

## DERBY AND DERBYSHIRE ELECTIONS 1837 — 47

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### THE 1837 ELECTION

The death of William IV on 20th June 1837 necessitated a general election. In the northern division of Derbyshire there was a contested election which was the only contested general election between the first two Reform Bills apart from the election immediately after the 1832 Bill. There was no contest in the southern division of the county; the borough was contested. The rather general issue of who were the real reformers, characteristic of 1832 and 1835, crystallised in 1837 into more specific controversies. The corn law, the poor law, the ballot were precise issues.

In the north the tories finally agreed that George Arkwright, the great-grandson of the inventor, should challenge the whigs. Both sides were now referring to themselves by their new names, liberals and conservatives. When attacking each other it was whig and tory as before. The *Derby Mercury*, in giving a list of all the returns for the country on 23rd August, placed them in two categories: Conservatives and Ministerialists. This was a conservative comment on the mixed bag who called themselves liberal. A difference of attitude was observable between the liberal candidates in north Derbyshire. George Henry Cavendish, who in his address regarded it as sufficient merely to refer to his 'well-known political principles' and to himself as 'a well-known supporter of Lord Melbourne's Government',<sup>1</sup> was joined by William Evans, the Derby mill-owner, who came forward as a clear advocate of liberal principles, including equality of rights to the Irish, relief of dissenters from paying church rates, freedom of trade in all its branches, especially trade in corn, and support for the ballot in order to protect the working class in the exercise of their political rights. The *Mercury* commented critically on the association of an old aristocratic liberal family with a radical and republican. This was rather hard on Evans; nor did Jeffrey Lockett agree with it. He wrote of Evans to the Duke of Devonshire:

Tho' Mr. Evans cannot be compared with Mr. Gisborne in talents & address, he is a well informed man, of excellent character & devoted to buss. He is zealously attached to the established Church — very rich — charitable — & a liberal promoter of education. In my opinion he is a better colleague for Mr. Cavendish than Mr. Gisborne would have been.<sup>2</sup>

Lockett was congratulating the duke on his victory and may have allowed his enthusiasm to restore the balance too much in Evans' favour from the Cavendish viewpoint. They did not agree with his all-out support for the attack on the corn laws and were to consider this two years later when thinking in terms of a compromise with a tory to the exclusion of Evans, though the issue was one of tactics rather than of principle.

In opposing George Henry Cavendish and William Evans, who, incidentally, had taken Gisborne's place because of his ill-health and who was Gisborne's brother-in-law, Arkwright disavowed any attachment to party and also claimed that his candidature had nothing to do with the fact that he was the Duke of Devonshire's cousin. George Henry Cavendish wrote to the duke about Arkwright's speech:

He said he came forward at the requisition of 700 electors and not because he was the Duke of Devonshire's cousin . . . . he said he was neither a whig, radical or tory and would not pledge himself either to support the whigs or tories but thought he should sit on the opposition benches.<sup>3</sup>

This was the attitude of the typical country gentlemen and an attitude with which much of early Victorian society would wholly agree.

The conservatives pressed the contest. The usual accusations that North Derbyshire was a close borough were made and George Henry Cavendish found it necessary to

attempt to refute the charge during his nomination speech at Bakewell on 2nd August. If the tenants voted as they did, it simply meant that they held the same principles as the duke; and he was pleased at this sensible coincidence. Arkwright agreed that the duke might not coerce his tenants but his agents were very active.<sup>4</sup> George Henry Cavendish wrote to the duke and hoped that he had

successfully vindicated you from the ridiculous charge of wanting to make Derbyshire a close borough.

He added:

I have had a very civil note from the Duke of Rutland in which he hopes that his tenants will all vote for me.<sup>5</sup>

The Rutland interest in Derbyshire arose out of the ownership of Haddon Hall in the north of the county. Voting was arranged for the 7th and 8th of August. The fight, as usual, was between the county gentlemen and the Cavendish interest, supported by the liberal elements in the towns of the northern part of the county, such as Chesterfield and Glossop, though a number of conservatives gave their second vote to George Henry Cavendish out of respect for the Duke of Devonshire and, no doubt, in return for suitable offerings. George Henry Cavendish wrote from Chatsworth to the duke, who was at Southampton preparing for a continental tour, giving him the state of the poll on the first day. He commented on these offerings which had not always had the desired effect, especially in the Scarsdale district where Arkwright polled more votes than either he or Evans. He concluded that this

shows conclusively that Scarsdale on which so much pains has been spent to keep things straight among the gentlemen is worth nothing compared with the Peak . . . . Those fat bucks would keep a hundred votes in the Peak in good humour while they cannot keep one gentleman . . . .<sup>6</sup>

Many of the conservatives regretted the association of the Cavendishes with the more advanced liberals and looked back to the days when the representation was split. At a speech in Chesterfield, during the canvassing, one of Arkwright's proposers had complained bitterly 'that the Cavendish interest did not stand as heretofore on neutral ground'.<sup>7</sup> The truth was that the Cavendishes would have preferred this, but the growing strength of the liberal elements in the county made it a risky proposition.

Despite the conservative exertions, Arkwright decided to withdraw at 11 p.m. on the first polling day, when the voting stood as follows:

The Hon. George Henry Cavendish	..	2,816
William Evans	.. ..	2,476
George Arkwright	.. ..	1,983 <sup>8</sup>

Polling had taken place at five places, Chesterfield, Glossop, Alfreton, Bakewell and Chapel-en-le-Frith, and at all places the conservatives had made strenuous efforts. Bands and banners marked 'Arkwright and Independence' had been a prominent feature. Expectations of further fierce contests led to a competition of house building between the two parties. Houses worth 40/- a year were built and owned by the Strutts, Lockett and some south Derbyshire liberals. This was done because the conservatives started it.<sup>9</sup> This form of rivalry tends to suggest that Lockett's belief, expressed in a letter to the duke, that the result of the 1837 election had shown that the conservatives had no chance of returning a member for North Derbyshire, was somewhat optimistic. But events were to prove him right.

In the southern division of Derbyshire the conservatives were well-entrenched and there was no contest. They got rid of their liability, Sir Roger Gresley, who by an injudicious jocularly in his speeches had too obviously attempted to conceal his lack of knowledge of political questions, on the announced grounds of ill-health. Sir George Crewe, the sitting member, was joined by Francis Hurt of Alderwasley, a country squire from a tiny hamlet near Wirksworth. Crewe referred to his past record in his election address and Hurt to general principles, including support for the constitution, the church and the House of Lords.<sup>10</sup> The liberals could find no one to place against them and

even the local liberal newspaper conceded that 'the general respect entertained for both gentlemen, independently of the powerful party by which they are supported, would place a successful opposition to their election out of the question'.<sup>11</sup>

The liberal candidates in the borough election of 1837 were the sitting members, Strutt and Ponsonby. As in 1835, they were opposed by Francis Curzon. This time a second conservative entered the field. He was Charles Robert Colvile of Lullington, son of Sir Charles Henry Colvile of Duffield Hall.

The issues between the two groups were, like those in the northern part of the county, less generalised than hitherto. The liberal candidates were against the corn laws, in favour of a revision of the poor laws, and for the ballot. Presumably Ponsonby had shed his uncertainty about the ballot. Concern for Dissent continued to be a thread running through liberal policy. Colvile, who later in life was to show himself a man of vigour and of independent views, professed what were to become the conservative traditions of support for the Crown, the Constitution and the Church, but, in addition, was not afraid to tackle the controversial issues of corn and poor laws. He was ready for an alteration in the latter, but agreed that a repeal of the former would not lead to all that was claimed for it.<sup>12</sup>

The election was fought with the usual hand-bill and squib weapons, though no violence or undue excitement was reported. One hand-bill may be quoted as an example of the verbal battles. The Tories were satirised by a description of what were called 'Tory Cardinal Virtues':

- 1st — Tory Charity — Bishops in affluence. Curates in a state of starvation. Compulsory payment of Church Rates, by compelling Dissenters to pay towards the support of the Church.
- 2nd — Tory Patriotism — Gagging Bills. Indemnification Bills. Packed Juries. Imprisonments, and Beheading.
- 3rd — Tory Loyalty — The Massacre of the People. Attempt to divert the Succession of the Crown from our young and excellent Queen, in order to place it on the head of the detested Duke of Cumberland.
- 4th — Tory Religion — Sir Andrew Agnew's Sabbath Bill, which oppresses the Poor man without touching the rich. Sporting Clergymen. Roman Catholic Persecutions. Extortion of Tythes, etc.

The result of the poll was declared on 25th July:

				<i>Mayor's Return</i>
Edward Strutt	..	..	837	838
J. G. B. Ponsonby	..	..	792	794
Francis Curzon	..	..	529	533
Charles Robert Colvile	..	..	465	468 <sup>13</sup>

(The poll-book explains the two sets of returns as the consequence of a few burgesses' votes being tendered and allowed at the time of polling, which were not upon the last revised list.) The only comfort the conservatives could take was that the whig majority of 1835 had been slightly reduced.

In between the 1837 and 1841 elections there was an interesting episode affecting North Derbyshire that illustrated the difference between the 18th and 19th centuries in the attitude towards compromise elections. The episode arose out of the resignation of the liberal government on 6th May 1839, which, though they finally remained in office, was sufficient to set in motion election hopes and speculations. On 23rd May the Duke of Rutland wrote to the Duke of Devonshire informing him that several of the supporters of the conservative cause in North Derbyshire had expressed the wish that his son, the Marquis of Granby, be put in nomination for that area in the event of a dissolution of parliament in place of Arkwright. He reminded Devonshire that he had

constantly and uniformly . . . . given your nominee the support of half my interest in the Co. of Derby<sup>14</sup>

as he regarded the arrangement as a species of family compact. He now asked the duke if he would do the same for his son, Granby. The Duke of Devonshire was in Geneva at the time and the matter was discussed with George Henry Cavendish by correspondence. The sixth duke was not greatly interested in politics and invariably sought the advice of his brother. The request provoked careful consideration. The duke submitted to George Henry three drafts upon which the latter commented at length in a letter addressed to the duke at Geneva, dated 15th June. He made several points before coming to a conclusion. He pointed out to the duke the danger of appearing to divide the representation between two great landowners; the risk was that the liberals would desert them and set up a radical candidate, and then

it would rest with the Tories and your landowners to return your member.

This, too, would be a risk as the tories were still smarting from their recent defeat, he went on. If Evans were to withdraw,

then it would be quite fair to enter into a compromise with the Duke of Rutland.

and this might be to our advantage as Evans had done himself great harm by opposing the corn laws and Granby would have considerable support at a contest. George Henry Cavendish then put their dilemma:

. . . . it would certainly be much pleasanter for you personally and me too if we could have one on each side and no contest — but I think if we gave up our principles, or in any way abandoned our party the abuse we should get would make us uncomfortable.

Somewhat inconsistently he had said earlier in the letter that the duke and Evans had paid for the previous elections and unless, therefore, the party shared the expenses in the future, the duke would be entitled to look back to his old family interest. It seems doubtful whether this threat could be held out to the liberals in North Derbyshire in view of what Cavendish says about the risks involved in a compromise. His conclusion was that the duke should tell Rutland that he could only allow his tenants to vote exactly as they wished.<sup>15</sup>

The reply to the Duke of Rutland was delayed, the excuse being that the Duke of Devonshire was abroad, which was true of course, and before a reply was made a fresh impetus was given to the problem. Cavendish informed his brother that Stanley, the Secretary of the Treasury, of whom he wrote that he knew all about who were to be candidates at future elections, had told them that at the next election in North Derbyshire it was intended to put forward Lord Edward Howard, Lord Surrey's second son, in place of Evans who would be persuaded to go to South Derbyshire. The policy that Cavendish recommended to the duke was as before:

I am quite satisfied that the only thing to do is to stick by our party — as we shall slip between two stools besides incurring a good deal of odium and abuse. If the Liberal party thought there was anything like a disposition to compromise with the Duke of Rutland and to let in a Tory, I believe they would give their entire support to Lord E. Howard or any other Liberal candidate.

The inescapable attitude towards Rutland's request was, Cavendish concluded, to tell him that the liberal party in North Derbyshire was strong enough to put up two candidates and that, because of the way in which they supported the duke at the last election, he could not oppose the second liberal candidate. The best he could do was to leave his tenants to vote as they thought fit.<sup>16</sup> A reply along these lines was at last despatched, to which the Duke of Rutland replied on 3rd September. He was disappointed and though admitting the duke's particular position in the county directed a slight barb:

As to Party and political principles I myself have shown that I can abandon them to a certain extent when the Interests of a Friend are to be served.

He further sadly reminded the duke that his friends in the county of Leicester frequently taunted him with his incomplete and neutralised support of the tory interest in

Derbyshire and that his excuse had always been that nothing would induce him to forego his support of the Duke of Devonshire's interests in Derbyshire except the knowledge that such support would not be reciprocal. He concluded:

This knowledge I have now with much regret acquired.<sup>17</sup>

The episode illustrates the growing strength of a local party limiting the ducal selection of candidates and making dangerous the kind of compromises that were so prominent a feature of 18th century politics. One of the factors that prevented the growth of political parties was breaking down.

#### THE 1841 ELECTION

The general election of 1841, though fought against a lively background of agitation over the corn laws, dissatisfaction with the new poor law and generally harsh conditions, was not widely contested. It has been estimated that less than half the constituencies were contested.<sup>18</sup> To this proportion of uncontested elections North Derbyshire contributed. But the battles in the borough and in South Derbyshire were the fiercest since 1832.

The liberals in South Derbyshire, after their failure to force a contest in 1837, managed to persuade Lord Waterpark to try again and had him joined by Matthew Gisborne, a member of the well-known Derbyshire family. Their reason for challenging the conservatives in South Derbyshire was a curious one, if a letter written (after the election) by John Strutt is not simply an excuse for failure. In appealing to the Duke of Devonshire for financial assistance to help to clear the expenses of the election, he wrote that the contest was entered on with a doubtful chance of success, but that the decision was taken in order to make the Tories spend money and to help the liberals in the north and in the borough.<sup>19</sup> If this was so, the plan miscarried. There was no contest in the north and the borough as usual comfortably carried its two liberal candidates. Even more, the liberal expenses were astonishingly high.

The conservative attack on the Melbourne Ministry was a concerted affair and their organisation in Derbyshire was a reflection of the efficiency which Peel had enthused into the party. Annual conservative dinners were now held in Derby and during the gathering of January 1841 Colville, the defeated candidate for the borough in 1837, referred to Peel's cry of 'register, register, register'. He revealed that over 200 electors had put their names on the registration lists for the southern division and that the conservatives were a growing and powerful party.<sup>20</sup> This was all in keeping with the political techniques of the time, which were developing rapidly and spreading widely.

It was at this dinner that the two members were chosen who were to contest the southern division. Colville was adopted, thus turning his attention from the borough to the county, and Edward Mundy of Shipley Hall, near Ilkeston, and, like Gisborne, a member of a well-known Derbyshire family. Opposing them were Lord Waterpark and Matthew Gisborne with Joseph Strutt as chairman of their joint-committee. No longer was it regarded desirable to mask the co-ordination of candidates' canvassing. Waterpark said he had no intention of offering himself again, but that he had been requested to come forward. Gisborne announced that he had been invited to offer himself along with Lord Waterpark. The issues between the two groups were very much as in 1837 in the northern division: the conservatives professing their support of Church and State, and the liberals attacking the corn laws, though not advocating their abolition as the more radical liberals did. The conservatives' attitude was that the cry for reform of the corn laws was an electoral trick and would not benefit the people.

The course of the election was marked by violence. Hired gangs of bullies from Nottingham, known as 'lambs', were used in groups of 50 and 60 at a time to break up conservative gatherings at the polling stations at Heanor, Ilkeston, Melbourne and Swadlincote. The military from Nottingham had to be called to Ilkeston. Intimidation by force was not confined to any one group, conservative, liberal or radical, for much was



at stake in these elections, money as well as the urge to remove discontent. Subtler methods were also employed. Attempts were made to impersonate conservative voters and so register a vote for the opposite side. The attempts were detected and two men were put in gaol for it. One of the men caught confessed that he was to receive a sovereign for the job.<sup>21</sup> The *Derbyshire Chronicle*, a short-lived liberal newspaper, admitted 'the detection of a few personations of voters on the liberal side', which was 'quite a god-send to the Tories'.<sup>22</sup> There was the customary bribery by ale and the *Mercury* alleged that it knew of one man who died from the effects of liquor supplied to him by the whigs.<sup>23</sup> The *Chronicle* admitted that a man died in one of the villages, but that he was an old man who died from excitement when welcoming Gisborne!<sup>24</sup> The usual pressures were exercised and there was an interesting example of a country gentleman being advised to send written instructions to one of his tenants requesting him to vote contrary to what his immediate landlord had ordered. C. H. Welch, presumably an agent for the Ashbourne district of Derbyshire, wrote from the committee room there on 11th July to Sir Henry Fitzherbert of Tissington:

Dear Sir,

. . . . John Swindell of Drakelow has a vote . . . . which he has I rather think promised for Waterpark and Gisborne, but if you will see him it is very likely you can induce him to give it to Mundy and Colvile or at all events to be neutral.

Thomas Yeomans . . . . (your tenant) has promised to vote for us — but having since received a letter from Mr. Fitzherbert (who is also his landlord) requesting him to vote for our opponents he does not know what to do. Will you therefore be so good as to write a note to him requesting him to vote for us and I will send it by messenger.<sup>25</sup>

The Duke of Devonshire's name was used pretty freely during the course of the election and it was broadly hinted that he wished Waterpark and Gisborne to be returned. The *Mercury*, with due respect, admitted the duke was not behind this himself, but that it was the work of agents.

Polling took place on 13th July and, despite the strenuous efforts of the liberals, the conservative majority showed an increase on 1835:

Edward Miller Mundy	..	3,234
Charles Robert Colvile	..	3,209
Matthew Gisborne	.. ..	2,403
Lord Waterpark	.. ..	2,325 <sup>26</sup>

The size of the electorate in the division was now 6,807, so that the proportion of those voting had been high.

The liberals had spent highly and unwisely. Over a year after the election they were still in debt and John Strutt had the unhappy task of approaching the Duke of Devonshire for financial assistance. In a letter to the duke, written on 20th October 1842, he described himself as 'the unwilling organ of communication that the liberal party, after the late election in South Derbyshire after paying a very large sum are still in debt'.<sup>27</sup> It was a cautious letter. The reason for embarking on an election in which they knew that their chances were not very promising was given and their lack of time for organisation due to a late decision to challenge was put forward as a factor in their defeat. More artfully, Strutt wrote that he might have cautioned much unwise expenditure, but he recalled Waterpark's attributing a former defeat to too scrupulous an economy. But he was immediately humble again and admitted their great extravagance in eating and drinking. He assured the duke that all were disgusted with their behaviour and regarded the episode as a salutary experience. He then listed the subscriptions that had so far been given:

	£		£
Mr. Evans	1400	Mr. Nightingale	500
G. B. Strutt	1400	Mr. Pares	300
Joseph Strutt	1400	I. Strutt	350
Ed. Strutt	1400	A. Strutt	700
Earl of Leicester	500	John Strutt	700
		Dr. . . . . [sic]	750
		advanced without any expectation of repayment.	

Mr. Matthew Gisborne £200 unsolicited. These subscriptions have all been paid and there is still a deficiency of not less than £2000. Many of the claimants are becoming importunate.

John Strutt hoped that the duke would consider the matter. There is a copy of the duke's reply on the foot of the letter. The date is 28th October and a draft for £500 was apparently sent. The expenditure of £9,600 for an electorate of just under 7,000 was high, but not unusually so for the price of politics of the day.

The election in the borough of Derby in 1841 followed the pattern of the 1835 and 1837 elections: comfortable liberal victories with the conservatives slightly reducing their opponents' majority each time. The small conservative gain was repeated in 1841, despite the incredibly late entry of their candidate: his name was not announced until the day before nomination day. The election's most interesting feature, perhaps, was a remarkable speech by the proposer of the conservative candidate who openly proclaimed his nostalgia for the way in which elections were quietly decided in the 18th century.

The liberal candidates once more were Edward Strutt and John Ponsonby. Both were now well-known members, Strutt having sat since 1830 and Ponsonby since 1835. They opened their campaign early and published their election addresses at the beginning of June. Both were against the corn laws, for free trade and the ballot. The conservatives were faced with the problem of finding new candidates to take the place of Colville, who had gone to the southern division, and Francis Curzon who was not standing again. For a whole month no conservative name was announced and then on the Sunday, the day before the nomination day, which was the last day in June, they announced that Edward Sacheverell Chandos-Pole of Radbourne Hall would stand. Chandos-Pole, member of an old Derbyshire family, had served in the Peninsular War and had been High Sheriff for the county in 1827. The Chandos-Poles were a distinguished family, contributing several High Sheriffs and had an ancestor, Sir Peter de la Pole, who had been a Member of Parliament for Derbyshire in the reign of Henry IV. There were lively scenes at the nomination speeches when Chandos-Pole's supporters spoke for him. Chandos-Pole himself was not there, so sudden had been the announcement of his standing. His proposer, a Mr. Roger Cox, had to say: 'brother townsmen, I am very unexpectedly raised to a situation here to propose a candidate for your election. I knew nothing of this till I drove into town at five minutes to ten o'clock this morning, so I have got neither notes nor comments.' This was greeted with cries of 'shame', 'fudge', 'cock a doodle do' and 'shut your tater trap'.<sup>28</sup> Chandos-Pole's brother, the Rev. Reginald Chandos-Pole, spoke on his behalf and made a very unwise speech that caused considerable commotion. He looked backwards sadly:

Up to the Reform Bill, the county was under a sort of contract that it should be represented by one of each party. The arrangement was carried on with the utmost amicable feeling for a long period. The conservatives continued to act up to their arrangement but the whigs did not. (Uproar).

This was a very unpolitic remark to make to the liberals, confident of victory and assured of the justness of their cause. The Rev. Chandos-Pole spoke well of Strutt, but referred to Ponsonby as 'a nominee of a very influential party', the usual conservative dig at the Duke of Devonshire. A new argument was adduced against the reduction of the corn laws that bullion would have to be paid for foreign corn and this might cause bankruptcy.

Edward Strutt, as usual, headed the poll:

		<i>Plumpers</i>
Edward Strutt	875	10
John Ponsonby	784	2
E. S. Chandos-Pole	587	496
	for Strutt & Ponsonby	778
	for Strutt & Chandos-Pole	87
	for Ponsonby & Chandos-Pole	4.29

In the speeches after the result, Ponsonby tackled the allegations that he was a nominee. He said that this was not so, that he was selected six years ago without the Duke of Devonshire's knowledge. This was, of course, quite true, but Ponsonby went further and tacitly admitted that he owed his approval as candidate to the duke, justifying this by reminding his audience that neither he nor they need be ashamed of the natural respect which they paid to so distinguished a person and so munificent a supporter of the town and the county.<sup>30</sup> Such sentiments were a fair comment on the conventions to which many still adhered.

#### TWO BOROUGH BY-ELECTIONS: 1846 AND 1847

A by-election in the borough was necessary in 1846 because of the appointment of Edward Strutt to a Government post and another in 1847 because of the removal of Ponsonby to the House of Lords on his father's death. The conservatives tried, in the first of these by-elections, to turn to their advantage the dissatisfaction felt by many dissenters with Peel's policy towards the Irish Roman Catholics. Despite the fact that Strutt had voted for the Maynooth grant and notwithstanding an official resolution by the local dissenting group not to vote for Strutt, many did and he was returned for the seventh time. The by-election of 1847 was interesting in that it saw the first attempt by a chartist to contest Derby. There was no voting: the Mayor disqualified the chartist candidate on a technical point. The election was also interesting for the example it afforded of the Duke of Devonshire once more breaking a rule he had adopted after the Reform Bill. For the second time he supported a relative on the grounds that he was a relative rather than as a means of continuing a desired influence. It was, in fact, the last time a member of the house of Cavendish was to be returned for the borough.

On 29th August 1846 it was announced that Strutt was resigning consequent on his appointment as President of the new Railway Board which was taking over the work done by the Board of Trade for the railways. He offered himself for re-election, stating that his principles were as before. The conservatives were ready with an opponent. They brought forward Colonel Sir Digby Mackworth, a regular soldier who had fought in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo, and who was a stranger to Derby. His election address was in the (by now) usual conservative formula, but there was added to it the specific religious issue. The *Derby Mercury* said of him: 'His only object in coming forward was simply and solely to give an opportunity to the electors to record their protest in favour of genuine protestantism, and against the encouragement of Popery in the kingdom'.<sup>31</sup>

The support of Strutt and Ponsonby for Peel's April proposals to spend money on the reconditioning and maintenance of the Irish Catholic Seminary at Maynooth had upset the Dissenting element in the local liberal party, so much so that on 30th August a meeting was held and Strutt invited to attend to answer questions on why he had voted for Peel's measure. Strutt, questioned by the Reverend James Gawthorn, an Independent Minister who was prominent in local politics, justified his support on the grounds that it was better to educate Roman Catholic priests in Ireland than have them instructed abroad to return with an ever-increasing disaffection.<sup>32</sup> The Dissenters were hardly satisfied and a resolution was passed not to support Strutt at the contest.



Few could have obeyed it as the decline in the liberal majority was no greater than at any other election since 1832; in fact, it was less. The incident is interesting as an example of the slowly growing dependence of a candidate on his constituency, a dependence with which the printing of how a candidate had voted had much to do.

Nomination day was Wednesday, 2nd September. During the speeches a voice was raised that Strutt was now a placeman, but this was quickly squashed by the retort that his appointment was an all-party recommendation. Digby refused to pledge himself to anything except so far as it touched on Popery and he admitted that he was in favour of flogging in the army, reluctantly of course.<sup>4</sup> Polling was on 3rd September and the result declared soon after:

Edward Strutt	..	..	..	835
Colonel Sir Digby Mackworth			..	559 <sup>33</sup>

As before, the conservatives could point only to a reduction in the liberal majority and underline this continuing feature since 1832. The editors of the two leading local newspapers put the whole contest down to religious issues. The conservative *Mercury* admitted that 'there would have been no election but for this religious issue'.<sup>34</sup> The liberal *Reporter* exclaimed sardonically: 'Who would have dreamt that a "No Popery" cry could have been raised in Derby in the year 1846?'.<sup>35</sup>

The death of the Earl of Bessborough in Dublin on 17th May 1847 necessitated the removal of his son, John George Brabazon Ponsonby, from the Commons to the Lords and thus brought about the by-election of 1847 in Derby. The liberal candidate brought forward to take his place was Frederick Leveson-Gower, brother of Lord Granville and a nephew of the Duke of Devonshire. His uncle supported his candidature mainly from a sense of family obligation. He wrote to his nephew:

I am so very happy that you are pleased, and your letter has gratified me very much. It is quite true that you are the only person to whom I should consent to prolong that sort of interest with Derby.<sup>36</sup>

But before he was acceptable to the local liberal group, Leveson-Gower had to agree to some pretty radical proposals. It was announced in the *Reporter* on 28th May that his nomination had depended on his acceptance of the principles of household suffrage, vote by ballot, triennial parliaments and free trade. The *Mercury* was aghast at this association of aristocracy and radicalism. Their editorial comment was bitter:

The Hon. Mr. Gower seems determined to render himself acceptable to that hodge-podge of political opinion — Whig, Radical, Republican & Chartist — which is usually comprehended under the familiar title of the 'liberal party'.

Nor could they resist the usual criticism of the Cavendish influence:

Here is a borough, practically quite as much a nomination borough as ever was Old Sarum, bound over to the House of Cavendish by the very men who are foremost to assert their own political independence — men who, like the puppet which dances at the will of its owner, act just as the strings are pulled by the master hand.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, of course, the control was nowhere near what it had been and the conservative exaggeration was a mixture of their ignorance of the true situation and their irritation at what they regarded as a sacrifice of aristocratic principles to maintain political ascendancy. They were to be similarly expedient themselves shortly.

Leveson-Gower's opponent was Philip M'Grath, a chartist lecturer from London. This was the first occasion on which a chartist had contested Derby. Chartism, which had lost some of its appeal since the return of economic prosperity from the middle of 1843,<sup>38</sup> recovered much of its enthusiasm as a result of the launching of O'Connor's Land Plan in April 1845. Derby shared in this revival of enthusiasm. Leveson-Gower's view was that all the workers in the town were chartists.<sup>39</sup> A meeting was arranged to take place in the market-place, but the Mayor refused this because of the possibility of obstruction. Gatherings were held at Chester Green, a large open space about one quarter of a mile away, on 2nd June, and in the Town Hall on the following night.<sup>40</sup>

At these meetings, M'Grath spoke of the six-sevenths of the male population excluded from the franchise and put forward the chartist claims for vote by ballot, annual parliaments, universal suffrage, improvement of the penal code and abolition of the gallows. He also spoke on Ireland and on the Poor Laws.<sup>41</sup>

Nomination day was Wednesday, 16th June. On the previous Monday, Colonel Sir Digby Mackworth, the defeated conservative candidate in the by-election of the preceding year, arrived, but was dissuaded from standing by his friends on the grounds that he had no chance.<sup>42</sup> M'Grath was proposed by a local man and supported by a local silk-weaver and one of the chartist executives from London. Leveson-Gower and his proposer made the usual admission about the Duke of Devonshire and the usual justifications. Leveson-Gower, writing 58 years after the event, described what followed:

at the nomination nearly every hand was held up in favour of my opponent. The Mayor, who was a Tory, but preferred even a whig to a chartist, sternly cried out, 'non-electors, put down your hands!' They, taken by surprise, obeyed him, and there remained a sprinkling of hands in my favour. Thereupon he decided that I had got the show of hands. The Chartists demanded a poll, but being unable to produce the requisite guarantee money, the Mayor declared me elected. I fancy his proceeding was illegal.<sup>43</sup>

The Mayor's tactics were not illegal, but simply sharp practice. The counting of hands led to much trouble and was open to considerable abuse. Non-electors were sometimes counted either by accident or by design. When necessary, of course, the law was strictly complied with. Contemporary newspaper accounts confirm Leveson-Gower's memory. The deposit demanded by the Mayor was the legal expenses of the returning officer, the sum of £20 13s. 0d. Much booing and hissing greeted the Mayor's rulings and as the *Reporter* added, 'some contention took place between the Mayor and Mr. M'Grath'.<sup>44</sup>

The conservative newspaper consoled its readers by saying that this election was no real test. No men of merit had fought the issues and Leveson-Gower's success was the success of a man who does well at college only because it is a bad year for ability. The liberal newspaper included a new and interesting justification for the admitted Cavendish influence. 'There is one thing not to be overlooked in selecting a Cavendish, we secure thereby not only his own but a great deal of collateral Parliamentary influence, also an amount we could not look for from any other family with whom we could be connected.'<sup>45</sup>

The two by-elections had been lively contests, but they were a mere prelude to what was to come in Derby.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>*Derby Mercury*, July issues, 1837.
- <sup>2</sup>28th August 1837, Chatsworth MSS. 868.40.
- <sup>3</sup>3rd August 1837, Chatsworth MSS. 1132.42.
- <sup>4</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 9th August 1837.
- <sup>5</sup>3rd August 1837, Chatsworth MSS. 1132.42.
- <sup>6</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 1132.43.
- <sup>7</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 27th July 1837.
- <sup>8</sup>Poll-book, Derby Library Collection.
- <sup>9</sup>G. H. Cavendish to 6th duke, 7th January 1838, Chatsworth MSS., 1132.44.
- <sup>10</sup>*Derby Mercury*, July issues, 1837.
- <sup>11</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 19th July 1837.
- <sup>12</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 12th July 1837.
- <sup>13</sup>Poll-book, Derby Library Collection.
- <sup>14</sup>Chatsworth MSS. 850.15.
- <sup>15</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 1132.45.
- <sup>16</sup>3rd July 1839, Chatsworth MSS., 1132.46.
- <sup>17</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 850.16.

- <sup>18</sup>N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (Gash) 239.
- <sup>19</sup>20th October 1842, Chatsworth MSS., 120.0.
- <sup>20</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 6th January 1841.
- <sup>21</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 30th June 1841.
- <sup>22</sup>*Derbyshire Chronicle*, 24th July 1841. (A liberal newspaper, printed at Belper, which had a short life. It is used to cover the 1841 election from the liberal angle as the *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter* is missing for this year from the archives of the Derby Telegraph Offices. Most of the copies of this paper are located there, very few being in the Borough Library.)
- <sup>23</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 30th June 1841.
- <sup>24</sup>*Derbyshire Chronicle*, 3rd July 1841.
- <sup>25</sup>Fitzherbert MSS.
- <sup>26</sup>Poll-book, Derby Library Collection. NB. The poll-book has a footnote:  
'This was the election when large bodies of persons of the lower orders, residents in Nottingham and its neighbourhood, impersonated voters and voted whig. They were detected.'
- <sup>27</sup>Chatsworth MSS., 120.0.
- <sup>28</sup>*Derbyshire Chronicle*, 3rd July 1841
- <sup>29</sup>Poll-book, Derby Library Collection.
- <sup>30</sup>*Derbyshire Chronicle*, 3rd July 1841.
- <sup>31</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 2nd September 1846.
- <sup>32</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 4th September 1846.
- <sup>33</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 11th September 1846.
- <sup>34</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 9th September 1846.
- <sup>35</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 18th September 1846.
- <sup>36</sup>F. Leveson-Gower, *Bygone Years* (Leveson-Gower), 237. Quoted in part by Gash, 216.
- <sup>37</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 22nd May 1847.
- <sup>38</sup>S. Macoby, *English Radicalism 1832-52*, 254.
- <sup>39</sup>Leveson-Gower, 237.
- <sup>40</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 4th June 1847.
- <sup>41</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 9th June 1847.
- <sup>42</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 18th June 1847.
- <sup>43</sup>Leveson-Gower, 237-8.
- <sup>44</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 16th June, and *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 18th June 1847.
- <sup>45</sup>*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, 18th June 1847.