

ART. XIII. – *Letters from Sir Christopher Musgrave to the Earl of Dartmouth, 1711-15: New Light on the Politics of Opposition in Cumberland and Westmorland.*
By J. V. BECKETT and J. A. DOWNIE.

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ONE of the most important factors in the politics of Cumberland and Westmorland, and particularly of the borough of Carlisle, in the years following the Revolution of 1688, was the emergence of the Howard family, earls of Carlisle. Writing more specifically of the period 1695 to 1723 Robert Hopkinson notes: "The story of Carlisle elections is best seen against the background of Lord Carlisle's desire for full control", and this contention might be extended at least into the 1750s.¹ Inevitably the rise of the whig Howards was accompanied by local friction, and one of the most notable and prolonged confrontations in the closing years of the 17th and the early years of the 18th centuries was with a leading local tory family, the Musgraves of Edenhall. When Christopher Musgrave was rejected as the city's representative in parliament in 1695 after his brush with the corporation in 1692,² his place was taken by Philip Howard. For the next twenty years the Musgraves manoeuvred against the interest of the Howards in and around Carlisle, in an attempt to re-establish their position in local politics and in parliament.

Christopher Musgrave was the second son of Sir Christopher Musgrave of Edenhall (1632-1704). The death of his elder brother Philip in 1689 and the minority of Philip's son Christopher – who inherited the baronetcy – left Christopher Musgrave as nominal head of the family in 1704. As such he inherited his father's mantle as chief organizer of the family's political interests in the north-west. But Musgrave was never able to secure his seat in parliament in the face of the interest of Charles Howard, third earl of Carlisle (1669-1738), and for this there were two major reasons; one a local matter, the other national. Christopher Musgrave was only nominally head of the family, he was not a baronet, and as such he lacked the political legitimacy of his nephew. Furthermore a lifetime spent as an Ordnance officer had left him relatively unknown in the north, and his isolation from local affairs was exacerbated by his appointment, on 20 January 1705, as one of the four principal clerks to the privy council (previously he had been clerk-extraordinary). After the death of his father in 1704, therefore, he continued to spend prolonged periods in London. As a result he was not in a position to benefit from the gradual build up of local support.

Aside from these difficulties in the north, Musgrave's fortunes also waxed and waned with the fortunes of the tories. Having been out of parliament since 1695 he was again chosen for Carlisle in 1702 on the accession of Queen Anne, along with Thomas Stanwix. This time Philip Howard was third. In part this victory was a result of changed local conditions. The death of Lord Lonsdale in 1700 brought to an end the Lowther family's

entente with Lord Carlisle designed to keep the Musgraves out of Carlisle and to secure the return of a Lowther and a Howard. James Lowther, who had sat in parliament on Lord Lonsdale's ticket, saw the writing on the wall, and after a narrow victory in December 1701 he withdrew from the following election. Yet the 1702 victory for Christopher Musgrave also reflected the decided tory bias of Queen Anne's first ministry. Musgrave's father still carried considerable weight in London, and lord treasurer Godolphin was at pains to accommodate him in the new administration. It was partly as a result of this factor that Christopher Musgrave was promoted in the ranks of the Ordnance from clerk of the deliveries of the Ordnance to Clerk of the Ordnance itself. Significantly his patent was dated 15 July 1702 – at that time preparations were being made in Carlisle for the General Election due in August 1702. Sir Christopher Musgrave's demise two years later was a sore blow to the hopes of the family. Musgrave's defeats at Carlisle in 1705 and 1708 were not only a reflection of the family's loss of influence, but also a gauge of the increasing influence of the whigs in the ministry. Both factors also help to explain the defeat of Christopher's younger brother Joseph at Appleby in 1708.

The fortunes of the national parties turned once again in 1710, when the tories returned to power under the leadership of Robert Harley, an old ally of the Musgrave family. This was opportune for Sir Christopher for it coincided with his coming of age. Once more the baronetcy became a force in local political considerations. Furthermore Sir Christopher was a nephew, through his mother, of the secretary of state, William Legge, first earl of Dartmouth. With weighty connexions in London, he set about restoring his family's position in the north-west, and soon he was called upon by Dartmouth to counter the influence of the earl of Carlisle. Sir Christopher's father, Philip, had held positions both in the Ordnance and as clerk to the privy council. On his death these had passed to his brother. Now Dartmouth felt that his nephew might benefit from resuming his employments. Sir Christopher, however, was well aware of the difficulties facing him in Cumberland and Westmorland, and he believed that a seat in parliament would do more to revitalize the family's local interest. In his letters to Dartmouth he pointed out the magnitude of his problems in opposing, without sufficient means, the considerable resources of the house of Howard. These letters provide new and interesting insights into the character of local politics at the time.³

Accompanying the change of government, a general election was held in October 1710, at which the tories hoped to triumph. In Carlisle William Nicolson, the (by then) staunch whig Bishop of Carlisle, employed his far from negligible influence to thwart the tories. He dined with Lord Carlisle at Naworth Castle on 31 August, when the mayor and aldermen of Carlisle made it clear that they would support their host and return Thomas Stanwix and Sir James Montague, the whig sitting members.⁴ This duly happened, but the tory candidate, Colonel Gledhill, petitioned the Commons. For a time it looked as if the election would be declared void, or that Gledhill would replace Montague. Finally the Commons decided merely to censure Nicolson at the bar of the house for infringing "the liberties and privileges of the Commons of Great Britain" in interfering with the freedom of the election. Dr Hopkinson notes that even with all this going on "Christopher Musgrave did not offer himself".⁵ Sir Christopher, on the other hand, was privately very eager to stand should the whole election have to take place a second time. An unsuccessful attempt had been made by Sir William Pennington in 1710

to find him a seat as member for Cumberland. On 5 January 1711 Sir Christopher wrote to Dartmouth:⁶

My Lord

The favours I have continually received from your Lordship are so great, that I am afraid it will seem the more Presumption in me to trouble you when I am sensible you have allready too frequent Solicitations on the same occasion. But at a time when there is so much Talk of alterations in the Ordinance [sic] and other Places, I hope your Indulgence will excuse my desiring any Preferment your Lordship shall think me most capable of serving in, I believe such a Countenance would enable me to recover the Interest of my Country, and bring me into Parliament this Election at Carlisle which I am informed will be made void between Sir James Mountague and Colonel Gledhill, and as I esteem your Patronage my greatest Fortune, I assure you my chiefest Ambition is to be on all Occasions your Lordships

most dutyfull and obedient
servant

Christo: Musgrave.

Jan. 5. 1711.

Sir Christopher did not enter parliament in 1711, and he was forced to fall back on Dartmouth's offer of government employment. He took his uncle Christopher's position as clerk to the privy council. Meanwhile the tory ministry consolidated its position, and Harley became lord treasurer and earl of Oxford and Mortimer. By the terms of the triennial act of 1694 a general election was due in October 1713. Sir Christopher acted as the government's agent in Cumberland and Westmorland. The influence of the Howards was temporarily in decline, but Musgrave required the removal of the earl of Carlisle from the post of lord-lieutenant in the twin counties, a place he had held since 1694. Significantly, although he was restored to his former position in 1715 on the accession of George I, Carlisle did not act as lord-lieutenant in 1713, the year of the elections. His ouster is difficult to explain, but he was replaced by a staunch tory, Thomas, sixth earl of Thanet (1644-1729) in 1712.⁷ Furthermore, a letter from Musgrave to Dartmouth, sent while preparations were being made for the elections, reveals that Oxford had promised that Carlisle would be dismissed, and Sir Christopher also hoped to replace him as governor of Carlisle itself:⁸

My Lord

When I waited on the Lord Treasurer to receive his Commands into these Countryes,⁹ he bid me take care of the Elections, and when I pressd that Lord Carlisle should be out he promised me he should. I have ever since I came here with the utmost Application and some Expence been forming of the Interest both of Carlisle, Cumberland and Westmorland and have great reason to say I have succeeded beyond expectation in all. But my Lord I find I have a great Interest to cope with the Whigs are all continued in Power and united through out the Country, my friends expected I should be made Governor of Carlisle and those that would follow the uppermost side think that my being not so is a Discouragement from the court since it has generally laid betwixt the Family of Howard & this House where he can only expect an Opposition. The saying a Military Man is to have it they take to be but an excuse from me since it was what was never before observd, and indeed the Fortifications must be defended (should there be occasion) more by the Interest of the Country Gentlemen then by the strength of the Soldiery that would be thought fit to be flung into it. My Lord I hope you will excuse the Trouble of this when I gave you so much before on the same occasion but now I am upon the Place I find so much depends upon it that I think it my Duty to represent it to your Lordship, and if you approve of the

enclosed entreat your Lordship that you would either present it to Lord Treasurer or let Mr Lewis do it.¹⁰ For if the Court pleases at this Time to make use of my Interest I will engage to have a very powerfull one in These parts, but I cannot pretend without their Encouragement to press it entirely by dint of Expence and my own Personall application I have with a great deal of Pains got these two Countys to Address her Majesty tho in Cumberland I met with the Bishops opposition who propos'd a very artfull one which wee flung out for the County and he cunningly got sign'd by the City of Carlisle.¹¹ I beg my Duty and Services may be made acceptable as due from your Lordships most Dutifull Nephew and servant.

Christo. Musgrave.

My Lord Paper is very scarce and Coarse in the North.

This partial success (Carlisle remained governor) was followed by another in the spiritual sphere. Clergymen tended to instruct their flocks not only in religious matters, but also in politics. Bishop Nicolson's strong whig bias had been offset for most of Queen Anne's reign by High Church deans. Francis Atterbury's stormy tenure was expected to give way on his promotion to the more prestigious deanery at Christ Church in 1711 to a candidate more suited to the politics of the bishop. Nicholson tried to remind the queen of her promise that Thomas Tullie, the prebendary, should succeed Atterbury. Hugh Todd was also hoping to receive Carlisle. In the event George Smalridge, one of Atterbury's tory friends, became dean. In 1713 Atterbury was elevated to the episcopal bench as Bishop of Rochester, and Smalridge replaced him at Christ Church. Once again the lists opened for the deanery at Carlisle. Sir Christopher Musgrave pressed for the appointment of his supporter, Thomas Gibbon, rector of Greystoke. He wrote to Dartmouth:¹²

Saterday night

My Lord,

I have this Evening receivd a Letter from the Dean of Christ Church [Smalridge] with some private hints as if his Resignation of the Deanery of Carlisle was sent up and mentioned that he had some hope My Friend Mr Gibbons would succeed him in it. This Gentleman has allready a very good Living in the Neighbourhood, an Extraordinary good Character and allways very active in the Common Cause which would make him of more Consequence in that Country than 3 times the Value any where else. I have some hopes of my Lord Treasurers favour, who I am informed is enclinable to serve him but that Lord Chancellor [Harcourt] and my old Enemy the Bishop of Rochester [Atterbury] makes earnest Application for another. Therefore my Lord I most humbly beg your Lordships seconding my Request who stand for a Place, (I hope upon her Majestys Interest) who allready have both the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and all that have any Employments in that County entirely against me, and should a Dean be put in at this time who is not my Friend I must expect for ever the strongest Opposition, I hope your Lordship will excuse this way of applying from

Your most obedient humble Servant
Christo^r Musgrave.

Nicolson, the Lowthers, and, no doubt, the earl of Carlisle, were all in favour of Tullie's preferment; Todd still had designs on the deanery himself, and he had the support, it seems, of his old colleague Atterbury. The summer of 1713 was a time of ministerial tension, and pressure was being put on lord treasurer Oxford by the Bolingbroke faction, which numbered the lord chancellor Harcourt, and the newly-installed Bishop of Rochester among its adherents. Francis Godwin James, in his biography of Nicolson, notes that Smalridge, an old friend of Oxford, recommended not Todd, but Gibbon for

the vacant deanery.¹³ Musgrave's letter to Dartmouth, however, who moved in a cabinet reshuffle from the secretary's office to become lord privy seal, adds a new perspective to the picture. Gibbon replaced Smalridge as dean. On 17 September 1713 Musgrave wrote:¹⁴

My Lord

Having succeeded in my Request for my Friend Mr Gibbons to be made Dean of Carlisle for which I return a great many thanks to your Lordship and the rest who have been so kind as to espouse his Cause, I beg leave by this Messenger to send down the Warrant from the Signet and to desire your Lordships favour in dispatching it under the Privy Seal.

The Reason I trouble your Lordship with this haste is because Lord Chancellor after monday retires to his Country house where he never fixes the seal to any thing and as I have been informed designs to continue there for some time.

On Monday I saw Lady Dartmouth and L[ady] B[arbara] at Windsor and your sons at Thisleworth who are all well I wish your Lordship much satisfaction in the Pleasures of Sandwell¹⁵ who am with the greatest Respect

My Lord

Your Lordships most obedient
faithfull humble servant
Christo^r Musgrave.

Musgrave required Gibbon's speedy installation as dean to benefit from his influence in the forthcoming elections. In Carlisle a Musgrave was chosen for the first time since 1702, and it had taken the interest of the baronetcy to swing the scales away from the house of Howard. There was a further success for the family at Cockermonth where Joseph Musgrave was elected as the borough's representative in parliament. For a brief period the Musgraves again had influence in Cumberland and Westmorland and in London. Although Christopher Musgrave's patent as Clerk of the Ordnance was revoked on 2 December 1714 on the accession of George I, Sir Christopher was named as one of the commissioners appointed to carry out the duties of the lord privy seal on 30 April 1715. But the earl of Carlisle was restored to lord lieutenancy in 1715, a post he retained until his death in 1738. The Hanoverian succession effectively handed over all political power to the whigs and the repercussions were felt locally. By the summer of 1715 Sir Christopher was anxiously asking Dartmouth whether or not he should try to capitalize on his employments before he was turned out.¹⁶ He was privy seal commissioner for only a short time on the death of the earl of Wharton before the post was given to the earl of Sunderland. Finally he lost his place as clerk to the privy council when his patent, dated 30 October 1714, was revoked on 26 March 1716.

The Musgraves failed to hold a seat in the 1715 elections, and although Sir Christopher himself was M.P. for Cumberland from 1721 to 1727 the house had to wait until 1741 for its next electoral success, when after inheriting the baronetcy from his father in 1735, Sir Philip Musgrave won the election in Westmorland. All this time the house of Howard was consolidating its position in the city of Carlisle. Charles Howard represented the borough in parliament from 1727 to 1761 without a break.

Sir Christopher continued to correspond with his uncle, the earl of Dartmouth, after the accession of George I, but little of political interest remains after both men had been dismissed from their respective employments.¹⁷ Three points of some interest, however, emerge from their earlier letters about local politics in the north-west during this period,

in addition to many hints clarifying the background to specific events. One, which has already been briefly noted, is the importance of the head of the family, and the influence he could bring to bear in attempts to find a parliamentary seat. The political significance of the baronetcy is demonstrated by the loss of Musgrave influence in the years of Sir Christopher's minority. From being a family that had the potential to challenge the house of Howard in 1704, it waned in local importance until the majority of the baronet in 1710. Thereafter he made strides to restore the prestige of his house, with temporary success, and the virtual eclipse of the earl of Carlisle in 1713. But, and this brings us to the second point, the Musgraves were never able to secure this exalted local position. They always had to depend on others to find them a seat in parliament, and they could seldom aspire to county seats. It was difficult for a gentry family unless they possessed considerable resources in wealth and influence to be certain of a seat without the support of one of the major county aristocracy or gentry, or the cooperation of friends at Whitehall. In the context of the region at this time they were not untypical: they fall into that group of substantial gentry families worthy of a seat, always aspiring to a seat, but never automatically assured of one. Finally the letters, together with the family's intermittent success, show clearly the way in which politics in the early 18th century were governed by a mixture of local and national considerations. The political climate in London was certainly reflected in the provinces, but in Cumberland and Westmorland it had also to suit the prevailing local conditions.

Notes and References

- ¹ Robert Hopkinson, "Elections in Cumberland and Westmorland 1695-1723" (unpublished Newcastle University Ph.D. thesis, 1973), 152. Cf. Carlisle R.O. D/Lons/W, Sir James Lowther to John Spedding, 11 and 14 Jan. 1752. Carlisle's rising fortunes were partly facilitated by the political impotence of one of the major gentry families in the area, the Grahams of Netherby.
- ² See J. A. Downie, "The Disfranchisement of Christopher Musgrave, M.P., by Carlisle Corporation in 1692", CW2, lxxv, 174-87.
- ³ None has been published in full, and the letters were not used by Dr Hopkinson in his thesis. One is calendared in the Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission on the MSS of the earl of Dartmouth (HMC *Dartmouth*, I, 309), but in addition to errors and omissions in transcription, it is wrongly dated 5 Jan. 1711/12. The letters are now deposited in Staffordshire R.O. We are grateful to the earl of Dartmouth for permission to use the Dartmouth MSS.
- ⁴ Francis Godwin James, *North Country Bishop: A Biography of William Nicolson* (Yale, 1956), 201-2. (Naworth, not "Haworth", as James has it).
- ⁵ Hopkinson, *op. cit.*, 150. On the other hand, James suggests that Sir Christopher Musgrave stood with Gledhill. *Op. cit.*, 202.
- ⁶ Staffordshire R.O., Dartmouth MSS, D (W) 1778. I, ii, 309. Musgrave was employing the new, continental, style of dating, which places this letter, as the context makes clear, firmly in January 1711. The old style, in which the New Year began not on 1 January, but on 25 March, and which was, after 1700, eleven days behind the new style of Gregory XIII's calendar, did not become officially obsolete until 1752.
In all cases, contractions such as "y^e" for "the" and "y^t" for "that", have been modernised.
- ⁷ Carlisle R.O. D/Lons/W, James Lowther to William Gilpin, 1 May 1712. No appointments to the lieutenancy are enrolled on the Patent Rolls in the Public Record Office between 1712 and 1714. Lord Carlisle was restored to the Lieutenancy (for both counties) on 28 January 1715.
- ⁸ Staffordshire R.O., Dartmouth MSS, D (W) 1778, I, ii, 342, n.d.
- ⁹ i.e. Cumberland and Westmorland.

- ¹⁰ Erasmus Lewis, Dartmouth's under-secretary, had also been Harley's under-secretary when he himself had been secretary of state from 1704 to 1708. Lewis was a good friend of Christopher Musgrave. In his *Journal to Stella*, Jonathan Swift recorded an occasion on which Lord Mansel and Mr Lewis "made me dine with them at Kit Musgrave's". *Journal to Stella*, edited by Harold Williams (Oxford, 1947), II. 524; cf. *Ibid.*, I, 258.
- ¹¹ Addresses to the queen were regular occurrences, and they were not without political significance. This refers to the Peace of Utrecht, signed in 1713, which was not approved by the whigs, although it would not have been prudent to emphasize this in the address; thus the "artful" one here.
- ¹² Staffordshire R.O., Dartmouth MSS, D (W) 1778. I, ii, 342, n.d. [1713]. The rectory at Greystoke was in the gift of the Musgraves.
- ¹³ James, *op. cit.*, 211-12.
- ¹⁴ Staffordshire R.O., Dartmouth MSS, D (W), 1778, I, ii, 342.
- ¹⁵ Sandwell was Dartmouth's country seat near Birmingham. Lady Barbara was Dartmouth's elder daughter.
- ¹⁶ Staffordshire R.O., Dartmouth MSS, D (W) 1778. I, ii, 481; Musgrave to Dartmouth, 27 Aug. 1715.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, D (W) 1778, I, ii, 509: the same to the same, 1 Nov. 1716; D (W) 1778. I, ii, 512b: the same to the same 8 Jan. 1717; D (W) 1778. I, ii, 567; the same to the same, 15 Nov. 1721.

