

The General Election of 1784 in Chester

By FRANK O'GORMAN

HISTORIANS of the city of Chester have demonstrated a curious reluctance to study the political history of a town which in the eighteenth century exerted a commanding influence over the county of Chester and parts of North Wales. Thomas Hughes, writing of the Restoration in 1856, declared: 'From this eventful period down to the present day, saving a few royal visits, no circumstance has occurred of sufficient import to deserve especial mention here'.¹ Indeed, the standard authority on the history of the city, Joseph Hemingway, writing in 1831 of the tumults occasioned by the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, informed his reader that, 'from this period, down to the present time, there have been no very interesting occurrences within the city that will require particular detail'.² The political stability which obtained in the country at large after 1715 was thus apparently reflected in the absence of division and conflict within the city. Yet such an impression ignores the undercurrent of vociferous and frequently violent political opposition within the city which existed just beneath the deceptively calm surface of politics and which threatened to disrupt its tranquillity. In fact, the 'stability' of local politics which was responsible for the almost complete absence of electoral conflict between 1747 and 1784³ reflected the ascendancy of the Tory Grosvenor family of Eaton Hall over the city. This ascendancy was founded upon a complex intermixture of traditional attitudes and material interests which civic oppositions throughout the century attempted to alter and to attack. The influence which the Grosvenors wielded was based on local prestige, old loyalties and a tradition of civic service and paternalism. This influence is illustrated by the family's control of the city Corporation, its influence with the guilds, its generosity towards the poor of the city, its extravagance at elections and an efficient political machine which rendered it difficult for the opposition within the city to challenge the power of Eaton Hall. So overwhelming was this dominance of the Grosvenors that it was but rarely that a group or interest attempted to challenge it. The election of 1784 must therefore be seen in relation to earlier problems and conflicts in the city and thus superimposed upon the pattern of Chester politics which had existed earlier in the eighteenth century.

Politics in the town had turned on some few traditional issues which continued to exercise the townspeople in 1784. The commerce of the city had gradually declined in volume and in importance while that of the neighbouring port of

¹ Thomas Hughes, *The stranger's handbook to Chester*, Chester, 1856, p. 9.

² Joseph Hemingway, *History of the City of Chester*, Chester, 2 vols. 1831, ii, p. 245.

³ In the Grosvenor MSS. (made available to me at the City Record Office, Chester, where Mrs. Elizabeth Berry has given me unfailing assistance) there is a reference to one Henry Hervey Aston, who canvassed the town for a month but withdrew his prospective candidature on 11 December 1767, even though it made 'all my schemes for rendering you TRULY FREEMEN abortive'. Chester Election Papers, 1661-1810.

Liverpool had assumed greater size and significance during the eighteenth century. To revive the declining commercial prospects of the ancient town, a scheme was set on foot 'by some gentlemen of the Whig party', as Fletcher put it,⁴ in the early 1730s to effect some improvement in the navigation of the Dee.⁵ A bill was thus drawn up and presented to Parliament in 1732. Sir Robert Grosvenor, like the other Chester member, Sir Charles Bunbury, was a Tory, but although he chaired the Commons Committee which dealt with the bill he was, in actual fact, opposed to it and was responsible for provoking delays and difficulties which delayed the passage of the bill until 1733.⁶ Dissatisfaction with the Grosvenors manifested itself in the city in the contested mayoral election in 1732. According to Hemingway, 'On this occasion the contest was so great, that £20 was given for a vote, about £6.000 spent, and, as reported, some lives lost'.⁷ Nevertheless, the Grosvenors retained their hold on the mayoralty and thus the Corporation. Their candidates, Aldermen Johnson and Ellams received 1,097 and 1,095 votes respectively while their Whig opponents, Aldermen Bennet and Mainwaring polled 858 votes each.⁸ The matter did not end there for this contest revived controversies which had divided the city in the previous century and it was alleged that in violation of the charter non-residents had been brought to the polls. This question of the voting qualification at mayoral elections had implications, of course, for elections of common councillors and even of members of parliament and the whole system of Grosvenor control of the politics of the city was thrown into question. The opposition took their case to law, arguing that the election of the aldermen and common council was vested in the citizen at large by the charter of Henry VII granted in 1506 and the confirmations of this charter issued by Elizabeth I in 1574, James I in 1605 and Charles II in 1664. The Corporation rested its case initially on a charter granted by Charles II in 1685 which sanctioned the current practice but this failed to satisfy the Court of King's Bench. Subsequently the Corporation rested its case on practice, declaring, after Coke, that even if the early charters had been infringed, customary practices should be allowed to prevail through the issue of a bye-law. After lengthy litigation this plea stood, the verdict being given in favour of the Corporation at the

⁴ J. Fletcher, *Chester Election Petitions*, 2 vols. 1791, i, xii.

⁵ This is probably the only subject on Chester history in the modern period on which adequate research has been completed. See G. M. Haynes-Jones, 'The Port of Chester, 1700-1850', L.C.A.S. vol. 59, 1947; R. Craig, 'Shipping and Shipbuilding in the port of Chester, in the 18th and early 18th centuries', L.C.H.S. vol. 116, 1965; R. Craig, 'Some aspects of the trade and shipping of the River Dee in the eighteenth century', *ibid.* vol. 114, 1963; T. S. Willan, 'Chester and the Navigation of the Dee, 1600-1750', C.A.S. vol. 33, 1939.

⁶ J. Hemingway, *op. cit.* ii, p. 246; J. Fletcher, *op. cit.* i, xii-xv. The Act of 1733 allowed 40 undertakers to levy tolls on sea-going craft to finance the cutting of a new channel which was expected to cost £40-£50,000.

⁷ J. Hemingway, *op. cit.* ii, p. 247. The source of Hemingway's remark was probably 'The Unpublished Diary of the Rev. Peter Walker in 1733-34' printed by H. Taylor in C.A.S. vol. 3. 1888-90, p. 158, which suggests that £20 was given for each vote. This seems much too high an estimate. In the Grosvenor MSS. (Chester Election Papers 1661-1810) there are references to payments of 4 gns. to two freemen for their votes, and of £5 to an alderman for his vote but there are few other records of such corruption. Yet the story of £20 a vote is repeated in R. R. Sedgewick, *The House of Commons, 1715-1754*, 2 vols. 1970, i, p. 204.

⁸ J. Hemingway, *op. cit.* ii, pp. 246-7.

County Assizes of Spring 1735.⁹ The power of the Grosvenors and the Corporation had thus been upheld and those who wished to render the Corporation more responsive to popular pressures had suffered a decisive reverse.

Before the verdict of 1735, three contested Parliamentary elections in less than two years (1733-34) had illustrated the strength of feeling in the city. Very little is known about either of the two bye-elections of 1733 or the general election of 1734, except that the two parties faithfully continued their local feuds, that national issues counted for nothing and that the Grosvenor interest was on each occasion successful.

A little more is known about the general election of 1747 when, once again, the franchise was the main issue. The result was as follows:

	<i>Resident</i>	<i>Non-Resident</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sir R. Grosvenor	716	333	1049
P. H. Warburton	610	318	928
J. Mainwaring	575	182	757

These figures show quite clearly that without the votes of the non-resident freemen the Grosvenors would have been hard-pressed to retain their control of the city. Mainwaring, a Whig alderman of the city, petitioned the Commons against the return on the grounds that non-resident votes were inadmissible. The argument ran very close to the pattern which had appeared during the dispute over the franchise for civic elections. In the end the Commons rejected the petition by 141 votes to 92,¹⁰ and so once more the Grosvenors' control of the city had been confirmed and vindicated.

The parliamentary borough of Chester was one of the 92 freeman boroughs in the kingdom, in most of which control of the Corporation was the key factor in securing control of the representation.¹¹ Thus, although the number of electors (1500) in Chester was quite large by the standards of the unreformed Parliament, they were not free. Large numbers of voters induced complexity in electoral affairs and sometimes violence, but rarely freedom. It was the consistent aim of oppositions throughout the century to free Chester from the domination of the Grosvenors and to restrict the franchise to resident freemen as they believed that if they could win one of the town's two representatives, the independent freemen would have an independent member to safeguard their interests.

It is not a little paradoxical then that the members for Chester were not only men of a traditional but also of an 'independent' character (one could be an 'independent' on the national but not on the local stage), and the biographies of members in the *History of Parliament* reveal that Chester members followed an independent line. Sir Richard Grosvenor left the Commons in 1761 when he

⁹ *Ibid.* ii, p. 398; J. Fletcher, *op. cit.* i, xii-xv. There is an affirmation in the Grosvenor MSS. (Chester Election Papers, 1661-1810) stating that non-resident freemen had been excluded from the franchise only since 1690.

¹⁰ J. Hemingway, *op. cit.* ii, pp. 399-400.

¹¹ L. B. Namier and J. Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754-90*, 1964, 3 vols. i, p. 221 for a brief account of Chester borough.

obtained his peerage. His other two ambitions—an earldom and the lord lieutenancy of the county of Chester—did not lead him into close connections with politicians or ministers. He obtained his earldom in 1784 but he was never to see his other ambition realised. Sir Richard's brother, Thomas, represented Chester from 1755–95 and appears to have been considerably more independent in his behaviour, for although he loyally supported Lord North's American policy, he was thoroughly independent in the Commons. Thus he went some way with the Rockinghams' plans for Economical Reform so long as the real interests of the Crown were not violated. The withdrawal of his support dealt the North ministry a fatal blow in the weeks after the Yorktown campaign, and he was also one of the influential group of St. Albans Tavern Independents who vainly tried to reconcile Pitt and Fox in 1784. Thomas Grosvenor's fellow member for the city in 1784 was Wilbraham Bootle of Rode Hall in Cheshire. He was a lesser figure than Grosvenor, but reputed to be honest and sincere, attached to no party, and prepared to put the interests of the country before all else. Like Grosvenor, he was a member of the St. Albans Tavern group. Both Chester representatives in 1784 were in fact real independents, men of principle, astute without being subtle, solid without being boorish, and as such typical of the independents of the House of Commons in the eighteenth century. Most of all, they were conscious of their local position, and both of them, but especially Grosvenor, were assiduously attentive to the interests of their constituents and not likely to be easily dislodged.

The anti-Grosvenor faction wasted no time as the anticipated dissolution of 1784 approached. As early as 10 February 1784, John Crewe of Bolesworth Castle, 'a gentleman but of moderate fortune', announced his candidature, coming forward, it was suggested, at the invitation of his friends.¹² The announcement was not well timed. Although the Chester press was not subservient to the Grosvenors,¹³ its sympathies were Pittite and loyalist.¹⁴ Furthermore, Crewe's announcement coincided with the public and county meetings which were being held in the region to promote loyal addresses or petitions to the king.¹⁵ In particular, the Chester petition was an enormous success and before it was presented to Parliament in March 891 people signed it.¹⁶ Amidst the excitement that the political drama of the winter of 1783–1784 at Westminster generated at Chester, where the debates were very fully covered and where loyalist feeling ran high,¹⁷

¹² J. Hemingway, *op. cit.* ii, p. 401.

¹³ *The Chester Chronicle* printed matter highly critical of the St. Albans Tavern Independents, of whom Sir Thomas Grosvenor was a leading member.

¹⁴ *The Chester Chronicle* 13 February 1784 condemned the St. Albans Tavern discussions as a dereliction of duty on Pitt's part to consider a coalition with Fox.

¹⁵ Anglesey, Denbighshire and Caernarvonshire all decided to address in March. Only Flintshire decided against such action since it might serve to 'widen the breaches between the contending parties'. *The Chester Chronicle*, 27 February, 5, 12, 19 March 1784, has accounts of the meetings.

¹⁶ The total population of Chester in 1782 was, 14,700. See E. Dyke: 'Chester's Earliest Directories, 1781 and 1782', C.A.S. vol. 37, pt. 2, 1949.

¹⁷ Grosvenor and Bootle, despite their Independency, were regarded as sympathetic to Pitt by the public at large. John Robinson, secretary to the Treasury, counted on their support and their return. ('Same again; see them'. *The parliamentary papers of John Robinson, 1774–1784*. ed. W. Laprade, 1922, 22, 71, 114.

Crewe's candidature was almost forgotten. When it was remembered, he suffered from the unhappy coincidence that the sitting county member, his namesake, John Crewe, was a close personal and political ally of Charles James Fox.

Crewe thus had to renounce any thought of entertaining any differences of opinion on national affairs with the sitting members. 'I am, from principle, a supporter of the Just Prerogatives of the Crown, and of the present Ministers, and no Foxite'.¹⁸ In addition, his supporters carefully refrained from attacking either the personal integrity or the parliamentary records of Grosvenor and Bootle and so there was little for it but to revert to the political slogans of the past. The issue of the election, Crewe told the electors, was 'whether you are for ever to remain a **BOROUGH OF THE HOUSE OF EATON**'.¹⁹ Yet to have attacked the highly respected Thomas Grosvenor would have been counter-productive. Crewe thus had recourse to attacking Bootle as the tool of Eaton and to stress the unhappy effect upon the city of the Grosvenor regime. The propagandists of the Crewe campaign realised that they had to fight a battle against overwhelming odds and they gave themselves away in the following paragraph: 'The plain truth is, the citizens of Chester are thoroughly convinced that there is an all-controlling power which disposes of the representation, pulling down one, and setting up another as it pleases. This power has been so long exercised, and so long submitted to, that any opposition to it, is now considered as little less than a rebellion of the citizens against a lawful authority'.²⁰ Thus the best material in the world would be wasted upon an electorate whose attitudes of deference towards the Grosvenors overbore their ability to make a conscious political judgement. Yet such material existed. After the election, and the timing is significant, 'Honestus' condemned the secret connection between the Corporation and Eaton Hall, the self-perpetuating nature of the Corporation oligarchy, the intimidation of Grosvenor tenants, especially those on Crown leases and on Corporation tenures, and the proscription of those who refused to accept Grosvenor domination in its entirety.²¹ On these issues the opposition had a real, if exaggerated, case. Yet they failed to press it home, perhaps rightly, in the belief that to have done so would have done them more harm than good.

The Grosvenor campaign met the charges of the opposition as squarely as the conventions of the time allowed. If neither the personal integrity nor the political records of the two sitting members were at issue why should the city be put to the peril of violence and disorder which might attend a contested election?²² What, after all, did Crewe stand for? What were his opinions? What would happen to the peace and security of the city, to its established interests, if he

¹⁸ *The Chester Chronicle*, 2 April 1784.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 March 1784.

²⁰ *The Alphabetical List of Voters in 1784 with trades, residence and voting*, 1784, pp. 1-2. Hereafter cited as *The Alphabetical List*.

²¹ *The Chester Chronicle*, 23 April 1784, 7 May 1784.

²² *Ibid.*, 9 April 1784; *Adam's Weekly Courant*, 6 April 1784. For Bootle's denial of his dependence upon the Grosvenors see *The Alphabetical List*, pp. 30-31. For insistence upon the regularity of the attendance at parliament of the sitting members, *ibid.* p. 34.

should be returned? 'Shall we, my friends, by submitting to a party, take a man hitherto untried . . . ?'²³

The election was marked by no unusual incident and followed the normal pattern that elections did in the eighteenth century. There was nothing new in the joint declaration against the violence which always accompanied elections²⁴ but the canvassing passed, on the whole, peaceably enough. The scanty information which we have about the canvassing suggests that Crewe started early and apparently enjoyed a successful canvass before Grosvenor and Bootle made a somewhat belated appearance. They were forced to promise to visit every freeman—about 1500 in all—though whether they did so or not is impossible to establish. At the polls, however, Crewe was disappointed by the failure of many to fulfil their promises of support. Clearly, his canvass had not been so well organised or so thoroughly conducted as that of Grosvenor and Bootle.²⁵ The fact that both the Chester newspapers, and, so far as can be ascertained, most local clergymen, supported the Grosvenor-Bootle campaign would be a further explanation for the Crewe's campaign's loss of steam in the second week of the polling.²⁶

There were other explanations. The treating of freemen was a traditional part of elections. Mr. Duke, the agent for the Grosvenors, had to meet a bill for drink alone of over £14,000 (though he was able to reduce the sum by bargaining down to £8,500).²⁷ The total expenses of the Grosvenor-Bootle party cannot have been much less than £20,000.²⁸ Crewe's party probably did not spend half as much. They could not afford to because after the election Crewe was forced to sell his home. Only a family with the resources of the Grosvenors had the resources to win a contested election in a town like Chester. The effectiveness of such treating can best be shown by the voting patterns²⁹ of those most closely involved with the treating. Of the city's 23 inn-keepers and inn-holders, 21 gave their votes to Grosvenor and Bootle; of the 18 wine merchants, 16 did the same.

The city went to the polls between 5 and 16 April 1784. There were initially three candidates, Thomas Grosvenor, Wilbraham Bootle and John Crewe. On the ninth day of polling, however, Wednesday 14 April, a fourth candidate unexpectedly appeared. He was Roger Barnston, a prominent member of the city opposition and one of Crewe's election committee. He came forward because at that stage Bootle and Crewe had exactly the same number of votes, 397 each on Tuesday 13 April. Barnston stood, therefore, simply to catch Crewe's second

²³ *ibid.* p. 34.

²⁴ *ibid.* pp. 36, 37. The candidates issued their declaration on 8 April 1784.

²⁵ *The Alphabetical List*, pp. 27–29; *The Chester Chronicle*, 23 April 1784; *The History of the . . . Election of 1812*, stressed the 'numerous promises of support' for Crewe in 1784, p. 31.

²⁶ *Adam's Weekly Courant*, 13 April 1784 for the support of the church for Grosvenor and Bootle.

²⁷ J. Hemingway, *op. cit.* p. 402; G. Huxley, *Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors*, 1965, pp. 85–87, prints some interesting campaign details from an account book of Mr. Duke in the Grosvenor MSS.

²⁸ *The History of the . . . Election of 1812*, p. 31.

²⁹ Such assessments can be measured from the poll book of the election, printed in *The Alphabetical List*.

votes and to prevent them from going to Bootle. In retrospect, no difference would have been made to the result had this very necessary stratagem been adopted from the outset. Grosvenor, not Bootle, would have lost votes and these would have gone to Barnston and not Crewe.³⁰

The following are the votes given on each day of the poll together with cumulative daily totals for all the four candidates:³¹

<i>Monday 5 April</i>	Grosvenor	51	
	Bootle	51	
	Crewe	52	
<i>Tuesday 6 April</i>	Grosvenor	20	(71)
	Bootle	20	(71)
	Crewe	21	(73)
<i>Wednesday 7 April</i>	Grosvenor	64	(135)
	Bootle	60	(131)
	Crewe	60	(133)
<i>Thursday 8 April</i>	Grosvenor	74	(209)
	Bootle	71	(202)
	Crewe	60	(193)
<i>Friday 9 April</i>	Grosvenor	32	(241)
	Bootle	29	(231)
	Crewe	41	(234)
<i>Saturday 10 April</i>	Grosvenor	75	(316)
	Bootle	63	(294)
	Crewe	61	(295)
<i>Monday 12 April</i>	Grosvenor	75	(391)
	Bootle	63	(357)
	Crewe	61	(356)
<i>Tuesday 13 April</i>	Grosvenor	60	(451)
	Bootle	40	(397)
	Crewe	41	(397)
<i>Wednesday 14 April</i>	Grosvenor	108	(559)
	Bootle	82	(479)
	Crewe	70	(467)
	Barnston	35	(35)

³⁰ 620 of Bootle's 626 supporters also voted for Grosvenor but 97 freemen who voted for Grosvenor gave their second votes to Crewe. Grosvenor and not Bootle would have been weakened by the stratagem.

³¹ These calculations are taken from MS poll-book in the Grosvenor MSS, entitled 'A non-alphabetical list of voters day by day'.

<i>Thursday 15 April</i>	Grosvenor	104	(663)
	Bootle	100	(579)
	Crewe	9	(476)
	Barnston	2	(37)
<i>Friday 16 April</i>	Grosvenor	50	(713)
	Bootle	47	(626)
	Crewe	4	(480)
	Barnston	1	(38)
<i>Total at close of Poll</i>	Grosvenor	713	
	Bootle	626	
	Crewe	480	
	Barnston	38	

These figures illustrate quite clearly that Crewe's campaign collapsed in the second week when he exhausted his promises of support. According to one report, the Grosvenors could still have brought another 69 freemen to the polls even after the election was over.³² It is doubtful if they could have polled many more than that. From an electorate of about 1500, 1104 voters had cast 1877 votes. Given the shifting and mobile electorates of the day it was hardly possible for more than 1200 voters to come to the polls from an electorate of this size. In any case, Grosvenor and Bootle had won a comfortable victory without needing to stretch their support to its limits.

Because only registered freemen were entitled to vote at parliamentary elections in the city, it was inevitable that the process of registration and 'making free' of voters not already freemen would engross much of the attention of both sides during the campaign. In Chester, as in many other freeman boroughs, there was no set time for the admission of those entitled to be registered as freemen and between November 1781 and March 1784 only 59 freemen were enrolled.³³ During the campaign of 1784 422 were 'made free' within two and a half weeks. The following table sets out their voting behaviour.

<i>Total</i>	<i>Grosvenor</i>	<i>Bootle</i>	<i>Crewe</i>	<i>Barnston</i>	<i>Not voted</i>
422	168	154	160	8	102

Whatever weaknesses characterised other aspects of his campaign, inattention to the registration of freemen was not one of Crewe's mistakes. Further, it is clear from these figures that considerable inroads could be made into Grosvenor's and Bootle's support, especially among the younger freemen. They were more likely

³² *Adam's Weekly Courant*, 20 April 1784.

³³ *Chester Freeman Rolls, 1700-1805*, L.C.R.S. vol. 55, pp. 384-5. The freeman rolls list the name, trade and the date the man was 'made free', and from this he can be traced in *The Alphabetical List* and his voting ascertained. That both sides understood the importance of the votes of these men is reflected in the number of advertisements they placed in the newspapers encouraging supporters to attend at the Pentice on the mornings of the poll in order to be 'made free'.

to vote than those already registered (75.8% of them voted compared with 72.5% of the older freemen) and they were more likely to support Crewe than their elders. Crewe and Barnston obtained 27.1% of all votes cast at the election, but among these new freemen they obtained 34.2%.

From which sections of opinion and interest groups within the city did Crewe and Barnston obtain their support? *The Alphabetical List* provides information respecting the voters' occupations and it is therefore possible to construct tables demonstrating the numbers and percentages of votes obtained by the opposition from various occupational groups.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Total number of votes</i>	<i>Votes for Crewe and Barnston</i>	<i>Percentage of votes for Crewe and Barnston</i>
skilled craftsmen	326	81	25.7%
textile workers	92	24	26.1%
retailers	489	138	28.1%
tobacco interest	48	21	43.7%
esquires and gents	116	27	23.2%
marine trades	42	20	47.6%
agricultural	47	5	10.7%
semi- and unskilled workers	1007	288	27.8%
professions	32	20	61.4%
drink interest	53	8	15.1%

On the whole, the opposition vote was a fair sample of the total vote distribution among the occupational groups. A tendency for skilled craftsmen and the wealthier classes to vote against Crewe is matched by a marginally greater degree of support for him from the semi- and unskilled workers. These deviations from the norm of 27.1% of the total vote, however, are very slight indeed.

Within certain groups there are, however, signal deviations which the total figure tends to conceal. Within the 'retailers' group, for example, Crewe and Barnston were less popular among the butchers (14 out of 82 votes) than among the grocers (17 out of 42 votes). Not surprisingly, the opposition candidates were not at all popular with the victuallers (10 out of 65 votes). Yet as a group, the 'retailers' provided the opposition with 28.1% of their votes, a deviation from the norm of only 1%.

The variations from the norm include the voting of the drinking interest, the object of the generosity of the Grosvenors. The relative popularity of the opposition among the marine trades can be explained by their declining wealth and importance and votes for Crewe were a manifestation of the dissatisfaction of this group with its lot under the Grosvenor regime. What is less clear is why the tobacco interest should have supported the opposition so strongly. Within this group there is an even more remarkable phenomenon of 'block voting', and all 11 of the tobacconists voted for Crewe.

It is clearly dangerous to draw rash conclusions from these figures. There was a slight tendency for the wealthier, more established members of the community to support Grosvenor and Bootle and for the less wealthy, less skilled and less established voters to support the opposition. Yet most groups, however they are categorised, gave the opposition around 25% of their votes. This leads to the tentative conclusion that Crewe lost the election not because he failed to appeal to any social or economic group but because in most cases his share of the poll was consistently too low. Opposition to Grosvenor dominance of the city was widespread, but it was neither popular enough to swing elections nor concentrated enough to provide Crewe with anything like a secure base. In a city like Chester in the eighteenth century, political opposition to the dominant interest carried with it social, and possibly even occupational implications and it could not lightly be undertaken by someone in any degree dependent upon the Grosvenors. The interests of property, patronage and friendship at the command of Eaton Hall were so coextensive that a political rebuff to the Grosvenor family was unthinkable and even the opposition in 1784 seems to have realised this.

There were other considerations which account for Crewe's apparently low share of the poll. His campaign lacked money, sound organisation, effective canvassing and, on the political plane, it confined its attack to local issues but never defined them until it was too late, and its attack on Grosvenor and Bootle was curiously timid and muted. When one places the result at Chester in its national setting, one may be surprised that Crewe's performance in 1784 was roughly typical for an eighteenth century Chester opposition.³⁴ As sitting members who had opposed Fox's India bill and supported Pitt and George III, Grosvenor and Bootle might with some justification avail themselves of the loyalist reaction which swept the country in the spring of 1784. Once again, the prevailing political order in Chester had triumphed, apparently with ease, over its opponents. This was, however, to be the last time that Grosvenor hegemony was capable of resisting the pressures of social and political change which were beginning, even before the 1832 reform Act, to overturn the traditional political order throughout the country.

³⁴ In 1784 the opposition's 27.1% of the vote compares with 26.7% in 1722, 18.8% in 1727 and 27.8% in 1747. Yet it should not be forgotten that 43.5% of those who voted in 1784 were prepared to cast at least one vote for the opposition. Potential opposition to the Grosvenors was perhaps much more widespread than the election *result*, taken in isolation, would suggest.