Houses and parliament:
local politics, tenure and ‘townscapes’
THE CASE OF SUSSEX BOROUGHS IN THE ‘LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY’

By Spencer Thomas

Little or no attention has been paid to the relationship between electioneering and urban morphology before 1832 despite a general literature that documents patrons’ manipulation of small boroughs to improve and/or ensure their or their nominees’ election to parliament.¹ In Sussex, proprietorial boroughs revealed a pernicious association between the electoral ambitions, power and influence of local landed interests, both aristocracy and gentry, and the acquisition of burgage plots. Their ruthlessness had a profound impact on the appearance of places subject to burgage and related tenures.

BURGAGE TENURE AND FRANCHISE

Burgage tenure has been defined as ‘one undivided and indivisible tenement, neither created nor capable of being created within time of memory, which has immemorially given a right of voting’,² and as ‘a form of free tenure peculiar to boroughs where a tenement so held might be alienated by gift, sale or devise, to a degree regulated only by the incidence of feudalism or villeinage: divisible at pleasure’.³ These interpretations manifested themselves in the medieval proprietorial boroughs in Sussex subject to burgage and related tenures (Arundel, Bramber, East Grinstead, Horsham, Midhurst, New Shoreham and Steyning) in distinctive ways, including variations in the numbers, sizes and rents of burgage plots and the privileges and responsibilities attached to them. Irrespective of these differences, burgage plots were susceptible to be ‘divisible at pleasure’ and the ‘myth’ of indivisibility was exploded at an early date.

In proprietorial boroughs the vote was treated as a form of property and the voting process as a transaction.⁴ Whoever owned the property registered the vote. Plots of land which incorporated a residential qualification were vulnerable to the avarice and wealth of patrons bidding to purchase the majority of the properties to control the seat and consolidate their influence. Domination and the existence of nomination boroughs were not the exclusive preserves of proprietorial boroughs with burgage and related tenures.⁵ Venal, corporation, patronage and open boroughs all controlled representation, to a greater or lesser extent, through paternalistic/deference structures, mutual dependence, reciprocal obligations, political favouritism, abuses of power and financial inducements. The distinction revolved around the individual nature and status of burgage tenures, the antiquity and complexity of the titles, and local customary practices that amounted to legal precedents.

In the period under review the constituency was the basic unit, electoral activity was overwhelmingly local, and local politics was indistinguishable from the local community. Political activists bequeathed an indelible legacy on the form of the settlements at the heart of the constituencies. The impact of electioneering on urban morphology has been neglected. Indeed O’Gorman asserts that there ‘has been a remarkable indifference to and consequently massive ignorance of the electoral foundations of the Hanoverian (1734–1832) political and social order and upheavals in local life have never been seriously investigated’.⁶ He deprecated the inadequacy of the electoral dimension in the familiar chronicles of social and political history.

THE ESTABLISHED POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORDER

The justification for an electoral dimension is a tacit acknowledgement that for nearly 600 years burgesses were at the core of the local political and social fabric in borough constituencies, through rights attached to burgage tenure and
enshrined in ancient charters. As well as the right to vote for parliamentary candidates, burgesses usually appointed the returning officer, who effectively stage-managed the election and administered the ‘extremely perilous duty’ of arbitrating on complaints against the legitimacy of individual voters. Losing candidates often accused them of ‘scandalous partiality’ towards their successful opponents, whereas in reality they ‘were frequently ill-calculated to decide such matters of importance as come before them’ and to combat the legal representatives of the candidates present at the counts.7 Other local officials were accused of compromising themselves; ‘through the Inadvertence or Contrivance of Careless and Artful Stewards’ they allowed ineligible persons to become burgesses.8 Corrupt manipulation of the voting process manufactured burgages where there were none and prised burgages away from their legitimate owners.

Burgage tenure also incorporated the right to elect, usually annually, local borough officials such as the steward, reeve, bailiff and headborough. They exercised local authority through the Court Leet, effectively administering local government and dispensing justice in criminal and civil cases. They controlled commerce in the borough markets in accordance with the privileges conferred in the original and subsequent charters, through officers such as the ale-conners, leather searchers and sealers. In return they were obliged to attend the Court Baron, which was the private court of the Lord of the Manor preserving his rights vis-à-vis his tenants, but also defending the privileges granted to tenants. As these met regularly, usually fortnightly, to fulfil a range of functions a ‘body politic of a singular nature’ emerged, distancing itself from the rest of the community, who were disfranchised and consequently of inferior status.9 Possession of burgage tenure was an accepted means of achieving upward social mobility, and consequently burgesses were courted by the ambitious who sought influential roles in local society, and by those with pretensions to become Members of Parliament.

**CONTROL OF CONSTITUENCIES**

Most Sussex boroughs sent two Members to the first parliament in 1295.10 They continued to do so until either the Reform Act 1832 or the Redistribution of Seats Act 1885 reduced, and ultimately extinguished, their representation. Seats were re-allocated to avert a political crisis and to reflect changing urban and population distributions in the nineteenth century consequent upon industrialization and migration.

Over nearly 600 years three phases can be identified. The first ran from 1295 until the Civil War in the middle of the seventeenth century when the number of burgesses generally coincided with the properties enumerated in early charters as possessing burgage tenure. The number of burgesses remained more or less constant and they voted consistently for their local candidate, invariably the Lord of the Manor or his nominee. There was little dissent and there was an unobtrusive acceptance of a subordinate position in society ‘midway between the privileged and the property less’ in return for stability that was in both the burgesses’ and the Lord’s best interests.11

Although some towns grew while others declined, in general it was a period of urban stagnation or decay.12 No Sussex borough exceeded 2000 people and only Chichester, Lewes and Rye approached this figure. At the other extreme Steyning had a population around 300 and East Grinstead 200, while Bramber, ‘a miserable place comprising 24 thatched cottages’, was superseded by the creation of New Shoreham at the mouth of the River Adur in about 1100 which continued to be represented at Westminster until 1832.13 On this scale removal and reconstruction tended to balance each other, thereby preserving the form and appearance of boroughs. The corollary was that the small sizes of the franchises in the burgage boroughs and the prospect of a seat in the House of Commons at a reasonable cost made them the focus of zealous attention.

The second phase ran from the Restoration until 1832 during which:

‘the burgesses were manipulated out of their birthright and almost entirely extinguished; and the constituency, originally a free democracy, was captured and exploited in the financial and political interests of two or three influential families’.14

This period witnessed the growing rivalry between, and within, landed manorial families who had inherited their property and status, and between them and the new order driven by business and industrial wealth, army officers and
government officials. They coveted becoming Members of Parliament and the aristocracy were determined to thwart their ambitions and retain their social and political power base. These clashes prompted the pillage of burgage plots in the pursuit of electoral control and the promotion of self-aggrandisement.

The prime casualty of the attack upon the burgesses was the urban plan. Burgage plots were sub-divided into fractional holdings and, critically, some of the fractions held equal voting rights with an ‘entire burgage’. The increased number of tenants no longer equated with burgages prescribed in charters, but represented the number of voters accumulated by rival politicians through their deceitful exploitation of the burgage franchise to increase their share of the vote. The vote was attached to property not people.

In some boroughs, such as Chichester and Bramber, rival patrons agreed to share representation by nominating one M.P. each to protect their respective investments and to avoid the expense and inconvenience of a contest, even if it was a ‘despicable and unnatural coalition’. Agreements removed the pressure to sub-divide and accumulate burgages, thereby perpetuating the shape of the borough. Likewise, domination by a single powerful aristocratic family, such as the Sackvilles in East Grinstead, where elections were ‘unnecessary and uncustomary’, and the Pelhams in Lewes had the same effect in preserving the formal parallel layout of burgage plots at right angles to the highway.

Rye, the wealthiest borough in Sussex and the 20th most prosperous in the country in the Tudor period, prided itself on its independence compared with neighbouring Winchelsea’s ‘slavery’ under the Treasury where the 1768 contest was ‘a complete scene of villainy characterised by a considerable degree of corruption’.15 The Reform Act ‘far from buttressing the traditional superiorities’ as anticipated by the Grey government, undermined them and moved boroughs from ‘dictatorial control’ to ‘commercial venality’ in a surprisingly short time. In Horsham it was of a ‘high octane variety’ as the six burgesses who composed the franchise pre-1832 were replaced post-1832 by 256 votes.16 The measures that abolished the smallest and most rotten boroughs and extended the franchise were intended to replace proprietorial domination with a more transparent system less liable to corruption, intimidation and manipulation. In reality, undisguised bribery and attempts to ‘turn the screw’ on vulnerable tenants with threats of loss of jobs and/or dwellings and withdrawal of patronage of businesses and trades continued to usurp the democratic process beyond 1832, and made it difficult to jettison ‘the mantle of vassalage’.17 Nor did measures prevent Lord Abergavenny from building St Peter’s Place in Lewes St Anne after 1832, involving the demolition of three High Street frontages, to create two dozen votes.

The endurance of the oligarchy testified to the persistence of deferential habits of thought and behaviour towards authority, as much as to patronage and power. As early as 1796 the ‘real’ burgage holders in Midhurst advertised for a champion to challenge the external candidates imposed upon them, but it was not until 1859 that the pocket borough ‘threw off the shackles of the Cowdray interest’ and ‘Midhurst men breathed free’ when they rejected Lord Egmont’s nominee and elected one of their own, W. Townley Mitford, as M.P. to ‘remove the badge of serfdom’.18 In response to a letter from Lord Egmont’s butler, writing under the nom-de-plume of Jeames Plush, to a former employee of the Cowdray estate who had been evicted for defying his Lordship’s edict to vote for his candidate at the previous election and offering to reinstate him if he reversed his allegiance in the 1859 election, the West Sussex Gazette published this rebuke:19

‘Oh, Jeames! Thou seek’st my love in vain
Thou faithless, fickle Valentine,
Why this change – the whining cry?
Excuse me Jeames, it’s gone in my eye.
You’d have me sell my honest name
By promising the work again?
You first proved false – ah! Do not frown,
And now you seek a vote for Browne. My word is given: to Mitford’s cause I stick,
Indeed I shall Jeames, like a jolly brick.’
Fig. 1. Midhurst 1632 mapped in conjunction with a dispute over the Common — east is at the top of the page. Note the regularity of the lay-out before fragmentation and consolidation, the orientation of properties at right angles to the highway, barns behind the houses along burgage plots, exaggerated sizes of the principal buildings — church and market house – and infilling of the market place. (West Sussex Record Office (WSRO), Add. Ms. 24, 110.)
WIDESPREAD ABUSES OF POWER – FAGGOTS AND BASTARD BURGESSES

The legality of the manoeuvres which dissipated burgage tenure in the long eighteenth century was questioned and disputed locally as well as nationally (Fig. 1). In Midhurst in 1753 the burgesses were summoned to attend a Court Baron ‘to investigate the claim of people to be tenants of burgages which had been contested’. The summons declared:

‘about 25 or 26 years ago some persons who were desirous to subvert and overturn the ancient ways and constitution introduced a new method of creating qualifications different from what had been known or used before viz. by conveying their burgages for life only (instead of through inheritance and long leases) and the present Lord being a person of good natured quiet disposition and thinking it prudent not to interfere in these affairs these devices grew more and more into practice. The Returning Officers say they will reject votes from Life Tenures which they call faggots’.20

They implemented the decision, disqualified the ‘bastard burgesses’ and censured the Lord.

An additional issue reverberated in Midhurst because:

‘The Lord is apparently granting people parcels of land in his park which he says are burgages and therefore qualify for a vote but are not recorded on the Court Rolls which is the only proof available’.

Before 1599 Viscount Montague purchased six burgages at the northern end of North Street which he demolished, laid open and replaced with a stone wall to enclose part of his Cowdray Park known as Town Meadow (Fig. 2). The stones which had previously defined the boundary of each burgage were built into the low wall, eliciting the opinion that ‘so low has the election franchise fallen, that at Midhurst the very stones appeared as voters for Members of Parliament’.21

‘... the parcel or burgage whereon stood a house, garden and backside now part of Town Meadow abutting that part of the wall enclosing Town Meadow whereon is fixed stone no.1 by which the same is now known.’

This created insuperable problems at each election and in the succession of the lordship of the Borough of Midhurst. As late as 1803 Robert, Lord Carrington, possessed the vast majority of the votes but harboured doubts about the legitimacy of these burgages. His agent, James Upton Tripp, confessed:

‘that there are deeds somewhere undiscovered which might clear up the difficulties of the whole business because the papers we had from Cowdray required so much sorting that we have not till very lately been able to reduce them to order’.22
The ongoing enquiry into the state of the constitution of the borough of Midhurst was indicative of some of the other Sussex boroughs because:

‘it was unknown what exact number of burgesses there are by reason that just before the Statute of 7th and 8th William and Mary (1696) which is called the ‘Splitting Act’ many of the burgages were divided and ever since they have multiplied’ (see Fig. 1).

The ‘Last Determinations’ or ‘Splitting Act’ 1696 deemed the vote legal if it could be proved that the burgages had been split prior to the Act, and was often the basis of the decisions reached by the Select Committee of the House of Commons to settle disputes. The confusion which existed is evident from a ‘Particular of Burgage Tenements in Midhurst 1711’ which included numerous declarations — ‘who votes I know not’. The subsequent notorious 1729 Act ‘for the more effectual preventing of bribery and corruption in the election of members to serve in Parliament’ declared final and binding the previous or ‘last determination’ irrespective of any evidence to the contrary, effectively abandoning ancient rights and facilitating the scramble for votes by unscrupulous aspirants.

In Midhurst the situation was complicated by attempts to restrict the votes to resident burgesses.24 In Midhurst, lists surviving from 1688-1761 chart the fluctuations in their numbers and allegiances. In 1724 the bailiff was elected by 32 resident burgesses while in 1761 their number had increased to 64 with Sir Thomas Booth claiming a further 21 burgages. In 1741 Lord Montague ‘pretends to have 18 burgages but few or none were ever admitted or appears to have voted’. In East Grinstead the Sackville family exerted rigid control so that the number of burgage tenures increased only marginally, from the original 48 to 50 by the end of the seventeenth century, but by 1832 they had diminished the individual voting rights to 36 through consolidation.25 By obtaining control of the burgages, votes were either removed from circulation and vested in one person or delegated to others to vote as directed by the owner. It was possible to verify these arrangements because voters were accountable as their allegiances were subsequently published in Poll Books.

In ‘Scot and Lot’ boroughs such as Steyning where the franchise was lodged with householders who paid the poor rate it was ‘fixed’ in such a way that ‘many very poor persons were occasionally taxed as friends of the candidates and several persons of sufficient substance and ability to be taxed were omitted’.26

In the 1790 General Election a deliberate attempt was made to exclude bona fide occupiers of houses in Steyning and deprive their adversaries of the right to vote, and to include ineligible rate payers sympathetic to Sir John Honeywood because ‘opposition is begun to the Honeywood interest’ which had represented the borough for nearly 50 years. He set out ‘to buy as many houses in the High Street as possible to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy’. He ‘deluged the borough with an ocean of strangers’ and votes were cast for a malt house, a tan yard, a forge and a pigsty. Indeed, it was claimed that ‘it was hardly necessary to have a house; to boil a pot on a piece of ground’ was enough to vote.27 Appeals to the Quarter Sessions against these violations by supporters of James Lloyd, the opposition candidate, were upheld, illegible votes were rejected and the right of others to vote affirmed. Mr Penfold, constable, the returning officer, absolved himself of any blame because ‘he could not pay any attention to ancient custom’. At an earlier election the returning officer, a Honeywood sympathiser, had threatened the burgesses ‘that they might never see the Kingdom of Heaven if they did not vote for the sitting members’.

Intimidation and procurement of burgages, by fair means or foul, were not the only ways to sway election results. A combination of patronage, influence and corruption was also necessary to maintain control of an increasingly independent electorate. It was customary to massage the expectations of the electorate by extending ‘favours’ towards them, including appointing supporters to influential posts and lavishing substantial sums on ‘entertaining’ or ‘rewarding’ the electorate for their support before and after elections. In 1797 Lord Carrington entertained 45 electors to dinner at The Spread Eagle, Midhurst at a cost of 2s. a head lubricated by copious quantities of drink including 66 bottles of port costing £11 11s. 0d., punch at £2 9s. 6d. and 3 gallons of brandy for Mr Cobden, bailiff, ‘as usual’, setting him back another £2 14s. 1d.29 At the time largesse on this scale was considered normative behaviour and part of the election culture, but overt bribery and
corruption were met with disapproval. However, in the worst venal boroughs such as Arundel and New Shoreham, the most scandalous place for imposition at such times it was rife. The Duke of Richmond certified that New Shoreham was ‘a whore, that is any body’s for the mony’.30

HORSHAM: BOGUS BURGAGES AND PIMPING BURGESSSES

The earliest copy (1235) that prescribed the borough of Horsham and established the corporation referred to it as being from ‘time immemorial’, and there is a strong suggestion of a pre-Conquest origin.31 Until 1502 the franchise in Horsham resided in the 52 burgages described in the charter and in 1611 there were 54. Each burgess owned a burgage for which they paid 1s. rent producing an annual income of £2 12s. for the Lord of the Manor. Until 1389 these Lords were descendants of the De Braose family to whom William the Conqueror had granted the land. At this date it passed into the hands of successive Dukes of Norfolk. Under their custody the number of tenants and voters increased by partitioning the burgage plots, but the annual rental remained more or less static around £2 12s. a year until 1832. Rentals were sub-divided proportional to the fraction of the burgage plot held by the tenant. The ancient rent for a burgage in Horsham had been 1s. so that the rental for half a burgage was 6d. and 3d. for a quarter of a burgage. In Midhurst the burgesses were referred to as the ‘tuppenny people’ because the ancient rent for a whole burgage was 2d., the rent for half a burgage was 1d. and ½ d. for a quarter of a burgage.32 Albery underestimated the extent of partitioning in Horsham. He reckoned that in 1739 the original 52 burgages produced 66 votes whereas in fact there were 90 potential votes comprising 34 ‘whole’ burgages, 18 half burgages, 37 ‘portions’ of burgages and one ‘half-portion’. In Midhurst in 1648 there were 97 voters comprising 73 ‘whole’ burgages, 20 half-burgages and 4 quarter burgages.

In eighteenth century Horsham knowledge of the location, composition and attribution of the burgage plots was confined to Lord Irwin’s Steward, Edward Dickenson, and his gardener, John Meredith, who were his ‘henchmen’ and who attended every election between 1738 and 1770. Meredith, who filled the office of bailiff more frequently than anyone else during this period, claimed ‘I believe there is not one man in Town knows a quarter part of the voats but my selfe. I drewed a plan for Mr Dickinson to find out the voats by’.34 Albery prints Meredith’s ‘A’Count’ verbatim but ‘regrets we are unable to produce the plan of the borough he drewed for Mr Dickenson’. Meredith regretted ‘My Lord Henry Youst to make 85 but I Cannot find any more. I have Don the best I Can without any help’ (Fig. 3).

Meredith’s ‘mental map’ was informed by a ‘street-wise’ ethnography which endorsed it with a convincing credibility, especially as there was no-one else in Horsham capable of challenging his ‘highly personalised’ view. Although instigated to support Lord Irwin’s case, the context and accompanying comments confirm the naivety and integrity of Meredith’s bid to supply accurate information based upon ‘local knowledge’. Meredith’s motives were honourable, but the tenuous hold on facts implied in his admission of having done his best as opposed to having established the position beyond reasonable doubt invariably lays it open to the charge of ‘tactical mapping’. He discriminated and arrayed his material in ‘free-hand’ drawings or ‘sketches’ that locals would have recognised but which would have been unintelligible to outsiders. Irrespective of their accuracy they portrayed a ‘remarkably detailed and socially colourful sense of local dynamics and desires’.36

The present author has discovered the maps and sketches which revealed the extent to which vote-rigging had impacted upon the appearance of Horsham. Meredith ‘set downn figuers were Every Voat Lies’. He recorded 66, the number Albery quoted, and found 17 more by ‘what I have hard’ (in paddocks and fields ‘backwards’ of the buildings) which left him two short of Lord Irwin’s calculations. His rough drawings, sketches, illustrated how the original 52 burgages had become emasculated by 1764 in the pursuit of electoral gain. According to ‘oral tradition’ burgages were identified by the surname of the contemporary owner or tenant, or former owners or tenants stretching back two generations or more. According to Meredith many of the original 52 burgages no longer justified a vote, others qualified for two or more and some plots bore little or no resemblance to the original burgage layout but had acquired voting rights equivalent to those bearing
Fig. 3. Meredew’s ‘drawing’ 1764 showing ‘ware Every Voat Lies’. These were the 66 votes quoted by Albery, whereas in fact there were 85 votes because he did not take into consideration the quarter and half burgages and ‘portions’ that held equal voting rights with ‘whole’ burgages. The numbering is incomplete because of the dilapidated condition of the original ‘sketch’. (inset) Conjectural reconstruction of the 52 burgage plots in Horsham and key to Figures 4–8. (Arundel Castle MSS, H.O. 2226–9, ‘Sketches’.)
a legitimate provenance. The precision of Meredew and his local informants, ‘hearsay of labourers and servants recollections’, may be suspect, but his tenacity had fossilised the imprint of political intrigue on the urban plan of Horsham by 1764.

Meredew’s depiction of land and life in Horsham in the eighteenth century exhibited what Cosgrove termed a ‘discourse of localism, rootedness and bounded territoriality’. His mental maps were informed by his attachment to and familiarity with the borough, limitations to travel outside the borough and the conviction of his informants whose recall of their families reached back into distant memory. The reliability can be questioned, but Meredew, with a little help from his friends, penetrated the ‘local and immediately visible landscape and revealed larger intent in its structure and pattern’ which was put to good use by his employer, Lord Irwin. Meredew mediated the information and committed collective memory to paper as maps. He had no personal vested interest in publicising conditions in Horsham or how it had arrived at this state of affairs through the unscrupulous activities and machinations of rival political protagonists in Horsham. His ‘portrait’ of the appearance of the town was ‘incidental’ and ‘accidental’ to the purpose and, fortunately for subsequent researchers, encapsulated the consequences of the attack upon the burgages.

The ‘sketches’ were not the result of collusion between the Lord of the Manor and a hired surveyor commissioned to distort the franchise, but an attempt by the Lord of the Manor to substantiate the facts so that he could gain an advantage over his aristocratic rivals. His case depended on the recollection of an employee whose language, spelling and grammar warranted the epithet of ‘yokel’. Rivals did not have access to a similar source, so Lord Irwin was able to coerce the returning officers, often co-operative sycophants, to accept the version he presented. The irony was that Lord Irwin’s principal seat was at Temple Newsam, Leeds and the Duke of Norfolk’s was in East Anglia, so their ambitions rested on the word and topographical talent of a virtually illiterate gardener! They rarely visited Horsham, and were hardly conversant with their properties and their ancestry. Day-to-day management was conducted by resident stewards or bailiffs, to whom they deferred on matters of fact. With respect to burgages and their succession, they all had to succumb to a gardener with a monopoly on the information.

Legal challenges and opinions offered by representatives of Lord Irwin’s opponents who observed voting in elections on their behalf were futile in the face of the ‘evidence’ advanced by local witnesses invoking ‘custom’ and accumulated folk memory. Visiting lawyers were not party to the preparation of the ‘sketches’ or their integrity and reliability. They did not possess Meredew’s store of knowledge, nor were they conversant with the morphology or nomenclature of the burgages. However superior they considered themselves intellectually, they were at a distinct disadvantage in face of the aggregated sagacity of local ‘experts’ such as Meredew and his informants, so the decisions of the returning officers were difficult to refute.

**DISTORTION OF BURGAGE PLOTS: FRAGMENTATION, CONSOLIDATION, ASSIMILATION**

The first contested election in Horsham did not take place until 1701 but the threat of an election was sufficient to mobilize participants into action to protect their votes. The burgages fronting the western side of the Carfax were each approximately three acres in area, bounded at the rear by Rosemary Lane. The burgages on the eastern side were approximately two acres each and bounded by the Back Lane which led to the Heath (Common) in the north and to Cobbett’s Bridge over the River Arun in the south, and separated the burgage plots from the Common (Fig. 3). The area allocated to each burgage plot was excessive and the larger part was surplus to requirements, with the result that most tenants retained only the front section for their own uses, often only the house and garden, drawing an arbitrary and irregular rear boundary. The neglect of the bulk of the plots made them easy prey for neighbours and local ‘worthies’ with territorial and political ambitions. In some instances, as with coaching inns such as The King’s Head, the demand for stabling and storage encouraged lateral expansion behind the frontages and gardens of neighbouring burgages (Fig. 4).

Fragmentation frequently disregarded boundaries circumscribing burgage plots to produce an unstructured, piecemeal collection of properties.
Fig. 4. The expansion of The King’s Head behind the frontages of neighbouring burgages on North Street, Horsham. (Arundel Castle MSS, H.O. 2226-9, ‘Sketches’.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burgages 1611</th>
<th>Owner 1611</th>
<th>Rent 1611</th>
<th>Land use 1611</th>
<th>Owner 1809</th>
<th>Rent 1809</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Red Lyon</td>
<td>Roht Tredcroft</td>
<td>8d.</td>
<td>House</td>
<td>Duke of Norfolk</td>
<td>1s. 1d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richd Hurst</td>
<td></td>
<td>3d.</td>
<td>House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm Patching</td>
<td></td>
<td>2d.</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>Marquess of Hertford</td>
<td>2d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Pike</td>
<td></td>
<td>2d.</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holbrookes</td>
<td>Bert Sayers</td>
<td>3d.</td>
<td>One house and two gardens</td>
<td>Duke of Norfolk</td>
<td>3d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Eversfield</td>
<td>6d.</td>
<td>Two houses</td>
<td>Marquess of Hertford</td>
<td>2d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Ellis and heirs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wm Gomerswell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and uses. Arbitrary pieces were carved out of two or more neighbouring burgages that had little affinity with the orientation and dimensions of the original plots. This process departs from more conventional disciplined procedures where fragmentation was aligned within the parallel boundaries along the lengths of plots found elsewhere in the town, and in Midhurst where sub-division tended to occur within traditional boundaries.

The Red Lyon (Puffherne) and Holbrookes were two neighbouring burgages itemised in the thirteenth century borough charter and their rental of 1s. each remained constant over c.800 years. By 1611 their original boundaries had become blurred
and the 2s. rental was shared between them (Fig. 5). The Red Lyon had been sub-divided into four 'fractions' paying 1s. 3d. between them, whereas Holbrookes was fragmented into two 'fractions' paying 9d. between them so that together, not separately, they paid 2s. annual rent. The Red Lyon had acquired part of the adjoining Holbrookes burgage and levied that proportion of the rental on the 'fractions' which comprised it. By 1809 the four 'fractions' of The Red Lyon had been consolidated into two — one comprising three of the four ‘fractions’ extant in 1611 with a combined rental of 1s. 1d., and the other in the possession of the Marquess of Hertford at the same rent of 2d., adding up to the 1s. 3d. paid nearly 200 years earlier. The rental on Holbrookes remained at 9d. over the 200 years but in 1809 came from four 'fractions' sub-divided between four people rather than two people as in 1611. Robt. Eversfield’s 6d. rent in 1611 was shared equally in 1809 by the
The Marquess of Hertford, John Ellis and his heirs and Wm Gomerswell, while Bert Sayer’s 3d. rent was the responsibility of the Duke of Norfolk. This referred only to the front of the burgage marking its conversion into the north side of newly constructed West Street which was previously an alley into the market place (Carfax). Note that at this date the vote had been removed from Cooksfield and Spencers Mead, originally both ‘whole burgages’. (Arundel Castle Archives, H.O. 2226–9, ‘Sketches’.)

Horsham also demonstrated a combination of processes: fragmentation along the length of a plot with assimilation of the rear of contiguous burgage plots. Meredew’s ‘A’Count’ described three ancient burgages, Holbrookes, Randall’s Croft and Pufferne (Fig. 6).

No 43 Late Dr Bachers Corner House (Pufferne) now Miss Ann Ellis with her Brother House and voat her owne House Empty
No 44 Thomas Honeywood tenant the South part of a house (Holbrookes) and voat Thomas Waller, Bucher
No 45 William Palmer tenant in North End of the Same House (Holbrookes) and voat Lord Irwin’s
No 46 A Plot of Ground behind the House (Randall’s Croft) a voat Lord Irwins.

In the seventeenth century this group constituted four ‘whole’ (ancient) burgages – Pufferne, Cooksfield, Holbrookes and Randall’s Croft, each of which exercised one vote (Fig. 5). The corner plot, Pufferne, was originally a ‘whole burgage’ which by 1764 had been fragmented...
along its length comprising a mixture of houses, gardens and allotments. It preserved its vote, but the reference to ‘3 Collins No Burgess’ concealed an attempt to acquire a vote for this patch within the burgage plot, which had been dismissed. Cooksfield had lost its vote while Holbrookes had been divided into two parts, both of which had a vote. Randall’s Croft had expanded behind Holbrookes and Cooksfield and incorporated the bulk of these burgages within its limits. In the 1790 election both parts of Holbrookes retained their separate votes but the others had disappeared.

The corner plot, Puffherne, ran alongside one of numerous passageways (alleys/twittens) leading into the market place (Carfax) which was widened into a thoroughfare by embracing the former burgage plot. It constituted the northern side of West Street with houses and gardens built at right angles to the previous orientation of the burgage. The Red Lyon Inn that occupied the front of Puffherne plot, where Dr Bacher’s and subsequently Ann Ellis’s house had stood, was converted into a bakery. In 1787 it was purchased for £300 by Thomas Charles Medwin, a local solicitor, who the previous year had been appointed Steward to the Duke of Norfolk, acted as his election agent and lived there until 1829.41 A similar sequence evolved on the opposite side of the Carfax, where Nye’s ‘ancient’ burgage plot, by 1754 The King of Prussia Inn, retained some semblance of its original shape. The neighbouring Chequer Inn had been divided into two parts, each of which had a vote (Fig. 7).

Fragmentation predominated, but consolidation also occurred, particularly in the first phase when election contests were rare. Hughes discovered that the buildings on the burgage plots were overwhelmingly timber-framed constructions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They attested to the assimilation of neighbouring burgages with ‘drift’ across former plot boundaries as some hall and cross-wing Wealden houses occupied one and a half burgages which were compensated by more modest dwellings occupying half burgages or less. The shift was evident from the frontages of the premises, whereas behind the elongated or abbreviated frontages the rear burgage boundaries were recognisable.42 There is ample evidence of building and rebuilding when this occurred. Lacey’s studies in Steyning provide corroborative evidence of the habit of ‘drift’ as frontages departed from burgage boundaries.43

The 1611 Survey refers to the conjunction of ‘entire burgages’. A meadow, formerly Bishop’s and Seales burgages, had been formed by combining six whole burgages at a rental of 6s. per annum, ‘one messuage, barn and three acres of land late Andrew Robynson’s being three entire burgages, and 2½ burgages, four acres plus garden and orchard being The George late Bottings (ancient burgage) at a rental of 2s. 6d. per annum’.44 This is just one example of the amalgamation which had occurred by the beginning of the seventeenth century. Significantly, despite fragmentation and amalgamation, there were still only 54 burgesses in 1611 entitled to vote. During the second phase in the late seventeenth century and especially the eighteenth century the pace quickened, and by 1792 the Duke of Norfolk’s ‘interest’ claimed they had converted 20 of the burgages enumerated in 1611 to 55 votes. This was an audacious figment of the imagination, as most of them had not been admitted as voters or placed on the Burgess Roll.45

Nevertheless, it was symptomatic of the Duke of Norfolk’s determination to dominate the franchise in Horsham. In 1791 Robert Hurst proposed a plan to the Duke of Norfolk:

‘for the purpose of outnumbering Lady Irwin’s burgages, by dividing our own, apportioning the rents, admitting the tenants and installing them on the Burgage Roll; making some improvements on the system adopted by that [Irwin] interest in 1738’.46

Hurst’s scheme involved subdividing Bishops and Seales seven-acre meadow into 30 pieces and charging 1s. rent p.a. for each, consistent with the original rent of 1s. for an ‘ancient whole burgage plot’, to make the conspiracy more difficult to detect and challenge. Robert Hurst ‘accepted a fee of 300 guineas’ as professional compensation until the election to devote his time, skill and interest to preparing and digesting the legal measures and other means requisite to attain the object ‘of fragmenting the consolidated burgages’ to provide more voters for the Duke. As late as 1810 the Duke’s Steward, Thomas Medwin, was scheming and plotting to sub-divide Sir Harry Fletcher’s property into 60 pieces ‘for the benefit of Mr Robert Hurst, now a parliamentary candidate’.47 In 1811 he confirmed, having taken legal advice, that it was capable of sub-division ‘for the purpose of conferring the franchise of voting’. However, by the early nineteenth century the value of such
Fig. 7. Fragmentation and multiple land uses on the The George Inn, The King of Prussia and Chequer Inn burgage plots in North Street Horsham. 'My Lords' refers to Lord Irwin who possessed the burgages and on whose behalf Meredew drew the 'sketches'. (Arundel Castle Archives, H.O. 2226–9, 'Sketches'.)
transactions had been realised and attracted a new breed of burgess for whom a burgage was not primarily a passport to vote but a commodity to be traded — an investment. Fletcher, the owner of Bishops and Seales, held out for a higher price than the £10,000 offered and the illicit project collapsed.48

The commercial culture also embraced individual burgesses. In 1803 Christopher Hull of Footscray Kent offered Lord Carrington his burgage of Alcare in Midhurst for 1000 guineas which he claimed was worth £43 a year, and in a scarcely veiled attempt at blackmail threatened ‘if your Lordship does not purchase it, at the next election I am determined to tender the vote for the opposition’. Lord Carrington’s agent, William Tyler, informed him that he could find no trace of Alcare having been a burgage or having a vote, and he valued it at £29 a year and ‘I have reason to suppose that Mr Hull is in some way connected with our opponents at the last election’.49 By the early nineteenth century in constituencies where competition was fierce absentee burgesses sold to the highest bidder, making burgages potentially profitable investments.

The extent of fragmentation and consolidation of burgage plots in Horsham can be gauged from the summary of the position in 1812 (Table 2). The Duke of Norfolk held a disproportionate ratio of burgages to the area of land they occupied (an outcome of fragmentation). The Marquess of Hertford, son-in-law of Lord and Lady Irwin and their beneficiary, possessed 33 burgages which averaged out at one acre and received close to the expected rental (£1 9s. 8d. instead of £1 13s. 0d.) in keeping with the ancient rate of 1s. per burgage. The Duke of Norfolk's income of 6s. 1d. was far less than the 23s. he would have received on the traditional basis, because his 23 burgages had been fragmented into ‘fractions’ to increase the number of votes in his name. Conversely, Sir Harry Fletcher received more than double the rent to which the quantity of land he possessed would have traditionally entitled him at the ancient rate of 1s. per burgage (6s. 6d. instead of 3s.) because he had consolidated whole and fractions of burgages to reduce the number of votes.

Increasing mobility, migration and the expiry of hereditary family lines further exposed burgesses to greedy temptation. In total, these and similar developments punctured and disfigured the parallel boundaries of adjacent plots, and in the process the votes accruing to the house and garden at the front of the property were sometimes duplicated, sometimes replaced by votes assigned to other parts of the property, sometimes declared null and void, and often disappeared altogether.

**WAS IT WORTH IT?**

The extremes to which rival protagonists went to accumulate votes reached a nadir in Horsham in the 1790 election when two aristocratic families vied for seats in a close contest. Middleton Onslow, a supporter of the Duke of Norfolk’s candidate Sir Thomas Shelley, was admitted to Patchinges (an ancient whole burgage) at a hastily assembled Court Baron. Convening a jury of supporters at short notice was a favourite tactic to outflank opponents. Equally frequent, when matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Number of burgages</th>
<th>Area of land a.r.p</th>
<th>Burgage rents £.s.d</th>
<th>Notes a.r.p is acres, rods, perches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Norfolk</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.0.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>23 houses + 2 acres land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Hurst</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Harry Fletcher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24.2.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Eliz. Bridger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chas. Eversfield</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.0.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ellis</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wm. Gomerswell</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onslow/Thornton</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nath. Tredcroft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Wm. Gordon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4 houses + land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marquess of Hertford</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33.0.0</td>
<td>1.9.8</td>
<td>33 houses + 33 acres land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>70.0.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.12.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Table 2. Summary of burgages in Horsham, 1812.
were not moving in the right direction, was an adjournment to the following day in order to afford opportunity to friends and agents to make fraudulent and illegal conveyances and thereby generate new, fraudulent and occasional burgage voters.

The burgage can be traced back as far as 1444, when it was a ‘whole’ burgage. In the 1611 Survey it had been split into two, one half called Snellings after the lessee and ‘one curtilage enclosed with pales’ which had been conveyed to Henry Patchinges, whose name continued to be attached to it. It measured 59’ by 27” and was tucked away behind the old gaol and houses on the north side of the Carfax (Fig. 8). It epitomised the haphazard insertion of a sliver of land into a burgage with the express intention of achieving the same voting rights as the ‘whole’ burgage. The other candidates in the 1790 election were Gordon and Baillie, the nominees of Lord and Lady Irwin who owned the freehold of Snellings, which they claimed incorporated Patchinges. They granted the freehold of Snellings to Charles Smith on this understanding, on which premise he voted for Gordon and Baillie. In 1791 Middleton Onslow brought an action to recover Patchinges from Smith because the bailiffs had disallowed Onslow’s vote on Patchinges. Litigation dragged on for ten years without a result, despite Counsel’s opinion that ‘the object is not worth the pursuit’. Nothing was achieved despite prolonged and costly proceedings but it served to demonstrate the
extreme lengths opponents were prepared to go to acquire a single vote, and the virtual impossibility of proving title to burgages which opened the door to hostile bids. The abdication of the burgesses left the way open for opposing aristocrats to exploit the vacuum. By purchasing and leasing small portions of burgages they contributed to a disorganised and ungainly Horsham, which was described in the 1831 Report on the Review of Parliamentary Boundaries as ‘small, inconsiderable, irregular and poorly built’.51 Midhurst, where ‘attempts at Regularity have been for some time regarded with an Evil Eye and resisted by some Persons’, was described in similar acerbic terms.52

**Appearances were not deceptive**

The dishevelled appearance of Horsham was accentuated by an array of property boundary markers. The most visible were ‘posts, pales and rails’. Leases specified that access to the rear of properties had to be preserved ‘with the way leading to the piece through the gates of the house and through the garden which now is and heretofore has been used for a way to the said premises, a burgage’. Elsewhere in Horsham a lease preserved the ‘wayne way’ leading from the King’s Highway to the croft or common. The barns, stables and yards of the Talbot were ‘formerly set out and bounded by pegs but the tenant had joint and free use of the way or passage and the pond adjoining the said way’. In Midhurst wells were situated at the rear of the burgage plots and frequently shared, so not only had access to be preserved but also rights to draw water had to be maintained. The uses to which plots were put, other than and in addition to houses and gardens, varied considerably from orchards, fuel stores, woodhouses, workshops, horse mills and, in Midhurst, ‘a turf house and hog pen’.53 Pertinently some, such as a stable in Midhurst and a ‘dogg kenell’ at the rear of The King of Prussia in Horsham, but not all, possessed a vote. The distinction depended on the terms of leases and the clauses inserted by those whose deceitful intentions were to expunge ancient rights and manipulate them for their own ends. The mosaic of land uses contributed to the shabby appearance of the boroughs.

The legitimacy of the claims made for intrusive portions, often minute, were invariably contested and Petitions were regularly presented to the House of Commons.54 Until 1774 disputes were received by the House as a whole but thereafter the laborious process was referred to a committee of the House chosen by ballot in an attempt to ensure impartiality. The complexity, controversies and contradictions surrounding the issues customarily resulted in majority verdicts along ‘party’ (Whig) lines. Petitions often contained instances of coercion. In 1715 John Palford told a jury that Sir Harry Goring had solicited his brother’s vote ‘but when he found he could not depend on it they were ejected from their shop’ and replaced by a tenant on whose vote he could rely. For this indiscretion Goring lost his seat but in the face of such intimidation burgesses were virtually impotent. Reversal of election results following petitions was commonplace.

**Scale of Investment**

As the seventeenth, and particularly the eighteenth, centuries progressed burgage tenure was increasingly captured by ‘elites’ in boroughs. The acquisition of burgage tenures accelerated and secured the control of the electoral process by local oligarchies. Burgesses, as legitimate heirs to the tradition, were denied access and deprived of their rights, and consequently their interest in politics waned as power resorted to a few individuals or families. Indifference and apathy bred ignorance and burgesses’ acquiescence contributed to their demise.

The extinction of the genuine hereditary independent burgesses during the ‘long’ eighteenth century under political pressures exerted by the purchase of their freeholds by Charles Eversfield, Lord and Lady Irwin, and the Duke of Norfolk had reduced their number to eight in 1809, of whom only Robert Hurst (Horsham Park) and Nathaniel Tredcroft (Manor House) were residents.55 A few years later they had dwindled to six when the Marquess of Hertford, son-in-law of Lord and Lady Irwin, sold the Hills Estate and burgages devised in the will of Charles, 9th and last Viscount Irwin, and thus their votes, for £91,475 to Charles, 11th Duke of Norfolk who had previously spent £14,500 between 1786 and 1806 attempting to gain control.56 This sale recovered some of the outlay incurred by the Irwins in building their portfolio of burgages, since between 1736 and 1743
alone they purchased burgages representing more than 20 votes, increasing their liabilities on their burgage properties in Horsham to over £9000 when the rateable value of the whole borough was only £830. They When opportunities presented themselves to acquire burgages they spent extravagant sums. Somersett's burgage plot was purchased for £1750 when it furnished an annual rental of £68 9s. 0d., Lady Irwin purchased Thomas Harvey's burgage for £350, 'very near three times as much as it cost him', her supporter, Timothy Shelley purchased a house offered for £40 for £400, and the Duke of Norfolk purchased a burgage for £500 when it realised an annual rental of £13.58. The sums involved and the anticipated returns were unlikely to support the view that these were primarily financial investments, but rather the inflated price to be paid for political influence which often incurred crippling debts.

In Midhurst in the middle of the eighteenth century the Lords of the Manor, the Browne family, pursued a policy of buying independent burgages but, following the death of the 7th Viscount in 1787, the trustees sold the portfolio to Lord Egremont for 40,000 guineas to repay huge debts. In 1795 he sold the burgages to Robert Smith 1st Baron Carrington (Buckinghamshire) whose nominees were elected unopposed until 1832. The purchase and sale of burgages had become property transactions as well as means of political advancement. The huge costs restricted participation to wealthy investors.

CONCLUSION

In the revised political context of the period after 1660 the appropriation of burgage plots presumed an enhanced political and social imperative, over and above their economic values. The injurious impact on the appearance of boroughs was greatest where aristocratic control of the franchise was most severely contested, as in Horsham, Midhurst and Steyning, and conversely least where aristocratic control remained strongest for longest, in East Grinstead and Lewes, where it persisted until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in constituencies where opposing parties agreed to share representation, as in Bramber and Chichester, and in government (Treasury) controlled seats where the size of the electorate was restricted and government nominees were appointed to the corporation. In the Cinque Ports disputed elections were scarce since the Lord Warden exercised his right to nominate one candidate. Additionally, forces for distortion were subdued where space was not an issue as in Rye — 'many dayly fly from it be reason of the greate chadg on the towne for the maintenance of jetties, keyes, groines and sea walles', — while Winchelsea was 'a pitiful spectacle of poverty and desertion', as these towns declined from prosperity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and became impoverished from attacks by the sea and silting of their harbours.

The Corrupt Practices Acts 1854 and 1883, the introduction of the Secret Ballot in 1872 and Gladstone's Redistribution of Seats Act 1885 created a new political landscape that mirrored more accurately population distribution and urbanisation, disrupted traditional territorial allegiances and effectively distanced the constituency from the local fiefdom, thereby hammering the final nails into the coffins of the old order. The burgesses had long since capitulated in the face of the determined onslaught by local 'elites' whose influence, although dying twitches persisted until the First World War, had itself been terminated by nineteenth century legislation which marked the end of the use of burgage tenures as political pawns and as principal components in shaping towns. Success could no longer be guaranteed by corrupt exploitation of wealth and patronage with the collusion of an army of sycophants who identified their well-being with that of their social superiors, but became conditional upon endorsement by public opinion. An apparent indifference to the transition from subservience and impotence to participation and influence had been replaced by the more active role which elections increasingly played in the lives of inhabitants, as ancient boroughs metamorphosed from introspective 'backwaters' into mainstream society.

The emergent political culture had been forged in the furnace of the local constituency, where the volatile ingredients had been released by marginalising the aristocracy, the rise of popular agitation, the 'dangerous engine of freedom — the press', and allied factors as the reformed electoral system gained momentum. General elections concentrated minds and manicured attitudes at local level. Hustings demonstrated that the electorate, far from being 'anaesthetised'
as traditionally depicted, had been and were key and vibrant actors in the unfolding dramas. They gave vent to their feelings and, irrespective of candidates’ hospitality at election time, were hounded out of town. Hardy from Banbury, a candidate in Midhurst in the 1859 election, subsequently wrote:

‘if one of those boys who have kicked up such a row by lustily and incessantly shouting ‘Mitford for ever’ whenever I or my friends showed will send ‘A Child’s First Book of Grammar’ to the place from whence I came a stale Bun shall be his reward’.62

What had once been the preserve of the burgesses, then the bastion of the oligarchic elites, was superseded by a wider franchise in which property and privilege became secondary to popular acclaim. Ownership, occupation, use, buildings, plot boundaries and political voting rights interacted in different ways in different places at different times, impacting upon townsscapes differently. Not enough is known to generalize. More research is needed to reveal sequences of change and suggest explanations for ‘the emasculation of burgage plots’.63 It would be a delightful irony if further studies confirmed that the picturesque jumble redolent of old market towns so pivotal to the traditional image of Englishness was the product of the political corruption of ‘Olde’ ‘Merry England’.

Author: Spencer Thomas, “Dovedale”, 71 Barrack Lane, Aldwick, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, PO21 4DE.

NOTES


5 K. T. Hoppen, ‘Roads to democracy: electioneering and corruption in 19th century England and Ireland’, History 81 (1996), 553–72 defines the typology and composition of boroughs and analyses the consequences and implications of their status. He concludes ‘any categorisation of boroughs by type is bound to be blurred at the edges’.

6 O’Gorman, Voters, Patrons, Parties, 10.

7 West Sussex Record Office (hereafter WSRO), Additional Ms (hereafter Add. Ms) 33384, Papers relating to a Writ of Mandamus in the King’s Bench 1751–3; WSRO Cowdray Ms 4776–7, Rex v Morrison — a case study debating the eligibility of voting in Midhurst.

8 Report of the Proceedings before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the 1790 General Election (London: Murray, 1793), vol. II, 3–153; WSRO (Add. Mss) 5190–203 Horsham election 1790 only 24 votes were permitted ‘several of which were doubtful’.

9 Report of Select Committee on 1790 Horsham election, 27, ‘Horsham bore a greater resemblance to Okehampton than Downton or Clithero both in franchise and appearance’.

10 Midhurst is an exception. It sent its first M.P. in 1311, intermittently until 1382 and then continuously until 1832.


12 M. Bailey, ‘Demographic decline in late medieval England: some thoughts on recent research’, Economic History Review XLIX 1 (1996), 1–19. The debate on urban growth or decline has been around for over 50 years. Bailey concluded that, rather than uniform prosperity or decay, some urban settlements were expanding and others contracting, and a widespread revival only begun in the early sixteenth century.


15 Namier and Brooke, The Commons 1754–90, 1, 390–92.

16 Hoppen, Roads to democracy, 555.

17 WSRO Mitford Mss. 1021, 1091, 1094, 1095, 1097 supply an extensive archive of the 1859 election when W. Townley Mitford successfully challenged the ‘hegemony’ of the Cowdray family.

18 West Sussex Gazette 21 Apr. 1859.

19 West Sussex Gazette 28 Apr. 1859.
21 WSRO Cowdray Ms. 4758.
22 Buckinghamshire Record Office (hereafter BRO), Carrington Ms. D/CN Box 36 Bundle 10 H.M. Ms. 189.
23 WSRO Cowdray Ms. 4763, Particulars of burgage tenements 1711–61.
26 WSRO Add. Mss. 544–5, Briefs on behalf of householders appealing against omission from the poor rate, being the criteria for voting in the Scot and Lot borough of Steyning.
29 BRO Carrington Ms. D/CN Box 36 Bundle 10.
32 WSRO Cowdray Ms. 2008, Rental 1648.
34 H.M. Ms. 798 John Meredew’s Rent Book and Survey (On Occupiers, State of Buildings and ‘Voats’) printed in W. Albery, Parliamentary History of Horsham 1295–1865 (Horsham Museum Society, 1927), 80–98. About half the burgage houses ‘were not worth repearing’, ‘some were redy to fall’, others ‘may be mended’. One ‘old man would brek his hart’ if his house were pulled down.
37 Arundel Castle Archives (hereafter ACA), H.O. 2266, 2269, ‘Sketches’.
39 H.M. Mss. 1574–80, Abstracts of title to The Red Lion 1600–1826.
40 ACA, HO 2667–8, ‘Sketches’.
44 H.M. Ms. 2294, Survey of the Manor and Borough of Horsham 1611; ACA HO 2294.
45 WSRO, P5/13 Horsham 1770: Lands belonging to Viscount Irwin; H.M. Ms. 14, State of Duke of Norfolk’s interest 1792.
46 H.M. Ms. 4, Letter R. Hurst to Duke of Norfolk 28 May 1791. Hurst became M.P. for Horsham and eventually Father of the House of Commons; WSRO Cowdray Ms. 4755, Miscellaneous papers re titles to burgages. Thomas Waterton, a Horsham burgess, was recruited to be a servant at Temple Newsam, Leeds, the seat of the Irwins, while William Roe’s father-in-law mortgaged his burgage to raise money to go to London ‘and hired himself out as a master builder to a Jamaican planter’.
47 H.M. Ms. 3, preparation for election 1787.
49 BRO Carrington Ms., D/CN Box 36 Bundle 10.
50 ACA, HO15/ii; H.M. Ms. 13A, Letters re Patchinges including title of property since 1445.
51 S. Haines, Horsham: A History (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), 15. The triangular market place was first recorded as Skarfolkes in 1524 when, it is conjectured, it was unpopulated, empty heath or common — scarce of folk. After various mutations it was regularised as Carfax in the late eighteenth century; Review of Parliamentary Boundaries 1831.
52 WSRO, Cowdray Ms. 307, Survey of the Customs of the Borough of Midhurst and Manor of Cowdray 1568.
53 WSRO, Cowdray Ms. 4851.
54 WSRO, Cowdray Ms. 4844, Petition to the House of Commons 1802-4.
55 Albery, Millennium of facts re Horsham, 180.
56 ACA, Marques of Hertford to Duke of Norfolk 17 June 1808.
58 H.M. Ms. 792. A court case in 1788 insinuated that Lady Irwin had attempted to influence the verdict by hedging her bets as ‘Madam Opposition of the Borough being a favourite mistress with both yourself, (the Duke’s Learned Counsel) and him (her Counsel)’. BRO Carrington Ms., D/CN Box 36 Bundle 105.
61 West Sussex Gazette 14 Apr. 1859.