

## THE 1835 ELECTIONS IN DERBYSHIRE

BY C. E. HOGARTH

(St. Helen's House, King Street, Derby)

The 1835 general election in Derbyshire was contested in the borough and in the southern division of Derbyshire, but not in the north. Like the elections throughout the country, these contests were much quieter than those of 1832. There were significant changes in both borough and county. In the borough the name of Cavendish did not appear among the candidates, an absence which had been rare in the past. Since 1695 there had been only seven occasions on which the name Cavendish did not appear amongst the representatives: these were in 1702, 1710, 1713, 1747, 1748, 1797 and 1802. From 1835 onwards the name never appeared again, although the Devonshire influence was responsible for the selection of one candidate until 1846 and an exception made in 1847 to the accepted end of influence over the borough, when the duke offered his nephew, Frederick Leveson-Gower, a seat. In the southern part of the county the whigs were eclipsed and two tories returned, the beginning of a tory domination that lasted for over 20 years.

In the southern division, Vernon was again the centre of a controversy. This time it was not a problem of making up his mind which division he should stand for but whether he should stand at all, an indecision which caused his supporters anxiety and despair, and undoubtedly contributed to his defeat. Not all the fault was on Vernon's side, and assumptions that he would stand by some of his committee no doubt added invitation to uncertainty on Vernon's part.<sup>1</sup>

The story spreads over three weeks. It opens with a decision taken by his committee on Tuesday, 25th November 1834, that he should resign. The reasons for this decision were based on Vernon's letter to the committee that ill-health was the primary cause of his having to resign and financial reasons a secondary factor. John Harrison, a particular friend of Vernon, informed William Baker, a more active member of the committee, that money was really the main consideration. Harrison revealed this secretly and pledged Baker to silence.<sup>2</sup> This revelation and pledge was to lead to a misunderstanding by Baker. On Wednesday, the decision to agree to Vernon's resignation was cancelled and it was decided that he should be asked if he would stand again. The change was due to the handsome offer of £1,200 towards the election expenses, followed by offers of lesser sums by the various members of Vernon's committee, and the decision that Vernon could be spared a personal canvass if his health forbade active electioneering. The decision, together with the understanding that Vernon must stand in coalition with Lord Waterpark, was conveyed to Vernon in a letter written by Mozley on the same day, Vernon was asked to reply immediately. If he could not say yes or no immediately he was asked to let the committee know how long his medical advisers might take to make up their minds about what his state of health permitted him to undertake. The letter was addressed to Vernon at Brighton, but he had gone to London. Before a reply could be received, the committee was surprised by the appearance on Friday, 28th November, of the tory election addresses. At once the whigs decided to issue the names of Vernon and Waterpark as joint whig candidates. On Saturday a letter from Vernon was received, written from London and dated the previous day, but not, of course, a reply to Mozley's request of the 26th. It was a vague letter clear only in one thing, that Vernon's medical adviser saw no reason why his health should preclude his continuation in Parliament. For the rest, the letter could be interpreted to mean either that he would continue or that he wished to resign.<sup>3</sup> The committee interpreted it as confirmation of the announcement they had made on Friday. Baker replied the same day to Vernon's letter informing him of the decision to put Waterpark

and him forward as joint candidates, explaining that the tory action had made this necessary and that it need not be regarded as a precedent. He also made suggestions as to the matters Vernon might refer to in his election address.<sup>4</sup> But the decision taken on Friday and the assumption made from Vernon's letter of the 28th were now challenged by Vernon. On the 29th he replied to Mozley's letter of the 26th, expressly objecting to a coalition both on private and public grounds, and requesting that if a coalition were necessary terms exactly defining the independence of each candidate should be given. The letter was passed on to Baker, who replied in sharp terms on 1st December. He was at a loss to understand Vernon's request for terms of independence to be defined, adding that now, as before, his guarantors had stipulated no pledges at all. Vernon was no doubt annoyed by the decision to issue his name as a candidate without his express approval. Baker probably sensed this when, further on in the same letter he admitted that Vernon could not be regarded as bound to stand by the act of the committee on 28th November, but that he was so committed now in view of his letter of the 28th which had been shown to Dr. Forester and Joseph Strutt, who agreed with Baker's and Mozley's interpretation that it signified Vernon's willingness to stand.<sup>5</sup> This seems ungenerous. The committee's decision may not have bound Vernon, but it was made without consulting him. His letter to Baker about the medical report and his consequent intentions was no final statement on the problem of continuing or resigning from politics; only a select few of the committee decided that it was. Baker decided to withhold the contents of this letter demanding terms from the committee, keeping it secret between himself and Mozley. Only one other knew and that was Vernon's confidant, John Harrison.

John Harrison was playing a dual role. He was a member of the committee, whilst acting as Vernon's confidant and giving advice which was certainly not the recommendation of the committee. His revealing to Baker that it was really money and not health that held Vernon back is some justification for Baker's behaviour after having received reassuring reports from Vernon's physician. It excuses his interpretation of Vernon's unclear letter of the 28th, although, of course, it does not affect the decision taken on the 28th without Vernon's approval. It is to Harrison's credit that his advice to Vernon was clear and honest. Indeed Harrison's difficulty as confidant of Vernon and adviser to the committee was the vagueness that clouded all Vernon's letters. It moved Harrison to open one letter to Vernon with the words, '*So help me God, I do not know after reading all your letters what your real wishes are*'.<sup>6</sup> In the same letter he urged Vernon to make use of the embarrassing situation into which he had thrown his committee by his demands and vague hints of resigning by making a certain acceptance depend upon a clear guarantee about expenses and independence. Harrison was clearly feeling the strain which his dual role was imposing upon him and declined to proceed further with it. He would write to Vernon privately, but he would not see or write to any third person on the subject.

The committee was in an awkward position. Baker, in refusing to make known the contents of Vernon's last letter, asked him to reconsider his request for terms. Another member of the committee, Michael Thomas Bass, of the brewing firm at Burton-on-Trent, added his quota of encouragement and exhortation. He wrote on 3rd December to Vernon warning him that if he resigned now everything would be thrown into confusion. He suggested to Vernon that he should accept the offer to stand in tones that would make it perfectly plain that he assumed he would be spared all expense. He added that Mozley and Baker, to whom he had read his letter, wholly agreed with his recommendations.

The effort by Bass was superfluous, for Vernon decided on the same day that Bass wrote that he would stand. This is evident from Harrison's reply of 5th December to Vernon. The same letter hints at the variance between the Vernon group and the Strutt-Waterpark group. Harrison offered to find out what the reaction of that group was to Vernon's dislike of a coalition. Vernon did not write to the committee until

the day after he had written to Harrison. He wrote to Baker from the yacht *Harlequin*, anchored at Ryde, in which he was preparing to take a voyage to a mild climate for his health. The letter was passed to Mozley, who replied on the 7th. He said that no formal guarantee of meeting all Vernon's expenses could be given, but that this was no drawback since already and without solicitation £2,000 had been subscribed. He mentioned that Lord Waterpark was securely backed, a fact that could have afforded Vernon no particular pleasure unless he inferred that this meant that the subscription was not to be shared. Mozley reminded Vernon that this fact had to be kept secret, seemingly a superfluous observation to Vernon at that distance and with his knowledge of local politics. He wrote that Waterpark

will have a friend who will not let his election be lost for want of a good backer and a good purse. He has the D. of D. behind him (*most private*).<sup>7</sup>

As for Vernon's independence, he was as free as the air, Mozley wrote, and that thoughts to the contrary were a mere chimera.

Although Vernon had accepted, he was not happy about it. Between the 3rd and the 7th he must have again written to Harrison accusing his friend of allowing his (Vernon's) judgment to be overruled. Vernon's irritation may be marked by his referring to his committee as 'conspirators'. It is clear from Harrison's reply to these accusations that Vernon was particularly annoyed at the decision to announce that he was standing being taken without his consent.

Harrison said he, too, was surprised at this. He rightly assumed what lay behind it:

I concluded that you had made some communication of an *indefinite* nature which they had interpreted or *chosen* to interpret into an assent on your part.<sup>8</sup>

This was certainly how Vernon's letter of 28th November had been interpreted, but as the handbills announcing his intention of standing had gone out the day before the letter arrived, Harrison had not altogether cleared himself of the charge of committing Vernon by implication, if not by direct word. His aside to Baker that finance was the main element of Vernon's indecision may have caused the initial assumption that a risk could be taken about the announcement, as financial matters could always be solved afterwards. In his letter of the 7th Harrison repeated his encouragement to Vernon to be firm about expense and to state categorically that he would not be responsible for one penny above his £200.

Vernon replied to Mozley's letter of the 7th on the 9th. Writing from Ryde, he demanded a guarantee as a *sine qua non* of his standing. This caused offence, but there was little Vernon's committee could do. The Strutts were approached on the 11th and the guarantee obtained. Baker, in another sharp letter to Vernon, written on 13th December, and in which the whole situation is reviewed from the point of view of justifying Baker's action, said that the only reason they approached the Strutts for the guarantee was that

we thought it less discreditable than it would have been to withdraw your name when doing so would inevitably cause one or probably two Tories to be returned.<sup>9</sup>

On this rather unharmonious note the matter was settled between Vernon and his committee.

Although the whole episode is largely rooted in a personal problem, the distaste of Vernon for politics set against his sense of obligation to his supporters, there are features illustrating the general political problems of the time. One reason for the high percentage of uncontested elections in the 18th century was the fear of expense. This factor was to continue well into the 19th century. Vernon had certainly been concerned over the amount he had had to pay out for the 1832 election, though the election had not been expensive compared with many others.<sup>10</sup> There had, in addition, been unpleasantness attached to the business of paying bills. In February 1833 Mozley wrote to Lord Vernon asking him for £300, the balance of his son's £500 subscription.<sup>11</sup> It also seems that the Strutts had been awkward over paying certain sums to which they

took exception. This would explain the reluctance with which Vernon's committee faced the necessity of gaining a guarantee from the Strutts which Vernon forced upon them in 1834. Lord Vernon had come in for much criticism from certain members of his son's committee for his stinted assistance to his son.<sup>12</sup> Some obviously expected that greater help would be given by the father to obtain a seat in the Commons for his son, the usual method of preparation for the son's eventual elevation to the peerage and the Lords.

Vernon's reiterated objections to a coalition and to the associated fear of a lack of independence are interesting. The pledging of members to carry out measures desired by their constituents was very unpopular in the 18th century and was to continue to be so in the early and middle 19th century, even more when the device was aimed at by the radicals as a means of controlling members. But no constituents were attempting to tie Vernon to specific pledges, nor is there evidence that his committee were going beyond an expectation that their candidate would profess those general principles in which the whigs claimed to believe. Bass touched directly on this topic, which was still troubling Vernon even after his acceptance of the offer to stand again, when he wrote to Vernon about his dislike of a coalition:

... you don't identify yourself with your confederate's principles or character beyond the more general tone of your party politics.

Vernon may have been sincerely anxious about his independence, in accordance with the ideal of the age, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that many of his objections to standing were rationalisations of his distaste for political life.

The course of the election was lively, if without the rowdyism of the 1832 election. Opposing Vernon and Waterpark were Sir Roger Greisley, as before, and Sir George Crewe of Calke Abbey, the residence, nine miles south of Derby, of the Harpur-Crewe family, country gentlemen who had played a large part in Derbyshire politics in the preceding century. In the election addresses, Sir Roger Greisley again wrote that he was no 'ultra Tory or a bigoted party man', while Sir George Crewe stated that he represented the independent and conservative interest. The Tories generally in 1835 made it plain that they now accepted reform. The two Whig candidates used this change as a main part of their election addresses and scornfully associated the words Tory and reform. At least, Waterpark did. Vernon, whose address came from aboard the yacht *Harlequin* at Falmouth, and subconsciously prompted, perhaps, into a nautical metaphor, accused the Tories of sailing falsely under the flag of reform. Both sides altered the form of their addresses and used the heading: 'To the Independent Electors of . . .'.<sup>13</sup> The word independent had in the 18th century been used by the county gentry alone, when they challenged the Cavendishes. The source of Vernon's address needed commenting on, the Whigs presumably felt, and the chairman of the joint committee of Vernon and Waterpark, Dr. R. F. Forester, issued a letter to the press explaining that Vernon's recent serious illness necessitated his being excused a personal canvass and that his offer to serve again if required was a noble gesture.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the excuse was as much a handicap as the absence which, as Jeffrey Lockett wrote to the Duke of Devonshire on 16th December, 'was prejudicial'.<sup>15</sup>

Next it was Lord Waterpark's turn to play into the hands of the Tories. He was involved in a very curious episode which required a public meeting at which the Mayor took the chair to acquit him of a comic charge. Rumour flew around Derby that Waterpark had been involved in a fight in a brothel in the town with a tenant of Sir Roger Greisley and had received two black eyes. Waterpark found it necessary to make a public issue of this and had handbills printed calling a public meeting on 10th December in the Town Hall. There he denied the infamous allegations against his character, as he put it, and produced witnesses to prove that he was elsewhere at the alleged time.<sup>16</sup> He was vindicated, but the newspaper account leaves strangely silent the question of the black eyes. One would have thought that here was tangible evidence.



The episode presented the tories with a wonderful opportunity for printing and circulating ribald doggerel, a characteristic of election fights. One effort was particularly neat:

We wish to give the Exculpation  
Of Waterpark from defamation.  
His Lordship waited on the Mayor  
And to his Worship warmly urg'd his prayer,  
That he would strict enquiry make,  
And solemn evidence duly take  
Upon a subject greatly trenching  
On his Lordship's taste for wenching.  
My Lord thus stated his complaint,  
With looks demure as any saint:  
'With mingled shame and grief I tell,  
Tis said that in a Brothel  
I made a row, and had a fight  
With a Tenant of the Knight.

The lady over whom the fight had started thus gave her evidence:

The Virtuous Mrs. Richardson,  
With downcast eyes and modest looks  
She gravely touched the Sacred Book—  
One truant eye however,  
To gravity accustom'd never,  
Could not restrain the roguish leer,  
It shyly turned upon the Peer;  
She then with glowing indignation  
Made this convincing protestation,  
'Upon the credit of a w . . . . e  
I never saw My Lord before'.<sup>17</sup>

All the witnesses who had contributed to Waterpark's alibi were parodied, including Mr. Strutt, at whose house it was said Waterpark was dining when the supposed disturbance occurred. The incident did the whigs no good. Mozley, writing to Vernon after the election, referred to the harm which was done by

the lies about Lord Waterpark, & the Castle Street row which in immense numbers we got deluded with.<sup>18</sup>

Castle Street was the address of the brothel.

The tories were organising the whole contest very well. Bass wrote to Vernon on 7th December warning him to expect a much severer struggle than in 1832. Their operations were being conducted much more ably than before, he added. Sir George Crewe he referred to as 'a tower of strength'. In view of this it is difficult to understand Lockett's letter to the duke of the 11th December in which he says that Crewe is not expected to be returned, that he was only brought forward to support Greisley who is ready for a deal with the whigs, a compromise election, but the whigs will not have it.<sup>19</sup> Greisley speeches are poor, reading essentially like those of a man who knows little of politics and tries to cover inadequacy by jocularly. Crewe, in contrast, was an able speaker and Bass's judgment of him is to be preferred. He did, in fact, lead the poll. The local press, too, expected a severe fight in South Derbyshire and the *Reporter* went so far as to suggest that a contest was arranged in the borough solely to distract the 'attention of the influentials from the southern division'.<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence to show whether this is so or not.

There was a substantial amount of bribery during this contest. Although the evidence for it comes from whig sources there is no reason to disbelieve it. Many of the accusations against the tories ring true and it is reasonable to conclude that, as the tories were making strenuous efforts towards improving their organisation, the use of accepted conventions of alcoholic persuasions was practised on a large scale. Bass in his letter of 7th December to Vernon, already quoted, revealed some details of this persuasion at Newhall, a small place close to Burton-on-Trent:

They (the tories) were before me there and on the occasion of my first visit on Thursday night they were aware of my approach and as a counter attraction roasted nearly half an ox seasoned with three pounds of mustard, five of salt with pepper and vinegar to match and 200 quarts of ale; you will not wonder that I played to empty benches.

Since his own methods of canvassing on that occasion were choirs of singing lads, his empty benches are even less surprising. The technique of singing lads survived, however, at least very informally, until the 1930s. They do not now seem to be a phenomenon of electoral contests. The whig *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter* was indignant at the amount of bribery and corruption, and sought to revolt its readers with the case of a man at Bonsall who had drank

at these Tory orgies till abused nature revolted at the violence done to her feelings, and the drunkard retired to the privy to relieve his stomach, but being unable to keep his equilibrium he pitched head first into the disgusting receptacle, where he stuck fast by the shoulders in the seat and remained in that dreadful position for several hours.<sup>21</sup>

Accusations of 'swig clubs' and 'bribery by ale and gin' were, of course, denied in the tory *Derby Mercury*. Letters in the *Reporter* also alleged intimidation by landlords over tenants and customers over shopkeepers. A letter signed by 'A Voter' appeared in the 21st December issue of this paper, stating that

it is a well-known fact that in the peaceable village of Duffield there are several voters who would vote for Vernon and Waterpark, but their landlords say you must vote for Greisley and Crewe.

There might or there might not be coercion of tenants depending on the place and particular issues. In country districts the expectation that tenants would vote as their landlords was quite normal for the times. Poll-books have been called 'topographies of the estates'<sup>22</sup> and the 1835 poll-book for South Derbyshire certainly reads this way. Far less acceptable was the attempt to influence another man's tenants. This was tried during the South Derbyshire contest. Edward Mundy wrote, as chairman of the tory candidates, to the Duke of Devonshire on 1st January 1835:

Mr. Mundy presents his compliments to the Duke of Devonshire and requests as chairman of Sir Roger Greisley & Sir George Crewe's committees to be informed whether His Grace will give them his permission to canvass his tenants many of whom are disposed, if they are at liberty to do so to vote for these gentlemen.<sup>23</sup>

Written at the bottom of the letter in another handwriting is:

This letter got no answer, which gave great offence. Mr. Mundy was a sickly gentleman, who died of consumption in 1849.

The clergy attempted to influence the way people voted. The 18th-century alignment of tory and High Church and whig and Low Church and Dissent, a particularly valid distinction in the constituencies, is observable in the 1835 contest in Derbyshire. Bass, in his 7th December letter to Vernon, had concluded with the news that

Doctor Lloyd, Sir Roger's chaplain, called his parishioners into the vestry at Gresley after Church last Sunday and harangued them on the iniquity of voting for the Whigs.

During nomination speeches, Dissenting ministers made speeches favourable to the whig candidates. The activity of the clergy in politics increased in the 1830s and 1840s when ecclesiastical legislation was a cause of keen contention between the political groups.

Polling took place on 17th January and resulted in a victory for the two tories:

Sir George Crewe, Bart. . . . .	..	2,511
Sir Roger Greisley, Bart. . . . .	..	2,491
The Rt. Hon. G. J. Vernon . . . . .	..	1,948
The Rt. Hon. Lord Waterpark . . . . .	..	1,909 <sup>24</sup>

The swing from 1832 was considerable. Vernon had polled 1,088 votes less, Waterpark 930 less, while Greisley had increased his total by 539 votes. There was an extra tory this time, of course, but it was significant that he headed the poll.

On 4th February, Mozley wrote a long letter to Vernon giving his reasons for the defeat. He confirmed the fears that had been held about Vernon's delay and his absence. The tories had lost no opportunity in hinting at the uselessness of a sick man as a representative. He also paid tribute to the superior tory organisation backed by, as he alleged, a vast system of bribery:

ale and brandy ran like water — men were kept drunk for two weeks together.

His estimate of the whig expenditure was under £3,000, but that of the tories, visible and invisible, £12,000. He included a list of names of supporters, who, he believed, privately went against the whigs on this occasion. An examination of the poll-book confirms that Mozley's suspicions were well-founded. One name may be quoted as illustrating further the relationship of landlord and tenant. One lapsed support was Sir John Hophouse, of whose tenants Mozley wrote:

I am sure in voting against us his tenants thought they were obliging him.

Mozley also referred to the absence of the fervour for reform that had helped in 1832 and the apathy that the victory had induced in their supporters. As already noted, he regarded the Waterpark defamation case as a reason for the loss of some support. Over political issues he stated that the farmers provided the main support of the tories and were promised wild things by them. The jealousy of the farmers was raised against the manufacturers and he accused Waterpark of a tactical error in permitting their agents to accompany him while canvassing country districts. This probably referred to the Basses and the Strutts. The role of the Monarchy in elections was included among Mozley's observations on the defeat:

The Whigs ignominiously discarded by the King . . . . The King supposed to be frightened into Toryism.

This would seem to be evidence for the view that the support of the Sovereign at a general election was still an important factor.<sup>25</sup> It is an exhaustive list, but omits one possible reason for the tory success. Undoubtedly a number of conservative whigs were alarmed by the radicals and looked with concern at the radical support of whig measures in Parliament. During the election contest, Bass had written to Vernon's wife about the growing strength of the tories and observed in the letter that

many timid people have joined their ranks from a dread of the extreme radicals.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the defeat there was an immediate suggestion that Vernon should prepare to contest the division again for the soon-expected election; but this is not an epilogue to 1835 so much as a prologue to a contest which never took place.

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The 1835 election was not contested in the northern division of the county. The tories made attempts to share the representation and, that failing, considered putting up Arkwright in opposition to the two whig candidates, despite his close connection with the Cavendish family. He was a cousin of the sixth duke.

It was Sir George Sitwell, the defeated candidate of 1832, who sounded the duke on the possibilities of his support. He also approached the Duke of Portland. These overtures came fairly soon after the 1832 elections. The Duke of Devonshire wrote to the Duke of Portland about it and his letter makes it clear that his policy towards a second candidate for the northern part of the county was support for a liberal supporter of the Government and not a compromise with a tory, as had been the practice when the whole county returned two members before the Reform Bill.

He wrote on 9th July 1833:

My Dear Duke of Portland,

I return Sir George Sitwell's letter, with many thanks. I am very anxious that you should unite with me in assisting any liberal supporter of the Government who may come forward with Lord Cavendish to represent the northern division of Derbyshire.

In my own reply to Sir George I stated to him that I was sorry on account of our intimacy not to give him my support but that I should feel bound to take the part of any such candidate as I have described above.<sup>27</sup>

The Cavendishes had to change their candidate before the election, and, as usual, when one member of the family replaced another as representative of the county, no contest was involved. In May 1834 Lord William Cavendish became the second Earl of Burlington and his place as Member of Parliament for Derbyshire North was taken by his brother, George Henry Cavendish, who was to remain North Derbyshire's representative for 46 years, until his death in 1880.

The second recorded tory attempt to bring forward a candidate was Sir Roger Greisley's announcement that George Arkwright would stand in opposition to Thomas Gisborne, the sitting member.<sup>28</sup> Arkwright had been considered for some time as a possible tory candidate, but he never managed finally to get himself put forward until 1837, when he succeeded in forcing a contest for the north. The Duke of Devonshire's comment on Arkwright is interesting. In a letter to his niece, Blanche, Lady Burlington, he referred to the 'insidious Tories' meeting at Edensor, who

Try to make him appear my pet Tory.<sup>29</sup>

The interpretation would seem to be that the tories hoped to make use of the relationship of Arkwright to the Cavendishes and the well-known custom of the sharing of the representation between whig and tory. But it must have been made clear to them that the duke wished to support a second liberal candidate and as Gisborne was the sitting member and showing no signs of retiring, they gave up the attempt. Early in 1835 the local newspapers were talking in terms of no contest for the north. But it was fairly certain earlier than this that there would not be one. On 16th December Gisborne had written a letter marked 'private' to the duke, in which he thanked him for the prospect of there being no contest:

I feel that I should be ungrateful if I did not state to your Grace that I am fully sensible that I owe it solely to your Grace that I am not likely to be harassed by a contest at the coming election.

Gisborne added his relief at being spared the expense of a contest and then hinted at an attempt to create a contest from a quarter which was not powerful unless it were backed by the Duke of Rutland, a point on which he had no information, and on which he was clearly seeking some.<sup>30</sup> There is no evidence in the Chatsworth papers about this. Sometime around the turn of the year the Duke of Devonshire made it clear that he was not in favour of a contest. John Harrison wrote to Vernon on 2nd January 1835:

The Duke of Devonshire has spoken out & prevented a contest for the northern division; & he is very popular for it.

He was not popular with the fiercely tory *Derbyshire Courier*, which accused the duke of making North Derbyshire a pocket borough. The whig *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, quoting this, scornfully dismissed the accusation and pointed out that when in 1832 the duke's influence was used to secure the return of only one of the members, the tory candidate was still nowhere in the running.<sup>31</sup> Clearly the conventions of the times still included the acceptance of the influence of property and personal importance.

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The 1835 contest in the borough was quiet, but interesting. Colonel H. F. C. Cavendish, one of the whig members of the borough, had not attended to his duties, in particular ignoring his constituents, and there was a general feeling that he was not likely to be

returned if he stood again. This feeling perhaps induced the whig group in the town to look around for another candidate and an invitation to stand was issued to John George Brabazon Ponsonby, the son of Viscount Duncannon. The Tories openly announced that they were seizing this opportunity of breaking the Cavendish influence over the borough and brought forward a strong candidate in Francis Curzon, the second son of the second baron Scarsdale by his second marriage.<sup>32</sup> The Duke of Devonshire, however, broke his recent rule of not interfering in the borough because of the Reform Bill, and supported Ponsonby on account of his family connection with the Cavendishes. Despite the fact that Ponsonby went mad during the contest, the Tory attack failed and two Whigs were again returned.

Viscount Duncannon was approached about his son in November 1834. He at once sought the Duke of Devonshire's permission before accepting on behalf of his son:

Nov. 24th, 1834.

My dear Duke,

I have been spoken to, as I believe you know, about Derby for my son on Saturday last, but I wished not to give an answer until you have been spoken to. To-day I saw Mr. Lockett and he assured me that you see no objection.<sup>33</sup>

Lockett wrote to the duke on the same day informing him how pleased Duncannon was with the duke's decision and how he had promised to be responsible for his son's politics and attention to parliamentary duty.<sup>34</sup> The duke replied to Duncannon and stated his reasons for supporting his son on this occasion, also referring to Henry Cavendish and the improbability of his being returned:

Nov. 25th.

My dear Duncannon,

Of course I feel the greatest regret about Henry Cavendish but his conduct made it impossible to expect anything but a defeat if he should attempt to stand for Derby.

Having taken the Reform Bill *au pied de la lettre* I had determined not to interfere or go to any expense but the prospect of your son coming forward, his excellent character and near connection with me are so agreeable to me that on this occasion (which is a most important and unusual one) I shall have much pleasure in defraying the expenses. In future elections some other arrangements might I think be made.

H. Cavendish was only informed of this yesterday and I have not seen him. He knows nothing about John, it is a matter of some delicacy, therefore pray do not mention it. When more is settled, I shall write to you.

Believe me, most truly yours,  
Devonshire.<sup>35</sup>

Duncannon sent his grateful thanks for this opportunity for his son, who had wanted to be in Parliament but who had hitherto been deterred by expense.

The delicate position of the negotiations was referred to by Lockett, who pointed out to the duke the difficult situation Ponsonby was in so long as it was unclear what the intentions of Colonel Cavendish were. He suggested to the duke that Ponsonby be given some authority for saying that Colonel Cavendish would not renew the offer of his services to the borough.<sup>36</sup> When Cavendish did write to resign, the attitude of the duke was somewhat different from that which he had taken with Duncannon. In a letter to his niece, Blanche, Lady Burlington, he wrote:

Derby in a mess. Ponsonby there by invitation and H. Cavendish *would* write to resign.<sup>37</sup>

It seems that the duke regretted missing the opportunity of having a member of the family and another close connection both returned.

If one problem was solved, another now arose; Ponsonby was taken ill. Lockett kept the duke informed of the rather alarming progress of Ponsonby's illness. This took the form of severe mental aberration and necessitated keeping him under observation. During a moment of slackness in supervision Ponsonby escaped and walked to Osmaston, three miles from the centre of the town, where he told a farmer that he was fleeing



from the bailiff and gave him £30 to hide him in his barn. When he was discovered he was unaware that anything had happened. Confined to bed he improved, though he had another, shorter, brainstorm, during which he imagined his father's sisters were in the bedroom, thus displaying a peculiar precognition, for they visited him on the following day.

It was decided to move the patient to Melbourne and issue daily bulletins in the borough. In informing the duke of this Lockett expressed by implication his concern about the effect Ponsonby's illness might have on the tories:

I am very confident that the appearance of an opposition candidate at this crisis would make the utmost disgust and only increase the numbers of Mr. Ponsonby's supporters.<sup>38</sup>

Lockett's fears were realised and just before the end of the year it was announced that Francis James Curzon, son of Lord Scarsdale of Kedleston Hall, would contest the borough. Curzon was a powerful opponent. A barrister and an able speaker, and with his father's influence over the tradesmen of the town as the nearest to the town of the local nobility, his candidature rightly alarmed the whigs. The neighbouring county squires rallied round him. Lockett sent his opinion to the duke:

If a canvass might be depended on Mr. Ponsonby would have nothing to fear from the opposition of Mr. Frs. Curzon — but intimidation & treating are practised to an unexampled extent, & great allowances must be made for the effect of these proceedings. All the neighbouring county squires are exerting themselves in the borough in support of Mr. Curzon, as actively as they are supporting the tory candidate in the county — and their influence on the shopkeepers will be felt on the poll.<sup>39</sup>

Duncannon was concerned too. After the election, he wrote to the duke that Curzon was a most formidable opponent, especially because of Lord Scarsdale's connections with the tradesmen of Derby. In the same letter Duncannon assured the duke that the only reason he had asked permission for his son to stand for Derby was that, in the known unlikelihood of Colonel Cavendish being returned, his son would be

the means of keeping your political connection with Derby . . . .

He hoped the duke would make clear to Henry Cavendish that Ponsonby would never have been put forward had there been the slightest chance of Henry Cavendish being returned. Interesting, too, is Duncannon's desire to remain friendly with the Scarsdales. He also asked the duke to make equally clear to them why he permitted his son to be put in nomination for Derby.<sup>40</sup>

The candidates for the election were, then, Edward Strutt, sitting member, and John Ponsonby, opposed by Francis Curzon. Curzon described himself as a 'Conservative of independent principles', disclaiming the assumption made by many of the whigs that he was attached to Peel's principles and politics. He claimed to favour reform if tempered by sober judgment. The two whigs in their speeches claimed, like the whigs in the southern division of the county, that only the whigs were the real reformers. Strutt added an interesting feature. He was in favour of the ballot; Ponsonby was not sure about it. This question was to play a great part in subsequent elections. Ponsonby's speeches were, of course, read for him and on nomination day Curzon suggested that Ponsonby might not even agree with what was being said on his behalf.<sup>41</sup> The safest line to adopt about Ponsonby seemed to be that of his proposer at the nomination meeting who said of him: 'He might be called a whig . . . . but he would at any rate be found to be an opponent of toryism'.<sup>42</sup>

Polling took place on 7th and 8th January, and resulted in an easy victory for the whigs:

				<i>plumpers</i>
Edward Strutt	. . . . .	..	903	12
The Hon. John G. B. Ponsonby		..	724	5
The Hon. Francis Curzon		..	525	525 <sup>43</sup>

The contest had been a quiet one; that in the south had been much hotter.

\* \* \*

In the first half of 1835 there was another series of negotiations in South Derbyshire prompted by the election expected sometime during the year. As before, the negotiations centred round George John Vernon and again are useful in illustrating certain political attitudes of the day.

Arising out of the defeat in January and because of the uncertain position of Peel's Government, two suggestions were put to Vernon: either that he prepare for another contest immediately; or that he arrange for a compromise with the tory Sir George Crewe. Both suggestions were based on the inadequacy of Sir Roger Greisley as a representative. Because of his poor showing, he could either be beaten in a fight or the tories approached with a view to a compromise. These suggestions were made immediately after the defeat of the whigs. In April, by which time Vernon had returned from a winter cruise and Peel's Government had got into considerable difficulty, the proposals were pressed. The motives of the whig group in South Derbyshire were mixed. Some merely saw an opportunity of getting a whig returned; others, disliking the association of whigs and radicals in Parliament, saw in Vernon a chance of returning a moderate whig along with a moderate tory. Everything depended on Vernon. Yet a third time he hesitated, raised objections of scruple about compromise without prior agreement between all whig supporters of the area, and concerned himself, as before, with those relationships between the South Derbyshire whigs and the Cavendish 'connexion'. This lack of cohesion between the two main whig groups, seen in 1832 and 1835, was a theme once more, with the added dislike which the South Derbyshire group felt for the Strutts and Lord Waterpark as too-advanced whigs. To achieve their aim, the southern group had to forestall any possibility that Waterpark might stand again or that he might join in a compromise with a tory. To this end it was necessary to take action without informing the Duke of Devonshire. This Vernon refused to do and gave the game away. Even so, he was accepted as a candidate for South Derbyshire, or rather bullied into accepting, for he at first firmly refused. At least, this time, his refusals and acceptances were unequivocal.

It was William Baker who was the leading light in inviting Vernon to become a candidate for the expected election. In a letter of 22nd January he put to Vernon the proposals of a contest aimed at Greisley or a compromise along with Crewe. The letter contains an interesting justification for compromise elections:

Many, like myself, will not hesitate to vote for you, when we have Sir Geo. Crewe ready to vote the antidote to your poison, on the only subject upon which I think you are likely to give a vote which I should not cordially approve — viz. — the appropriation to secular purposes of the so-called 'surplus' revenues of the Irish Church.

This sort of proportional representation might be regarded as the logical conclusion to those compromise elections which had in fact been contested in private.<sup>44</sup> It was Baker who raised the matter again in April on Vernon's return from the cruise undertaken for his health. He gave four reasons for advocating a compromise. It was injudicious to expect two whigs to be returned from South Derbyshire, it would save expense and exertion, the tories were favourable to the idea because of Sir Roger Greisley's lack of ability, and because of the whig-radical association. Baker admitted that he now saw little difference between 'moderate conservatism' and 'conservative whiggism', but that his attitude made some members of the whig group accuse him of lapsing into toryism. He added an observation on parties:

You have seen enough of parties to know that the man who will not continue to go the whole length with his party (how widely so ever his party may deviate from the course originally marked out for their guidance) becomes immediately an object of suspicion — in fact may think himself fortunate if he escapes being treated as an enemy.

This should perhaps be regarded less as evidence of the hardening of local party control than as an example of the unease of the turncoat. Baker rounded off his case by assuring Vernon that he was the sole man for this job, that Waterpark could not possibly be

considered, and that only a conservative whig could be considered by them as one with whom they might possibly compromise. He concluded:

The Tories look upon the Strutts as ultra whigs, . . . . and upon Lord Waterpark as being especially the Strutts protégé. They would not have the same fear of you.<sup>45</sup>

It was true that the Strutts were already in favour of the ballot, which was not the general attitude of whigs at this stage, and that Vernon was not as closely associated with them as Waterpark was. In fact, Vernon's relationship with the Strutts was cold and not without suspicion on both sides, he of their motives and they of his resolution.

Mozley and Bass now added their exhortations. Mozley recommended a compromise, but was not sure that it was likely: it was 'on the cards'.<sup>46</sup> Bass was quite sure that a compromise was there for the asking.<sup>47</sup> All three urged Vernon to visit Derbyshire and show himself to his future constituents. Vernon would not commit himself and raised objections to a compromise without the concurrence of a large body of his political friends. Mozley and Bass tried again. Mozley put as one reason for taking action the chance that it gave Vernon to show his independence of the Duke of Devonshire.<sup>48</sup> It was also hinted to Vernon that a compromise was perhaps the only sure way of being returned as, if it were a case of a contested election, the only man likely to be able to afford the money was William Evans, a local mill owner. Vernon asked Evans if this was so, as well as confiding his worries about the ethics of a compromise election. Evans assured Vernon that he had no intention of standing unless there were peculiar difficulties in finding a whig candidate, which was not so with Vernon in the field, and that no one would think that Vernon wanted a compromise purely for personal reasons. He recommended Vernon to go ahead with the compromise. Vernon had also raised the question with Evans as to whether he might not try for the Isle of Wight. Clearly Vernon had no stomach for Derbyshire politics. Evans replied that as Vernon had 'no natural interest there' he saw little chance for this idea.<sup>49</sup>

John Harrison now joined the attempt to persuade Vernon to announce his intention of becoming a candidate. An announcement was necessary to forestall any action from Waterpark as it was unlikely the reformers would want two whigs to be put up. An announcement would also give the tories the opportunity to approach Vernon about a compromise. Harrison included the interesting reason for a declaration by Vernon that it would prevent the South Derbyshire Liberal Association from giving the impression of foisting a candidate on the county, an impression which as only a small body in the county they would wish to avoid. He also recommended that no mention be made to the duke of Vernon's intention, which would only place the duke in a delicate position.<sup>50</sup>

Either Vernon's scruples were too much for him, or he feared taking a line independently of the duke, for he revealed the whole plan to the duke. His action upset his supporters. Evans wrote to him that revelation of the plan might now involve giving the duke a list of names of those people who wished to keep out Lord Waterpark, an action that

we may be almost sure that some of the leading friends of the liberal cause would much dislike to have . . . . pointedly stated to the duke.<sup>51</sup>

Nor was Evans in favour of a general meeting of the whigs. He assured Vernon that their opinion, presumably over a compromise, would be easy to ascertain without such a meeting. The plan was patched over and Vernon recommended merely to tell the duke that he intended to stand again and that no names were to be given to him.<sup>52</sup>

The central committee of the South Derbyshire Liberal Association met in mid-June and passed a resolution that in the event of a vacancy occurring in South Derbyshire they would support Vernon as their candidate. Evans, in a letter informing Vernon of this decision, added a note on the word 'vacancy'. This was used, he said, instead of dissolution, to leave it to the committee to decide whether to support two candidates or one. This would depend on tory action. The way was then open for the compromise,

if it could be arranged. There was a final twist in the story before it ended, one more personal touch. Vernon gracefully and clearly refused the invitation. He informed Evans of this on 18th June.<sup>53</sup> On 25th June, however, we find Evans writing to him that he is pleased that he has accepted, though the pleasure is limited by Vernon's —

I assure you it is with a heavy heart I accept.<sup>54</sup>

The pressure was remorseless. Edward Strutt made it plain that unless Vernon canvassed personally he would not succeed. He underlined this in his letter to Vernon of 27th June. He also categorically stated that financial assistance from the Strutts was strictly conditional on this personal canvass.

Vernon was saved the burden of battling on behalf of an overbearing committee. There was no election for two years and later in the same year that these negotiations had taken place, on 18th November 1835, his father died and Vernon became the fifth baron Vernon.

The story, as before, had revealed the complicated personal negotiations that took place before a candidate was chosen. It showed the continuing lack of cohesion of local liberal politics with the pattern of the Cavendish 'connexion', the South Derbyshire group and the financial link of the Strutts. This local fragmentation was symptomatic of the cracks and fissures in the whig party generally.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>This article is based largely upon the Vernon manuscripts held by Lord Vernon at Sudbury House, and on the Cavendish papers at Chatsworth. References to individual letters only are noted in the Vernon MSS. My thanks are due to Lord Vernon, the Duke of Devonshire and the Trustees of the Chatsworth Settled Estates.
- <sup>2</sup>Baker to Vernon, 13th December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>3</sup>Baker to Vernon, 13th December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>4</sup>Baker to Vernon, 29th November 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>5</sup>Baker to Vernon, 1st December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>6</sup>An unsigned fragment in the Vernon Papers, but clearly from John Harrison by place, handwriting and style. He dates it Friday, 2nd December 1834, but if the 2nd, and this seems probable, it should be a Tuesday. A strange confusion perhaps explicable by his mood: the letter is quite agitated.
- <sup>7</sup>Mozley to Vernon, 7th December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>8</sup>Harrison to Vernon, 7th December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>9</sup>Baker to Vernon, 13th December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>10</sup>See Appendix for a table of the official expenses.
- <sup>11</sup>Mozley to Lord Vernon, 28th February 1833, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>12</sup>Bass wrote to Vernon on 13th December 1834, informing him, as Baker did on the same day, that the Strutts had guaranteed his expenses but that they did not relish having to do so and felt Lord Vernon ought not to place his son in such a position. Bass added: 'I wonder that Lord Vernon should advise such a course with his fine fortune of thirty-five thousand a year'. Vernon MSS.
- <sup>13</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 7th January 1835.
- <sup>14</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 4th December 1834.
- <sup>15</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 868.37.
- <sup>16</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 11th December 1834.
- <sup>17</sup>Sir Roger Greisley Collection of Papers and MSS. at Ashby-de-la-Zouch.
- <sup>18</sup>Mozley to Vernon, 4th February 1835, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>19</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 868.35.
- <sup>20</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 1st January 1835.
- <sup>21</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 5th February 1835.
- <sup>22</sup>Quoted by N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (Gash), 178.
- <sup>23</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 930.1.
- <sup>24</sup>Poll-books, Derby Library Collection.
- <sup>25</sup>Aspinall: *Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries*, p. xxxii.
- <sup>26</sup>Bass to Mrs. Vernon, 15th December 1834, Vernon MSS.
- <sup>27</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 767.28.
- <sup>28</sup>Lockett to the Duke of Devonshire, 11th December 1834. Chatsworth MSS. 868.35.

- <sup>29</sup>11th December 1834, Chatsworth MSS., 767.302.  
<sup>30</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 1283.0.  
<sup>31</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 15th January 1835.  
<sup>32</sup>*Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, 1949 Edition, 1795.  
<sup>33</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 891.9.  
<sup>34</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 868.33.  
<sup>35</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 767.299.  
<sup>36</sup>6th December and 11th December 1834. Chatsworth MSS., 868.34 and 868.35.  
<sup>37</sup>11th December 1834, Chatsworth MSS., 767.302.  
<sup>38</sup>16th December 1834, Chatsworth MSS., 868.37.  
<sup>39</sup>1st January 1835, Chatsworth MSS., 868.38.  
<sup>40</sup>9th January 1835, Chatsworth MSS., 891.12.  
<sup>41</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 8th January 1835.  
<sup>42</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 14th January 1835.  
<sup>43</sup>Poll-book, Derby Library Collection.  
<sup>44</sup>Gash, 240.  
<sup>45</sup>Baker to Vernon, 4th April 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>46</sup>Mozley to Vernon, 5th April 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>47</sup>Bass to Vernon, 13th April 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>48</sup>Mozley to Vernon, 16th April 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>49</sup>Evans to Vernon, 19th April and 23rd May 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>50</sup>Harrison to Vernon, 23rd May 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>51</sup>Evans to Vernon, 27th May 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>52</sup>Evans to Vernon, 29th May 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>53</sup>Vernon to Evans, 18th June 1835, Vernon MSS.  
<sup>54</sup>Evans to Vernon, 25th June 1835, Vernon MSS.



