid., App. 2.
⁴ Ibid., p. 76.
required reform. He was persuaded that the question of reform could no longer be avoided or delayed. He would advise his noble friend at the head of his Majesty's Government, and their Lordships, not to refrain, though the fear of going too far, from doing that which was necessary to satisfy the public mind in this eventful crisis.

The same message rang out with clarity and insistence from every part of Kent, as freemen and freeholders assembled to urge on the Whigs. Thomas Bentley, for example, congratulated a meeting of the inhabitants of the northern division of the Lathe of Aylesford at Rochester on 18 January 1831:

that the united voices of the people had at length so imperatively demanded the reform of what might properly be termed the house of corruption, as to make it hazardous for that house, or any Minister longer to refuse it.

Like many Kentish speakers at this period, Bentley was confident of the friendly disposition of Grey and the King, and although still suspicious of the Tories in both Houses, was certain that 'a power now existed which, if properly directed by the irresistible influence of the press, would prove more than a match for the unconstitutional power of the oligarchy'.

The petitions presented in November and December 1830 had sought to couple agricultural and fiscal issues with pleas for reform, but by the new year it had clearly been decided to concentrate upon achieving a re-envigoration of the representation from which all other blessings would naturally flow. Charles Larkin advocated such a policy at the Rochester meeting, and at a gathering of East Kent freeholders at Canterbury, Edward Hughes and Mr. Martin held up taxation, tithes, sinecures and the National Debt as areas where a reformed Legislature would enact speedy relief. Neither was it considered desirable to dictate to ministers on the precise plan of reform to be adopted. Mr. Prentis spoke warmly on behalf of a substantial redistribution of seats and the enfranchisement of copyholders and leaseholders at the 18 January meeting, while the

1 Parl. Deb., 3rd Ser. i. 1295.
3 For example, those presented by T. H. Hodges in Parl. Deb., 3rd. Ser. i. 383-5 and 972-3.
4 Maidstone Gazette, 15 Feb. 1831.
ballot was frequently applauded as 'the most efficacious means of preserving purity of election'. However, in the main, Kentishmen were prepared to await the Whigs' proposals and meanwhile to fortify them for the struggle which lay ahead.

Lord John Russell cut short the nation's suspense on 1 March, and shortly afterwards the Kent Herald observed: 'We never remember so intense and general an enthusiasm in favour of any question as on the present measure of Reform'. The Bill, it felt, was a 'constitutional evolution', and rejoiced that 'the grand principle of actual and direct representation is recognised and established'.

C. J. Jacobson declared at Maidstone on 10 March that it was the duty of the public to support the King's ministers, and Mr. Ellis' resolution to this effect only attracted three dissentient voices. The adherence of the corporation of Canterbury to the cause, allowed the Rev. H. Lacey to refute charges that the Bill was 'corporation robbery', and to defend it as being revolutionary only in the sense that day followed night. Great pleasure at the breadth of the scheme, despite the omission of the ballot, was expressed by Mr. Neve at a Sheerness assembly, and the list of approving speakers might be extended from dozens of other newspaper reports. 'Britain', asserted the Kentish Chronicle, 'is rising en masse to support a measure of Reform that transcends all our hopes'; while on viewing the national agitation, the Kent Herald reflected ominously that 'if the prayer for reform is now denied it will grow rapidly to a demand and who will dare refuse it'.

On 19 April, however, the Bill was defeated in committee, and three days later William IV attended in person to dissolve Parliament.

1 Maidstone Gazette, 25 Jan. 1831.
3 Maidstone Gazette, 15 Mar. 1831.
4 Ibid.
5 Kent Herald, 10 Mar. 1831.
6 Maidstone Gazette, 15 Mar. 1831.
The division on Gascoyne's motion should recall us to the fact that even in the spring of 1831 not all Englishmen were devotees of reform. In Kent, opposition to Russell's Bill was spear-headed by the tory press, and especially by the Kentish Gazette which observed on 29 April:

The plot thickens every hour, and the inhabitants of this great nation are rapidly dividing themselves into two classes - the friends of order and a conservative constitution on the one hand, - the lovers of change at all risks and hazards on the other.

The paper argued that it sought merely 'to transfer the cause from the tribunal of passion to that of reason and sober judgement'; and concurred with most tory apologists of the day in dismissing the damaging idea that those who disliked the present measure were 'secret or avowed enemies to all reform'. 'Never', it believed, 'was a greater or more invidious calamity put forth'; and continued:

Is it really so, that no man can be hostile to the bill, who is not also averse to meet the exigency of the moment, by admitting such changes as shall have a tendency to strengthen our institutions, at the same time that they trench neither upon chartered rights nor established usages.

Finally it warned 'moderate thinking men' not to be hurried into the adoption of measures, which however deeply they may find reason to deplore them, can never be recalled'.

In the highly-charged atmosphere of late April 1831, however, these political niceties fell upon stony ground. Public opinion desired only 'The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill', and division lists were closely scrutinised to discover the offending Members. After the Bill's second reading, one correspondent had written in the Kentish Chronicle:

I therefore repeat, that so far from being discouraged, this division plainly shows that in a new Parliament this vital measure would be carried triumphantly, for it will be the fault of the people if any county, or open place return any man not pledged to reform. We may do much in our own county, and we ought to commence with the county itself. Rochester, Maidstone, Dover, and Sandwich, are like the county, neutralised, but need this be the case at a new election? Canterbury and Hythe have done themselves the greatest credit by

1 Kentish Gazette, 29 Apr. 1831.
choosing members who are staunch in the cause - and why should not this example be followed? 1

Here, then, was a challenge, and Kentish electors were not found wanting in zeal to take it up.

At Canterbury, Richard Watson told the freemen that after 'deliberate and mature reflection' he had supported the Bill, 'conscientiously believing that the future tranquility and safety of our country depended on its successful termination'; while Lord Fordwich pledged himself to promote the reform of our Representation, which is now loudly and decidedly called for by all classes of the community. 2 Both men arrived in the city on 22 April and were greeted with enthusiastic popular acclaim. A 'worn out tory flag' was also hoisted above Mr. Baring's committee rooms, but having derived little encouragement, even among the labourers in the cathedral precincts, he announced rather lamely on the 25th that 'he was friendly to reform himself, and to contest the city would not only be ungentlemanly on his part, but a great waste of money to no good purpose'. 3 'The anti-reform party', gloated the Kent Herald, 'have consequently passed the week in disconsolable inertness, dreaming now and then of catching a golden gull of the Tory species, and quietly waking to the reality of desertion and utter defeat'. 4 Since no other candidate could be induced to appear, nomination day proceeded without incident, and was more a celebration of, as Watson termed it, 'a bill that would not innovate or make a breach, but assist in closing up those breaches that had been made, and cause the constitution to spring up with greater fame and glory'. 5

The borough of Hythe also returned unopposed, a pair of M.P.s pledged to support Russell's Bill, in an election which strikingly reveals the deep in-roads made by reform since the previous summer. In 1830, Hardoribanks and Loch had been chosen as the defenders of

2 Ibid. 26 Apr. 1831.
3 Ibid. 28 Apr. 1831.
4 Ibid. 28 Apr. 1831.
5 Report in Kentish Chronicle, 3 May 1831.
freemens' privileges, and by April 1831 these rights appeared to be in even greater peril, owing to the Whigs' proposal to reduce the port's representation to a single seat and to disfranchise its non-resident electors. According to the *Kent Herald*, however, it was the 'patriotic spirit' of these same out-voters that rendered the sitting Members unassailable, 'purely on account of those gentlemen having supported the measure'.

Elsewhere in Kent we may witness the decisive expulsion of anti-reform Members in a manner attributable to forces more profound than a mere change of Government. When considering the situation at Rochester on 28 April, for example, the *Kent Herald* reported:

> Mr. Bernal and Mr. Mills, Reformers both, are canvassing without an opponent, Lord Villiers having quickly found sufficient reasons for abandoning a hopeless contest.

On the 30th, both men expressed strong attachment to the ministers' plans, and were then sent off to Westminster to assist in their enactment by an electorate which defrayed all expenses.

The *Kentish Chronicle* was emphatic that Sir John Rae Reid 'must go out for Dover'; and in 1831 it would invoke an issue more powerful than popular dislike of colonial slavery to accomplish this desirable end. In his published address, Reid avoided any mention of the Reform Bill, but his two opponents made no secret of their commitment to Grey's scheme. C. P. Thomson was a reformer with a well-tested pedigree, while Captain R. H. Stanhope came to the borough 'in unflinching Opposition to Corruption and firm Support of the great cause of REFORM and RETRENCHMENT', which he felt would best be secured by 'a Long Pull, a Strong Pull, and a Pull altogether'. The freemen were not quite as unanimous as Stanhope might have hoped, and for some time Sir John's campaign was sustained by the good wishes of the borough's non-residents. Yet, in the end

2 *Kent Herald*, 28 Apr. 1831. 6 For example, a meeting of London non-residents in *Kentish Gazette*, 29 Apr. 1831.
3 *Kent Herald*, 5 May 1831.
4 *Kentish Gazette*, 29 Apr. 1831.
he retired from the race, and thus allowed the reformers to walk over the course.¹

No candidate in 1831, with the possible exception of Sir Edward Knatchbull, aroused more hostility than Samuel Grove Price, the Tory Member for Sandwich. To the Kent Herald he was 'one of the chief mouth-pieces of the Boroughmongers'; and on one electioneering tour was actually attacked by a mob of Deal boatmen, who, as the Kentish Gazette rather scornfully reported, 'imagine that the Reform Bill will entitle them to the privileges of pilots'.² Like Reid at Dover, Grove Price directed his appeal to the out-dwellers³, but when the polls closed, he had obtained just 297 votes, and was well behind Marryat's 493 and Admiral Trowbridge's 397. Trowbridge was an Admiralty nominee of the old-school, who no doubt benefited from all the influence which the ministerial interest could exert. Marryat, on the other hand, drew together all the borough's independent and discontented elements in his triumphant campaign. He declared in the county press that:

> From the short experience I have had I feel persuaded that no effectual Retrenchment of expenditure or diminution of Taxation can be expected from the House of Commons as at present constituted.⁴

Nevertheless, in both his address and in Parliament, Marryat was careful to couple professions of attachment to the principle of the Bill with a steady determination to amend its details in order to preserve the liberties of his constituents⁵, and subsequently laboured hard to carry this undertaking into practice. In early May 1831, the Kent Herald was content to conclude: 'Nobly has that ancient Town rescued itself from the anticipative imputation on its character'.⁶

At the meeting summoned to approve Maidstone's pro-reform petition, much displeasure was expressed by the freemen at the conduct of Alderman Winchester.⁷ However, as late as 28 April no 'third

man had come forward, and an exasperated Kent Herald could not refrain from enquiring: 'Surely the freemen are not so spiritless there as to suffer their town to be disgraced by such a return at the present important crisis'. By polling day the borough had fallen into line with its Kentish neighbours, and two pairs of rival candidates were proposed. Robarts and Barrett appeared on behalf of the reforming interest, while Winchester and old George Simson united at the head of the tory faction. To Mr. Ellis, the question at issue was simply:

whether the enterprising and intelligent people of England should live under the rule of King, Lords, and Commons, agreeably to the spirit of the constitution, or whether they should be subjected to the misrule of a vile oligarchy sanctioned and supported by the tools of the Boroughmongers?

The freemen of Maidstone loudly signified their preference for the former proposition, and continued to shout and jeer throughout the speeches of the Tories. Simson just managed to record his utter abhorrence of the 'Russell Purge', while Winchester was heard to say that he opposed the Bill because it 'swept away rights and vested interests'. His later promise to assist in a 'moderate and constitutional reform' prompted general laughter, and did nothing to deter the voters from their resolution to 'redress the political character of Maidstone'.

Four M.P.s inimical to the Reform Bill as outlined in the late parliament had thus been defeated in the Kentish boroughs, and by the persistent exhortations of Sir J. M. Tylden and the editor of the Kent Herald, the freeholders were stirred up to expel a fifth from his county seat. We have already seen how Sir Edward Knatchbull had espoused the idea of a limited reform in the early months of 1830, and to this principle he remained faithful in his 1831 address. But on the whig Bill itself, the renegade Tory had

1 Kent Herald, 28 Apr. 1831.
2 Report in Kentish Chronicle, 10 May 1831.
3 Kent Herald, 5 May 1831.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 26 Apr. 1831.
regularly exhibited his disapproval, and for this failing alone, moves were quickly set on foot to find a more acceptable replacement. At the end of March the *Kent Herald* had run its eye over the principal contenders for any future vacancy. Though Lord Clifton was no longer eligible due to his recent inheritance of the family title, his younger brother, the Hon. J. Bligh, was still a possibility. More probable was Thomas Bentley, 'one of the first agriculturists of England, a liberal and reformer all his life'. Then there were William Frend of Canterbury, Colonel Barrett of Lee Priory, Samuel Sawbridge, 'a man of sterling and thoroughly liberal principles', Sir J. M. Tylden, 'a highly talented and zealous liberal', or even Edward Darell, 'the representative of a most ancient and honourable Catholic family, and an uncompromising friend of the people'. At a meeting at Sittingbourne on 26 April, however, the county's choice fell upon Thomas Rider of Boughton Place, whom the *Kent Herald* welcomed as 'a veteran in the cause of reform'.

With Rider and T. L. Hodges as their standard-bearers, Kentish reformers rallied to the great cause in ever increasing numbers. The Sittingbourne meeting had resolved to return both candidates entirely free of personal expense, and to this end the election was organised in a quite unprecedented manner. A central committee was established at Maidstone to co-ordinate the efforts of smaller bodies operating from such places as Bromley, Dartford, the King's Head, Canterbury, Tonbridge and Ramsgate. Subscriptions were instituted to cover local costs and to finance the traditional electioneering progress which Hodges and Rider undertook through many parts of the county. Finally, it was everywhere agreed that freeholders should transport themselves, and if possible their friends, to Penenden Heath on polling day.

Sir Edward Knatchbull's response to these elaborate proceedings

2 *Kentish Chronicle*, 3 May 1831.
3 *Kent Herald*, 5 May 1831.
4 *Kentish Gazette*, 29 Apr. and 3 May 1831.
was to restate the views which 'ill-health' had prevented him from explaining in the House:

Large populous towns ought to be directly represented - the amount of qualification is a matter of detail to be fixed upon deliberate consideration - I think it would be injurious to divide Counties and I am opposed to diminishing the number of English seats.

A committee was formed at Maidstone's Star Inn on 30 April to manage Knatchbull's campaign, and the baronet seized every opportunity to acquaint electors with his opinions. The Kentish Gazette also strove to stem the swelling tide of public feeling, and on 29 April published a fierce attack on Rider and the bill's likely effects in Kent:

The measure he pledges himself to support, takes the influence from the agriculturist..., and delivers it over to the shopkeeper. It takes the franchise from 27,348 voters, and gives it to 5,182. It takes, for example, the franchise of Dover from 1,866 to give it to only 273; of Rochester from 841 to give it to only 156; of Sandwich from 955 to give it to only 125.

Yet, on 4 May, Knatchbull was advised by his committee that he could not 'reasonably hope successfully to withstand the torrent of public opinion'; and a week later his withdrawal was officially announced.

After 10 May the Kent election assumed an almost festive air. Excursions by foot, by carriage and by steam boat were arranged to transport Kentishmen to Penenden Heath, where, on 15 May, 40,000 cheering spectators acclaimed Rider and Hodges and swore eternal fidelity to the Reform Bill, warts and all. It was a fitting climax to a general election which public opinion had been unashamedly rampant on a single national issue. And, when all the shouting had died down, the Kent Herald could look forward to the new session with hope and genuine local pride:

Imagine the Teller on the First Division proclaiming aloud - The honourable members for Kent representing TWENTY FIVE THOUSAND Freeholders and Freemen for Reform. The honourable members for Kent representing TWO HUNDRED Freemen vote against Reform.

1 Kentish Chronicle, 3 May 1831.
2 Kentish Gazette, 3 May 1831.
3 See ibid. for meeting at Canterbury's Fountain Inn.
4 Kentish Gazette, 29 Apr. 1831.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 10 May 1831.
6 Kentish Chronicle, 17 May 1831. 7 Kent Herald, 12 May 1831.
Only the farmers and fishermen of New Romney and Queenborough had failed to move with the national tide, and by that single act of defiance both somehow justified their fast-approaching dismemberment.

What were the exact provisions of the various Reform Bills respecting Kent, for which men voted and petitioned with such vigour during 1831 and 1832? One of the most controversial aspects of the whig plan was the proposal to divide counties, and thereby to enable both East and West Kent to return a pair of M.P.s. It was argued that the traditional unity of county society would be destroyed; that the influence of the landed interest would be fatally reduced; and that the Knight of the Shire would lose the prestige which had made him a by-word for independence and the natural channel for local business. Knatchbull, as we have seen, made his misgivings public in the 1831 election, while on 10 August even T. L. Hodges revealed that he did not acquiesce without reservations.

...the part of the Bill which he approved of least was the division of the counties; but the feeling in favour of the whole Bill was so unanimous through the whole country, that he had been induced to alter his opinion. He was not so much afraid of aristocratic influence, as some other persons seemed to be; and although he believed he should offend many of his constituents, yet as the country demanded the whole Bill, he was bound to preserve the consistency of the Bill and vote for the division of counties.

It was, however, the fate of the Kentish boroughs which engendered greatest debate within Parliament and out-of-doors. As defined in Russell's original Bill, Schedule A condemned Queenborough and New Romney to the loss of both their seats, and so fierce was popular hatred of the 'boroughmongering' system that neither constituency had any hope of a reprieve. Nevertheless, the arguments used in their defence are not without interest.

On 8 July 1831, Sir Edward Dering told the Commons that the 'anomalies existing in the Constitution' were the 'cause of benefit rather than of disadvantage'; and warned against jeopardising the

1 Parl. Deb., 3rd Ser. v. 1237.
nation's precious electoral system by a 'doubtful experiment' which 'did not promise one single advantage in return for the sweeping changes which it would effect in the condition of all classes in the community'. He feared the Bill would 'lay the ground of differences, and open the door to discussions, which would be endless'; and was anxious not to diminish further the weight of the agricultural lobby.¹ Later, on 26 July, Dering suggested that the boundaries of New Romney should be extended to include Lydd and Old Romney, and with the help of the 1821 census, demonstrated that the number of inhabitants would be increased from 967 to 2,573. On this basis, the borough had as good a claim to be in Schedule B as did nearby Sandwich.²

Sir John Brydges approved the idea as a way of balancing the added influence given by the Bill to the commercial interest; T.L. Hodges felt confident that the people of Romney 'were likely to form a set of as independent electors as any in the kingdom'; and Dering assured the House that since he owned no property in Lydd, there would be no increase in his powers of nomination.³ Other M.P.s were not so easily impressed. Colonel Evans rejected the comparison with Sandwich:

...the town of Sandwich was a flourishing and increasing port, with a good harbour, and which, together with Deal, was likely to rise into importance; whereas New Romney and Old Romney were not likely to rise above their present condition, there being no port to increase their trade.⁴

Lord John Russell was of a similar opinion⁵, and was not to be moved from his Government's initial decision.⁶

Reflecting on the election of Grant and Capel ahead of the 'staunch reformer' Captain Dundas, the Kent Herald described conditions in 'the insignificant fishing village of Queenborough', where 'the poor oyster-catchers are too much engrossed by the

⁴ Parl. Deb., 3rd Ser. v. 736.
⁶ Lords Jour., lxiii. 1024 contains New Romney's petition.
pressing necessity of procuring daily food to have leisure for the discussion of abstract political rights'. The eclipse of the ministerial interest had certainly not resulted in any wholesale conversion to reform, but awareness of national events in the borough was not as blinkered as the radical press seems to have imagined, and it was felt locally that recent progress had been sufficient to warrant a sympathetic review of its future status. In the Commons on 26 July, John Capel asserted that Queenborough was:

neither a nomination nor a rotten borough, it contained 300 freemen, who, after a hard struggle of seven years, had worked out their political independence. He and his colleague had been sent to the House as free and independent as any Member.

Sir J. Grant agreed:

That borough had certainly formerly been much under the influence of the Hon. Board of Ordnance, but it had returned Members to the last three Parliaments entirely independent of the influence of that Board. Prior to the last election he had received an invitation to come forward, accompanied by a pledge that he would be returned without expense to himself. He had accepted the invitation, and although strongly opposed to his Majesty's Government, he had been elected by a triumphant majority.

But these improvements were deemed too little and too late to allow Queenborough to cheat the gallows under which it stood.

Under the terms of the first Bill, two of the other Kentish boroughs were destined by Schedule B to forfeit one of their representatives. The freemen of Hythe made no effort to escape the rigours of Russell's measure, and on 30 September even petitioned the Lords to pass the Bill. Considerable disagreement did, however, arise in the case of Sandwich, and was intensified when the second draft of the whig plan sought to combine the borough with Deal and Walmer in a new two-Member constituency. Joseph Warryat spoke up in support of the clause on 9 August, only to be instantly opposed by Sir Charles Wetherell who claimed that the inhabitants of

1 See Kent Herald, 12 and 10 May, 1831.
3 Parl. Deb., 3rd Ser. v. 334.
4 Lords. Jour., lxiii. 1024 contains Queenborough's petition.
Sandwich would prefer to unite with Margate and Ramsgate. There were evidently many Sandwich out-voters resident in the Isle of Thanet, but for ministers, economic factors were all important, and in this respect Deal with its flourishing maritime connections was the obvious choice.

In addition to removing the dead and decaying branches of the Constitution, the Whigs were well aware of the need to extend electoral recognition to those areas whose wealth and population had grown rapidly in recent years. The division of the county and the enfranchisement of Deal were prompted by this desire, and in all three Bills it was proposed to give two seats to Greenwich and surrounding districts in the north-west of Kent. Government's greatest difficulty in this sphere was posed by Chatham, which in the first and second drafts it proposed to incorporate with Rochester. Dissatisfaction was immediately voiced from all sides. On 9 August 1831, John Mills asserted in the Commons that Rochester's 1,069 £10 houses and population of 9,890 were quite sufficient to enable the city to stand by itself. He was not averse to a junction with Strood, but felt Chatham, with its 16,000 inhabitants and 1,506 £10 houses, would totally overwhelm and effectively disfranchise the thousand-strong electorate of the old constituency. From the Tory benches, Lord Villiers reminded the House that many differences in outlook and interest divided the ancient and privileged city, with its corporation and cathedral, from the dockyards and military depot of Chatham; and under such concerted pressure Lord Althorp could only counter that local boundaries were obscure and that the amalgamation advocated in the Bill might go some way towards reducing undue influence at election-time.

Opinion outside Parliament was similarly split, and in their third Bill of 12 December 1831, ministers announced their revised

1 Parl. Deb., 3rd Ser. v. 1092.
2 Lords Jour., lxiii. 996.
intention to create a separate single-Member borough at Chatham. Mr. Ashley welcomed the scheme at a meeting of the inhabitants of Chatham on 17 January 1832, because he conceived that the divergent aspirations of the two neighbouring communities would have been hard to reconcile. To Ashley, 'to say that they would be a corrupt borough was to send them into quarantine before they had the cholera amongst them'; and was convinced that at least some of the 600 to 700 new voters would be independent men. Mr. Dadd, on the other hand, regretted the alteration, since he believed neither Chatham nor a Rochester stripped of its non-residents would be strong enough to resist outside influence, especially when it was wielded by a statesman less liberal-minded than Lord Grey.

Fears were also expressed that the expense of setting up a corporation at Chatham would add greatly to the financial burden of the inhabitants, but, despite the almost unanimous demands of the Sun Tavern meeting, Government was not again prepared to reconsider.

VI

While Parliament settled down to a long summer of discussion and wrangling over the details of the Whigs' Bill, Kentishmen could do little but follow events in the press, and occasionally spur on their representatives with petitions. In the immediate aftermath of the 1831 election, the dominant mood was one of optimism and heady expectation, since, as the Maidstone Gazette declared: 'Now that the sense of the people has been so unequivocally expressed, further resistance to the measure may be looked upon as utterly hopeless'. Men everywhere rejoiced at the glorious victories won at Dover and Sandwich, and at a dinner given in honour of Rider and Hodges at Rochester on 8 June, Lord Sondes looked forward to the day when a reformed Legislature would cast an enlightened eye upon the criminal code and the game laws.

1 Maidstone Journal, 24 Jan. 1832.
2 Maidstone Gazette, 10 May 1831.
3 Kentish Chronicle, 24 June 1831.
But this intensity of feeling could not be sustained throughout the tedious months when the bill seemed becalmed in a sea of minutiae. The unceasing war of words carried on between 'VINDEX' in the Kentish Chronicle and 'QUIRIUS CURRIUS' in the Kentish Gazette drew upon fresh reserves of bitterness and acrimony, and the pro-reform press in general abounded with denunciations of tory gentlemen and clergy. To frustration and anger at the delay was added the fear that the enemies of reform were stealthily regrouping. A number of petitions hostile to Government were successfully canvassed, and the Rev. G. R. Gleig, Rector of Ivychurch, was employed by Wellington to entice Sir Edward Knatchbull out of his premature retirement. Late in August, 467 Kentish Tories sat down to a banquet at Sittingbourne, and when the cloth had been removed, the company heard anti-reform speeches from Lord Mahon, the Earl of Winchilsea, Mr. Grove Price, and Knatchbull himself, who, having reiterated his criticisms and alarms, said enough to suggest that at the right moment he might again stand before the electors of Kent.

As tension mounted, it became daily more apparent that everything hinged on the House of Lords' interpretation of the temper of the country. Sir Charles Wetherell and T. L. Hodges crossed swords on this sensitive point when debating the union of Rochester and Chatham, and it was clearly uppermost in the minds of freeholders at a county meeting at Maidstone on 30 September. Despite stiff opposition from Lord Mahon and George Gipps, the assembly voted a petition, which, together with similar prayers from Cranbrook, Sandwich, Folkestone, Chatham, Dover, Gravesend and Milton, Dartford and Crayford, Lewisham and many other places, was presented to the Lords to urge its acceptance of the Bill. Nevertheless, at six

1 See, for example, Kentish Chronicle, 17 May 1831.
2 Maidstone Gazette, 31 Aug. 1831.
3 Parl. Deb., 3rd Ser. v. 1070-1.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 4 Oct. 1831.
5 Lords Jour., lxiii. 1034, 1035, 1036, 1037, 1040, 1026 and 1067.
o'clock on the morning of 8 October, Government was defeated at the end of the second reading debate, and three days later 'VINDEX' wrote in the Kentish Chronicle:

The Bill has been thrown out by a majority of 41 votes! It was right, however, to give them an opportunity of passing judgment on the question - now we see how the land lies! When the House of Lords stands out against the King and the Nation, the remedy is a fresh creation. Lord Grey will manfully stand by the ship whilst there is any hope! Thousands of petitions will soon be in preparation to his majesty - and every Englishman will take care to record his name in support of the rights and privileges of his country.

It was some months before William IV could be brought to consent to so drastic a step, and in the meantime the reform crisis entered its most extreme phase. Petitioning was endemic among the inhabitants of Kent, and one correspondent in the Kent Herald warned ministers not to purchase tranquillity at the expense of popular rights. He referred menacingly to the 'titled and mitred pests' and trusted that 'the annihilation of peers as an hereditary body, in an enlightened Country like France, will, no doubt, have due effect upon the insolent Boroughmongers of England'. Bishops were burned in effigy at Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Canterbury; riots were feared when Wellington held the Warden's sessions at Dover; and the Kent Herald told its readers that 'the natural indignation of an insulted, outraged people can with difficulty be restrained within the limits of orderly and peaceful deportment'. The scenes of tumult and destruction at Bristol cast an awesome shadow across national politics, and the Kent Herald believed that peace could only be restored by 'a prompt declaration of ministerial intent'.

While the nation waited for some statement, the more radical among the reformers were turning their attention, as Tories like Knatchbull and Dering had predicted, to other long-established institutions. At Canterbury, for example, it was decided to challenge the privileges of the corporation, and Mr. Keen was appointed to propose at a Court of Burghmote that all the freemen should

---

participate in the election of aldermen. On 27 October the Kent Herald noted confidently:

As the majority of the members have publicly declared themselves in favour of the Parliamentary Reform Bill, and as the civic question stands on precisely the same grounds, we cannot anticipate any other than a successful result.

A week later a petition to Burghmote was about to be circulated, and the same paper hinted darkly that the Bristol riots had been inspired partly by corruption in local administration. Disillusionment followed swiftly, since Keen's motion could only attract two votes in the Court, despite being backed by the signatures of 125 freemen. But if the tussle for municipal accountability was temporarily over, the Kent Herald announced defiantly on 17 November: 'We shall take all fitting opportunities of reverting to this subject. It must not be lost sight of.'

Parliament finally re-assembled on 6 December, and on the 12th a third scheme of reform was unveiled. Early in 1832, 'VINDEX' wrote in the Kentish Chronicle:

This great measure engrosses all the attention of all ranks in the country - men's hearts are fixed upon it - and to such an extreme are we arrived, that it is much to be doubted whether between reform and universal convulsion, any thing in the shape of an alternative could be discerned by the most sanguine and anxious well-wisher of the constitution.

'VINDEX' asserted that the Tories could not possibly justify the preservation of the old system, which had inflated the National Debt and rendered intolerable the condition of the labourers and the Irish; while to 'SCRUTATOR' the Opposition was composed of 'things-as-they-were men, corruptionists, worshippers of venerable and venerated abuses, idolators of boroughism, et hoc omne genus'. Towards the end of January the slow progress of the Bill led the Kent Herald to urge ministers to act with 'alacrity and resolution'.

1 Kent Herald, 27 Oct. 1831.
2 Kent Herald, 3 and 10 Nov. 1831.
3 Kent Herald, 17 Nov. 1831.
4 Kentish Chronicle, 17 Jan. 1832.
5 Kentish Chronicle, 10 Jan. 1832.
6 Kent Herald, 26 Jan. 1832.
and by the middle of February 'SCRUTATOR' was speculating that the measure might again be lost. The public had formerly borne their disappointment with 'fortitude', but now circumstances had entirely altered:

> Does Lord Grey really imagine that a second rejection of the bill will be received by the people with calmness and placid resignation? I hope it may - but is there a man in the kingdom credulous enough to think it will?

One manifestation of the country's impatience was the formation of political unions on the Birmingham model. In November 1831 the *Kent Herald* could discover no advantage to the reform cause from these middle-class and rather conservative bodies, but by the spring of 1832, a vacillating Government and an impending clash with the tory peers had worked something of a transformation. On 9 May a meeting at the King's Head, Canterbury, agreed to establish the 'Reform Union of Canterbury and its Vicinity', 'for the purpose of promoting by all constitutional means, the success of the great question of Parliamentary Reform'. The Union seems to have been well supported in north-east Kent, and no doubt did much to focus the public outcry which greeted the King's refusal to create fifty peers and his acceptance of Grey's resignation. On 17 May the *Kent Herald* voiced its belief that Wellington would be unable to piece together a credible administration, but nevertheless counselled its readers to keep the machinery of agitation in a state of readiness. If the 'English Polignac' should succeed, the nation should initially adopt 'passive resistance':

> ...by allowing the law to take its course in restraining their goods for taxes - they will abstain from the purchase of all exciseable articles - they will pay no Tithes, no rents to anti reform parsons and landowners - they will change all their bank-notes and deposits for Gold.

But even these contingencies were never put to the test. The King was eventually compelled by Wellington's failure to consent

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to the Whigs' demands, and thereafter the tory peers offered no further opposition. On 7 June the Kent Herald acclaimed the success of the long campaign:

**VICTORY!**

THE BILL IS PASSED! - In these few words what a bulletin of triumph is contained! What a moment of moral and political victory over an inveterate and long preponderating enemy. Thus has the popular will established its due supremacy over a selfish and bigoted usurpation.

Reform had come a long way and endured many hardships since 1768, and it would never again be possible to neglect public opinion as a principal factor in county or national politics. In the space of just sixty years, the centuries-old structure of Kentish society had crumbled away and been replaced by a new consciousness of realities and potentialities in a rapidly changing world. In 1832, Kentishmen had achieved that which their fathers and grandfathers had only dreamed of doing, but as 'VINDEX' soberly recognised in the midst of all the jubilation: 'The benefits of the bill, the gold in the mine, must now be worked out'.

---

1 Kent Herald, 7 June 1832.
2 Kentish Chronicle, 5 June 1832.
Appendices
Appendix 1

Membership of the Committee of the County of Kent


At the Assizes on 24 July 1779:

Duke of Dorset
W. Steade
Hon. Charles Marsham
Thomas Knight jnr.
William Evelyn
Sir Horace Mann
Sir John Filmer
James Best
Sir William Fagg
Sir Richard Betenson
Richard Hulfe
William Deedes
Sir Roger Twisden
Rev. J. Milner
Henry Hawley

J. Whatman
I. Bartholomew
Rev. J. Lynch
Rev. T. S. Courteis
Rev. John Taylor
George Bishop
Charles Booth
John Sawbridge
John Cole
Rev. Richard Styles
P. M. Austen
Rev. E. Marshall
A. H. Shove
F. Austen

Lord Romney
Absent from meeting, but members of the Grand Jury.

Thomas Knight snr.
Hon. F. Bouverie

Other leading Kentishmen who also subscribed:

Sir Charles Farnaby
John Toke
Lord George Germain
Sir Edward Dering
Hon. Robert Fairfax
Thomas Best
Lewis Cage
Henry Champney
John Coke
The Archbishop of Canterbury
Earl of Guilford
Thomas Heron
Rev. Ralph Drake Brockman
Hon. John Cornwallis, Dean of Canterbury
Thomas Barrett
James Lynch
Charles Pyott
Robert Kirk
Rev. Philip Breton
Stephen Richards
Thomas Hooker

Henry Whitfield
John Nash
Rev. Mr. Mansty
Earl of Darnley
Bonham Hayes
Joseph Brooke
Richard Hayes
John Market
George Smith
Edward Richer
Lord Sondes
Hon. Lewis Watson
Lord Conyngham
Richard Milles
Rev. Edmund Latter
Henry Woodgate
Rev. Henry Austen
Rev. Mr. R. Gunsley Ayersh
J. Baker
Stephen Beckingham
Sir Richard Betenson
Thomas Slackman

b) List of the original 100 members of the Kent Committee. Stanhope MSS. U4590/253: 'Resolves of the Committee of the County of Kent', f. 3.

Lord Abergavenny
Viscount Althorp
John Amherst
Stephen Amherst
George Arnold

Rev. Mr. R. Gunsley Ayersh
J. Baker
Stephen Beckingham
Sir Richard Betenson
Thomas Slackman
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Barritt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicholas Bourne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hon. W. H. Bouverie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Mr. Ralph Drake Brockman</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Bunse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lord Camden</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Carter</td>
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<td>Earl of Chatham</td>
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<td>Sir Robert Clayton</td>
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<td>Robert Cobb</td>
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<td>Thomas Wenman Coke</td>
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<td>Thomas Coventry</td>
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<td>Brass Crosby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Harborough D'Aeth</td>
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<td>William Dalison</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Francis Dodsworth</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Frederick Dodsworth</td>
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<td>Richard Duppa</td>
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<td>Edward Eliot</td>
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<td>Edward James Eliot</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. John Fermor</td>
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<td>Savile Finch</td>
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<td>John Frost</td>
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<td>Mr. Gee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Mr. Maurice Gleyre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Goring</td>
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<td>N. Haddock</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Hardy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Hilton</td>
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<td>Sir John Honywood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filmer Honywood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip Honywood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Hougham</td>
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<tr>
<td>William James</td>
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<td>Mr. Richard James</td>
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<td>Rev. Demetrius James</td>
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<td>James Lucas</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Lushington</td>
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<td>H. Lyell</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Edmund Marshall</td>
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<td>Daniel Master</td>
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<td>Dr. Thomas Milner</td>
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<td>George Morland</td>
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<td>Sir Henry Oxenden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry Oxenden</td>
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<td>Edward Peach</td>
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<td>Alured Ancke</td>
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<td>Mr. Plumer</td>
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<td>John Plumtre</td>
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<td>G. Polhill</td>
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<td>Nathaniel Polhill</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Joseph Pole</td>
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<td>Hon. John J. Pratt</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Pratt</td>
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<td>Rev. Mr. Samuel Preston</td>
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<td>J. Radcliffe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earl of Radnor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Thomas Rider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Robinson</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. Robinson Morris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Mr. William Robinson</td>
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<td>Hon. E. Roper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Richard Rycroft</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Sargent</td>
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<td>John Sawbridge</td>
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<td>William Saxby</td>
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<td>Thomas Scott</td>
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<td>Alured Henry Shove</td>
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<td>Sir Robert Smith</td>
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<td>Earl Spencer</td>
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<td>Earl Stanhope</td>
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<td>Oliver Stephens</td>
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<td>Henry Streatfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Streatfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clement Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Tempeth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earl of Thanet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Toke</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Toke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. Mr. Thomas Tourney</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rt. Hon. Thomas Townshend</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Trescothick</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Warde</td>
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<tr>
<td>Godfrey Webster</td>
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<td>Viscount Wenman</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Wills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir George Young</td>
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</table>
Appendix 2

Kentish Knights of the Shire, 1768-1832

Additional biographical material and references relating to the thirteen Kentish Knights of the Shire may be found in G. P. Judd, Members of Parliament, 1734-1832 (New Haven, 1955) and J. Cave-Brown, 'Knights of the Shire for Kent from A.D. 1275 to A.D. 1831', A.C., xxi. (1895), 198-243.


Honeywood, Filmer (c.1745-1809), of Monks Hall, Essex, and Hall Place, Kent. M.P. Steyning 1774-80, Kent 1780-96, 1802-6. See Namier and Brooke, ii. 635.


Rider, Thomas (1765-1845) of Boughton Place, Kent. M.P. Kent 1831-32, West Kent 1832-34.

Appendix 3

Kentish Elections, 1768-1832

This appendix is based upon the returns and polling figures quoted in Sir L. B. Namier and J. Brooke, The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-1790 (London, 1964), H. S. Smith, The Parliaments of England from 1st George I, to the present time (London, 1844-50), and Parliamentary Papers 1878 lxii. (69): 'Members of Parliament; with such amendments as are suggested by contemporary newspapers and poll-books.

Canterbury

17 Mar. 1768

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Lynch</td>
<td>787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Milles</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Maguire</td>
<td>585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Best</td>
<td>544</td>
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</table>

7 Oct. 1774

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Milles</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir William Mayne</td>
<td>761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir William Lynch</td>
<td>438</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Philip Hales</td>
<td>177</td>
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</table>

6 Sept. 1780

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Gipps</td>
<td>634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Robinson</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Mayne, Baron Newhaven</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Henry Watkin Dashwood</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Lade</td>
<td>28</td>
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</table>

30 Mar. 1784

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Gipps</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Robinson</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Trotter</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Wynch</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Sheriff refused to accept votes for Trotter and Wynch as they would not swear to their qualifications.

19 June 1790

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Gipps</td>
<td>809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Honywood</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil William Douglas, Viscount Daer</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Lewis Thomas Watson</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 May 1796

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Baker</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Elias Sawbridge</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Gipps</td>
<td>739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Honywood</td>
<td>716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10 Mar. 1797

John Baker 435
Samuel Elias Sawbridge 470
Sir John Honywood 195
George Gipps 185

re-elected, after the previous election had been declared void, Gipps and Honywood were then seated, after Baker and Sawbridge had been adjudged ineligible to stand.

27 Feb. 1800

Hon. George Watson 572
Joseph Royle 248

vice Gipps, deceased.

5 July 1802

Hon. George Watson
John Baker

29 Oct. 1806

John Baker
James Simmons

2 Feb. 1807

Samuel Elias Sawbridge

vice Simmons, deceased.

12 May 1807

John Baker 901
Edward Taylor 826
Stephen Rumbold Lushington 673
Robert Townshend Farquhar 503

9 Oct. 1812

Stephen Rumbold Lushington 1025
John Baker 517
Edward Taylor 329

19 June 1818

Stephen Rumbold Lushington 990
Edward Bligh, Viscount Clifton 861
John Baker 655
Joseph Royle 8
Edward Taylor 4

8 Mar. 1820

Stephen Rumbold Lushington 601
Edward Bligh, Viscount Clifton 566
Robert Foote 86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 June 1826</td>
<td>Stephen Rumbold Lushington 665, Edward Bligh, Viscount Clifton 435,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hon. Richard Watson 107</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 July 1830</td>
<td>Hon. Richard Watson 1334, George Cowper, Viscount Fordwich 1101, Henry</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baring 731, Samuel Elias Sawbridge 8, Hon. J. G. Milles 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Apr. 1831</td>
<td>Hon. Richard Watson, George Cowper, Viscount Fordwich</td>
</tr>
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**Dover**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>18 Mar. 1768</td>
<td>Sir Joseph Yorke 446, George Bussy Villiers, Viscount Villiers 339,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hughues Minet 189</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Jan. 1770</td>
<td>Sir Thomas Pym Hales 483, John Trevanion 456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>vice</strong> Villiers, on his accession to the Lords as Earl of Jersey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Apr. 1773</td>
<td>Thomas Barrett 524, John Trevanion 385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>vice</strong> Hales, deceased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Oct. 1774</td>
<td>John Henniker, John Trevanion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Sept. 1780</td>
<td>John Henniker, John Trevanion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Apr. 1784</td>
<td>Robert Preston 571, James Luttrell 529, John Trevanion 248, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bazeley 180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14 Jan. 1789
John Trevanion 511
Charles Small Pybus 454

*vice* Luttrell, deceased.

9 June 1790
Charles Small Pybus 883
John Trevanion 532
William Bentinck 497
John Henniker 292

17 June 1791
Charles Small Pybus

re-elected, after accepting office.

28 May 1796
Charles Small Pybus 425
John Trevanion 283
Nicholas Bayley 192

27 July 1797
Charles Small Pybus 291
Richard Heaton Sully 110

re-elected, after accepting office.

9 July 1802
John Trevanion 666
John Spencer Smith 584
William Huskisson 466

6 Nov. 1806
Charles Jenkinson 789
John Jackson 789
John Trevanion 744

12 May 1807
Charles Jenkinson 872
John Jackson 628
Hon. Henry Manvers Pierrepont 622

6 Oct. 1812
Charles Jenkinson
John Jackson

17 June 1818
Edward Bootle Wilbraham 510
Sir John Jackson 505
R. B. Robson 256
6 Mar. 1820

Edward Bootle Wilbraham
Joseph Butterworth

19 June 1826

Edward Bootle Wilbraham 1175
Charles Poulett Thomson 746
John Halcomb 628
Joseph Butterworth 198
George Finch 13
Michael Kingsford 8

11 Feb. 1828

William Henry Trant 738
John Halcomb 633

vice Wilbraham, on his accession to the Lords as Baron Skelmersdale.

5 Aug. 1830

Sir John Rae Reid 975
Charles Poulett Thomson 974
John Halcomb 730

29 Nov. 1830

Charles Poulett Thomson

re-elected, after accepting office.

28 Apr. 1831

Charles Poulett Thomson
James Stanhope

Hythe

16 Mar. 1768

John Sawbridge 59
William Evelyn 53
Lord George Sackville 11
Sir Charles Farnaby 11

7 Oct. 1774

Sir Charles Farnaby 66
William Evelyn 59
John Sawbridge 38

9 Sept. 1780

Sir Charles Farnaby 62
William Evelyn 61
John Stevenson 44
Richard James 42
1 Apr. 1784
Sir Charles Farnaby  61
William Evelyn  56
John Sawbridge  38

17 June 1790
William Evelyn
Sir Charles Farnaby Radcliffe

25 May 1796
William Evelyn
Sir Charles Farnaby Radcliffe

7 Nov. 1798
Hon. Charles Marsham

vice Farnaby Radcliffe, deceased.

5 July 1802
Matthew White  104
Thomas Godfrey  92
Charles Marsham, Viscount Marsham  90
Alexander Evelyn  71

31 Oct. 1806
Charles Marsham, Viscount Marsham  149
Thomas Godfrey  90
Matthew White  62

7 May 1807
Thomas Godfrey  109
William Deedes  104
Matthew White  93
Thomas Plummer  66

19 Mar. 1810
Sir John Pering  90
John William Head Bridges  51
William Bask  49

vice Godfrey, deceased.

7 Oct. 1812
Sir John Pering  158
Matthew White  123
Thomas Plummer  68

19 June 1818
John Sladen Taylor  167
Sir John Pering  116
Sir John Courtenay Honywood  45
Matthew White  22
20 May 1819

Samuel Jones Lloyd 159
Sir John Courtenay Honywood 90

vice Taylor, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.

8 Mar. 1820

Samuel Jones Lloyd
Stewart Marjoribanks

9 June 1826

Stewart Marjoribanks
Sir Robert Townshend Farquhar

26 Mar. 1830

John Loch

vice Farquhar, deceased.

3 Aug. 1830

Stewart Marjoribanks 270
John Loch 270
Fitzroy Kelly 8
William Frazer 8

29 Apr. 1831

Stewart Marjoribanks
John Loch

Kent

30 Mar. 1768

Sir Brook Bridges
John Frederick Sackville

15 Feb. 1769

Sir Charles Farnaby

vice Sackville, on his accession to the Lords as Duke of Dorset.

13 Sept. 1774

Hon. Charles Marsham
Thomas Knight

13 Oct. 1780

Hon. Charles Marsham
Filmer Honywood

21 Apr. 1784

Hon. Charles Marsham
Filmer Honywood
30 June 1790

Sir Edward Knatchbull 4196
Filmer Honywood 2957
Hon. Charles Marsham 2663

16 June 1796

Sir Edward Knatchbull 5202
Sir William Geary 4418
Filmer Honywood 4280

13 July 1802

Filmer Honywood 4763
Sir William Geary 4085
Sir Edward Knatchbull 3933

11 Nov. 1806

William Honywood 1854
Sir Edward Knatchbull 1852
Sir William Geary 826

13 May 1807

Sir Edward Knatchbull
William Honywood

13 Oct. 1812

Sir Edward Knatchbull
Sir William Geary

27 June 1818

Sir Edward Knatchbull 3417
William Philip Honywood 2097
Sir William Geary 934

16 Nov. 1819

Sir Edward Knatchbull

vice Knatchbull, deceased.

18 Mar. 1820

Sir Edward Knatchbull
William Philip Honywood

20 June 1826

Sir Edward Knatchbull
William Philip Honywood

9 Aug. 1830

Sir Edward Knatchbull
Thomas Law Hodges

11 May 1831

Thomas Law Hodges
Thomas Rider
Maidstone

18 Mar. 1768
Hon. Charles Marsham 697
Robert Gregory 433
Arthur Annesley 331

8 Oct. 1774
Sir Horace Mann 541
Heneage Finch, Viscount Guernsey 456
Robert Gregory 225

16 May 1777
Hon. Charles Finch 235
Charles Stanhope, Viscount Mahon 28

vice Guernsey, on his accession to the Lords as Earl of Aylesford.

8 Sept. 1780
Sir Horace Mann 558
Clement Taylor 399
Hon. Charles Finch 362

2 Apr. 1784
Clement Taylor 406
Gerard Edwards 393
William Geary 324

14 July 1788
Matthew Bloxam 328
George Byng 307

vice Edwards, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.

22 June 1790
Matthew Bloxam 419
Clement Taylor 419
Robert Parker 158

27 May 1796
Oliver De Lancey 415
Matthew Bloxam 328
Christopher Hull 281

8 July 1802
John Hodson Durrand 414
Sir Matthew Bloxam 381
Hon. John Henniker Major 319
9 Nov. 1806
George Simson 391
George Longman 368
Sir Matthew Bloxam 320

9 May 1807
George Simson 396
George Longman 374
Sir William Geary 332

8 Oct. 1812
George Simson 389
Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges 389
George Longman 211

17 June 1818
George Longman 233
Abraham W. Robarts 225
John Wells 162

9 Mar. 1820
Abraham W. Robarts 287
John Wells 250
Richard Sharp 236

10 June 1826
John Wells 375
Abraham W. Robarts 357
Windham Lewis 105

30 July 1830
Abraham W. Robarts 470
Henry Winchester 386
Philip Rawlings 156
W.G.T.D. Tyssen 6

3 May 1831
Abraham W. Robarts 478
Charles James Barrett 441
Henry Winchester 195
George Simson 150

New Romney

18 Mar. 1768
Sir Edward Dering
Richard Jackson

5 Mar. 1770
John Morton

vice Dering, who accepted the Stewardship of
the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.
7 Oct. 1774
Sir Edward Dering
Richard Jackson

12 Sept. 1780
Sir Edward Dering
Richard Jackson

8 July 1782
Richard Jackson

re-elected, after accepting office.

12 Apr. 1784
Sir Edward Dering
John Smith

14 June 1784
Richard Atkinson

vice Smith, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.

7 June 1785
John Henniker

vice Atkinson, deceased.

29 Jan. 1787
Richard Joseph Sullivan

vice Dering, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of East Hendred.

19 June 1790
Richard Joseph Sullivan
Sir Elijah Impey

27 May 1796
John Fordice
John Willett Willett

9 July 1802
John Willett Willett
Manaseh Lopes

4 Nov. 1806
William Windham
John Pering

7 May 1807
Thomas Scott, Earl of Clonmel
Hon. George Ashburnham
8 Oct. 1812
Sir John Thomas Duckworth
William Mitford

12 Feb. 1813
Sir John Thomas Duckworth
re-elected, after accepting office.

5 Feb. 1817
Cholmeley Dering
vice Duckworth, deceased.

18 June 1818
Richard Erie Drax Grosvenor
Andrew Straham

22 Feb. 1819
Richard Edward Erie Drax Grosvenor
vice Erie Drax Grosvenor, deceased.

8 Mar. 1820
Richard Edward Erie Drax Grosvenor
George May Dawkins Pennant

9 June 1826
George May Dawkins Pennant
William Tapps-Gervis

5 Aug. 1830
Hon. Arthur Hill-Trevor
William Miles
Sir Loftus Otway
Sir George Westphal

The Returning Officer refused to accept votes for Otway and Westphal.

9 Mar. 1831
Sir Richard Gresley
vice Hill-Trevor, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.

29 Apr. 1831
William Miles
Sir Edward Cholmeley Dering
Queenborough
16 Mar. 1768
Sir Charles Frederick
Sir Piercy Brett

7 Oct. 1774
Sir Charles Frederick
Sir Walter Rawlinson
Sir Piercy Brett

8 Sept. 1780
Sir Charles Frederick
Sir Walter Rawlinson

31 Mar. 1784
John Clater Aldridge
George Bowyer
Sir Hyde Parker
Robert Mackey

19 June 1790
Richard Hopkins
Gibbs Crawford
George Grant
William Popham

17 June 1791
Richard Hopkins
re-elected, after accepting office.

3 Dec. 1793
Augustus Rogers
vice Crawford, deceased.

15 Feb. 1794
John Sargent
vice Rogers, who accepted office.

27 May 1796
Evan Napean
John Sargent

5 July 1802
John Princep
George Peter Moore
John Sargent
Admiral Payne
21 Mar. 1806
Sir Samuel Romilly

vice Moore, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of East Hendred.

29 Oct. 1806
Sir Samuel Romilly
William Frankland

7 May 1807
Hon. John Charles Villiers
Joseph Hunt
J. P. Chichester

1 June 1810
Richard Wellesley

vice Hunt, who was expelled from the House of Commons.

15 Jan. 1812
Robert Moorson

vice Wellesley who accepted office.

7 Oct. 1812
Robert Moorson
John Osborn

17 June 1818
Sir Robert Moorson
Hon. Edmund Phipps

8 Mar. 1820
Hon. John Charles Villiers
George Peter Holford

22 Mar. 1824
Frederick Cavendish-Bentinck

vice Villiers, on his accession to the Lords as Earl of Clarendon.

10 June 1826
Ulysses De Burgh, Baron Downes
John Capel
Frederick Cavendish-Bentinck
2 Aug. 1830

William Holmes 138
Sir P.C.C.H. Durham 130
John Capel 130
Thomas Gladstone 123

Holmes eventually chose to sit for Haslemere, and Durham's election was declared void. Capel and Gladstone were thus returned.

2 May 1831

John Capel 124
Sir John Colquhoun Grant 121
J.W.D. Dundas 83

Rochester

16 Mar. 1768

John Calcraft 313
William Gordon 308
Francis Geary 292

9 Mar. 1771

Thomas Pye 293
Richard Smith 154

vice Gordon, who accepted the Stewardship of the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.

18 Sept. 1772

George Finch Hatton 329
Nathaniel Smith 253

vice Calcraft, deceased.

7 Oct. 1774

Robert Gregory 350
George Finch Hatton 293
Thomas Pye 252

9 Sept. 1780

George Finch Hatton 331
Robert Gregory 319
Nathaniel Smith 281

1 Apr. 1784

Sir Charles Middleton 70
Nathaniel Smith 61
George Finch Hatton 44
19 June 1790
George Best 367
Sir Richard Bickerton 322
William Henry Cavendish-Scott-Bentinck, Marquis of Litchfield 243

7 Mar. 1792
Nathaniel Smith 299
Sir Richard King 253
vice Bickerton, deceased.

12 May 1794
Sir Richard King
vice Smith, deceased.

27 May 1796
Sir Richard King 286
Hon. Henry Tufton 186
George Best 77
John Longley 30

5 July 1802
Sir William Sidney Smith 423
James Hulkes 417
George Smith 45
James Eoper Head 10

8 Nov. 1806
John Calcraft 575
James Barnett 393
Sir William Sidney Smith 382

8 May 1807
Sir Thomas Boulden Thompson 382
John Calcraft 362
Sir Thomas Trigge 308

7 Oct. 1812
Sir Thomas Boulden Thompson
John Calcraft

27 June 1816
James Barnett 408
Sir Thomas Boulden Thompson 406
vice Thompson, who accepted office.

6 Mar. 1817
James Barnett
re-elected after the previous election had been declared void.
20 June 1818

James Barnett 401
Thomas Hamilton, Viscount Binning 380
Robert Torrens 173

6 Mar. 1820

Thomas Hamilton, Viscount Binning
Ralph Bernal

17 June 1826

Hon. Henry Dundas 674
Ralph Bernal 354
W. Armstrong 311

4 Aug. 1830

Ralph Bernal 429
George Child-Villiers, Viscount Villiers 417
John Mills 339

3 Apr. 1831

Ralph Bernal
John Mills

Sandwich

16 Mar. 1768

Henry Conyngham, Viscount Conyngham
Philip Stephens

6 Oct. 1774

Philip Stephens 516
William Hey 455
Henry Conyngham, Viscount Conyngham 68

25 Nov. 1776

Charles Brett

vice Hey, who accepted office.

11 Sept. 1780

Philip Stephens 477
Sir Richard Sutton 366
Charles Brett 302

1 Apr. 1784

Philip Stephens
Charles Brett

17 June 1790

Philip Stephens 474
Sir Horace Mann 311
George Parker, Viscount Parker 290
13 Mar. 1795
Sir Philip Stephens
re-elected, after accepting office.

25 May 1796
Sir Philip Stephens
Sir Horace Mann

8 July 1802
Sir Philip Stephens
Sir Horace Mann

3 Nov. 1806
Sir Horace Mann
Thomas Freemantle

8 May 1807
Peter Rainier 171
Hon. Charles Cecil Cope Jenkinson 153
Sir Horace Mann 149

22 Apr. 1808
John Spratt Rainier 336
Charles Morgan 132

vice Rainier, deceased.

7 Oct. 1812
Joseph Marryat
Sir Joseph Sydney Yorke

18 June 1818
Joseph Marryat
Sir George Warrender

7 Mar. 1820
Joseph Marryat
Sir George Warrender

10 Feb. 1824
Henry Bonham

vice Marryat, deceased.

10 June 1826
Joseph Marryat
Sir Edward Owen

16 May 1827
Sir Edward Owen

re-elected, after accepting office.
14 Mar. 1828

Sir Edward Owen

re-elected, after accepting office.

30 Mar. 1829

Sir Henry Fane

vice Owen, who accepted the Stewardship of
the Manor of the Chiltern Hundreds.

31 July 1830

Joseph Marryat
Samuel Grove Price

4 May 1831

Joseph Marryat 498
Sir Edward Thomas Trowbridge 397
Samuel Grove Price 297
Bibliography
Contents

**Primary Sources**

A. Manuscripts

B. Borough Manuscripts

C. Historical Manuscripts Commission

D. Collections of Documents in Print

E. Newspapers

F. Poll-books - printed and in manuscript

G. Parliamentary Journals and Debates

H. Parliamentary Papers

**Secondary Sources**

A. Reference Books and Bibliographies

B. General History

C. General History - Collections of Articles and Essays

D. General History - Articles

E. Kentish and Other Provincial Studies

F. Kentish and Other Provincial Studies - Pamphlets

G. Kentish and Other Provincial Studies - Articles
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Honywood MSS. (U221)
Knatchbull MSS. (U951)
Marsham and Romney MSS. (U1300 U1515 U1644)
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Corporation records of Hythe

HMC. Fourth Report

Catalogue of Documents belonging to the Corporation of Hythe 11th to 20th Century. Also Churchwardens Accounts 1840 and subsequently

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HMC. Fourth Report


Corporation records of Queenborough


Corporation records of Sandwich

HMC. Fifth Report

The Guildhall Museum, Rochester

Corporation records of Rochester

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   29 Dec. 1744/2 Jan. 1745 - 16/20 July 1768.

4) Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal
   12 Sept. 1768 - 13 Nov. 1769.
   Canterbury Journal 3 Apr. 1770 - 20 May 1788.
   Kentish Chronicle and Canterbury Journal 27 May 1788 - 7 June 1791.
   Kentish Chronicle 10 June 1791 onwards.

5) Maidstone Gazette
   3 Apr. 1770 - 20 May 1788.
   27 May 1788 - 7 June 1791.
   10 June 1791 onwards.

6) Rochester Gazette
   5 Jan. 1830 onwards.

Public Library, Maidstone


F. Poll-books – printed and in manuscript

Printed copies of Kentish poll-books are to be found in many libraries, both within and outside the county. Two useful guides are: W.F. Bergess, Kent Directories Located (Kent County Council, 1978) and the History of Parliament Trust's Draft Register of Poll Books.

No manuscript poll-books appear to have survived among the borough records of Canterbury or Rochester, and it is not yet possible to examine the contents of the Maidstone and Dover archives recently deposited at the Kent County Archives Offices. The whereabouts of such poll-books as are available is given below.

Canterbury

1774 MS. in British Library add. MSS. 42594.
1780 printed
1790 printed
1796-97 printed
1818 printed
1826 printed
1830 printed

Dover

1826 printed
1828 printed
1830 printed

Hythe

1802 MS. in Town Council Offices, Hythe.
1807 MS. in Town Council Offices, Hythe.
1810 MS. in Town Council Offices, Hythe.
1812 MS. in Town Council Offices, Hythe.
1818 MS. in Town Council Offices, Hythe.
1819 MS. in Town Council Offices, Hythe.
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Kent

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**L. Kentish and Other Provincial Studies**

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<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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