

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GROSVENOR INTEREST IN CHESTER, 1710-48

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For the would be reformers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the electoral representation of Chester possessed two outstanding features: the violence and corruption of its contests; and the remarkable influence exerted by the Grosvenors of Eaton in determining their outcome. 'Although the number of voters is above one thousand,' wrote one anonymous campaigner in 1791, 'its representation is entirely at the disposal of Earl Grosvenor, whose brother and son are the present representatives, and whose family have possessed the same influence, except in one or two instances at the revolution, ever since the reign of Charles II.'¹ The family's record of personal service was indeed striking: Grosvenors sat in Parliament as Members for Chester without a break between 1715 and 1874, and for forty two of those years held both seats in what was then a two Member constituency. The late Sir Lewis Namier contended that this state of affairs perhaps owed less to corruption in the accepted sense of the term, than to the 'quasi-feudal' traditions of the 'conservative' North.² Nevertheless, for contemporary critics of the unreformed House of Commons, it was the supposed venality of Chester Corporation and the ruthless manipulation of crown lease properties, which accounted for the strength of the Grosvenor interest in the borough: a point that was driven home repeatedly in a succession of songs, advertisements, and broadsides. In one the 'tyranny' of Lord Grosvenor was compared unfavourably to the despotism of Bonaparte, whilst another told in verse of

The Corporate Body,
That bevy of Gluttons,
Who stuff at my table,
Till off fly their buttons . . .³

Quite clearly, the independence and probity of freemen and Aldermen alike was

¹ *The Chester Directory and Guide, containing an Historical Account of the Ancient and Present State of that Celebrated City*, c. 1791-92, p. 19.

² Sir L. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2nd ed., 1957, pp. 84, 87.

³ Quoted in G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 1963, pp. 124-25.

not held in particularly high esteem: 'There is to be disposed of,' announced one advertisement, 'a Good penniworth about 900 slaves. Some of 'em are to be purchased with ale; those who have Gowns and Tippetts with Expectations and a gracious Smile once a year.'⁴

Certainly there can be little doubt that the Grosvenors were well able to undertake expensive electoral engagements as and when the need arose; the income from substantial Cheshire estates and extensive lead mining operations in North Wales was, during the first half of the 18th century, increasingly augmented by the expanding revenue from their London properties, so that by one estimate the family's annual income rose from approximately £4,500 in 1676, to around £22,000 in 1742.⁵ Yet even in the early 19th century, the Grosvenor ascendancy in Chester cannot credibly be ascribed simply to the power of money; it rested also on a complex amalgam of local prestige, ancient loyalties, civic service, and a concerned paternalism. Those reformers who sought to 'free' Chester from the dominance of Eaton Hall found themselves having to contend with a subtle blend of traditional attitudes and entrenched material interests, both with origins firmly rooted in the differences and allegiances of past generations. The purpose of this paper is to show how the Grosvenors came to occupy so pre-eminent a position in the political life of the City, and in the process to clear away some of the misconceptions which, generated by the polemical writers of the reform era, still continue to colour interpretations of the early 18th century.⁶

The General Election of 1714-15

Sir Thomas Grosvenor, the third Baronet, having been the first member of his family to represent Chester in the House of Commons, died in the summer of 1700, leaving behind him three sons and a daughter, the eldest of whom, now Sir Richard Grosvenor, was only eleven years old. Their mother having become mentally deranged, the children were entrusted to the care of a guardian, Francis Cholmondeley of Vale Royal, who presently took up residence at Eaton and set about ensuring a proper upbringing for his young charges. The young Sir Richard was sent to Eton College, and between 1704 and 1707 made the Grand Tour in

⁴ Eaton Estate Office, Grosvenor MSS.: advertisement headed 'To whom you please', undated, among the personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet (1695-1755). Except where otherwise stated, correspondence and other items cited from the Grosvenor MSS. were found among the personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet (1689-1732); Sir Thomas Grosvenor, 5th Baronet (1693-1733); and Sir Robert. Each Baronet's personal papers are contained in a single box; individual items are unnumbered. All the Grosvenor MSS. used in research for this paper were consulted at the Chester City Record Office.

⁵ R. Sedgwick, *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715-1754*, 1970, vol. 2, p. 88; Mingay, *English Landed Society*, pp. 57-58, 76-77.

⁶ For a recent discussion of the foundations upon which the Grosvenor interest was based, see F. O'Gorman, 'The General Election of 1784 in Chester', *J.C.A.S.*, vol. 57, 1970-71, pp. 41-43.

Switzerland, Bavaria, Italy and the Netherlands.⁷ Then, shortly after his return to England, and still only nineteen years of age, he married the sister of Sir William Wyndham, a protégé of Viscount Bolingbroke and a future leader of the Tory party in the House of Commons.⁸

In the last twenty years or so of the 17th century, the strengths of the Whig and Tory factions in Chester were fairly evenly balanced, with neither side able wholly to dominate the Corporation or to monopolise the parliamentary representation. In 1698, however, after a brief period in which their opponents had appeared to be gaining the upper hand, the Tories succeeded in re-establishing the practice of filling Corporation vacancies by co-option rather than by popular election, and thus, having at the same time gained a voting majority, rapidly achieved a permanent ascendancy over their Whig rivals. In consequence, after 1701 there were no further parliamentary contests until the death of Queen Anne in 1714; for the Mayor and Corporation had the discretionary power to create new freemen, and successive Tory Mayors naturally took care to ensure that their own supporters constituted a good majority of those entitled to vote.⁹ Until his death, Sir Thomas Grosvenor had been the leading figure among Chester Tories, but during his son's minority the Grosvenor interest was supplanted by others. During these years, the City was represented in Parliament by Sir Henry Bunbury and Peter Shakerley, both prominent Cheshire Tory squires who worked hard in the service of their constituents. Quite clearly though, they owed their positions to the strength of the Tory faction within the Corporation, rather than to any personal influence over the Chester electorate; moreover, those positions would inevitably be called into doubt, should Sir Richard Grosvenor express a desire to pursue an active political career of his own when at last he came of age, which indeed it seemed more than likely that he would.¹⁰

At the end of August 1710, Sir George Warburton and Charles Cholmondeley, prospective Tory candidates for Cheshire, wrote to Robert Harley, the incoming Tory minister, to recommend Grosvenor as a suitably sound addition to the commission of the peace for their shire.¹¹ At the general election little more than a month later, Sir Richard did, in fact, contemplate putting up at Chester, but after some consultation was persuaded not to disturb the sitting Members. His companion on the Grand Tour, Alexander Forrester, wrote to him from Geneva, rejoicing

⁷ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: letters from Francis Cholmondeley to Sir Richard while he was on the Grand Tour, and draft replies in Sir Richard's letter book.

⁸ Sedgwick, *History of Parliament*, vol. 2, pp. 87-88.

⁹ J. Hemingway, *History of the City of Chester*, 1831, vol. 2, pp. 386-96; H. T. Dutton, 'The Stuart Kings and Chester Corporation', *J.C.A.S.*, new series, vol. 28, 1929, pp. 180-207.

¹⁰ For the efforts of Bunbury and Shakerley on behalf of their constituents, see R. C. Gwilliam, 'The Chester Tanners and Parliament, 1711-1717', *J.C.A.S.*, vol. 44, 1957, pp. 41-49; Historical Manuscripts Commission, *8th Report, Part I*, 1881, Appendix: Corporation of Chester, *passim*.

¹¹ H.M.C., Series 29, *15th Report, Appendix IV, Portland IV*, 1897, p. 579: Warburton and Cholmondeley to Harley, 30 Aug. 1710.

to hear of his 'so generously waving your present Interest in the City of Chester for the Publick Good. This, Sir,' he added, 'is an action which has for ever established the early good opinion and Esteem your Country has had for you and will do you honor to your dying day.'¹² Evidently though, esteem and honour did not add up to an hereditary claim to a seat in Parliament, and Sir Richard had to rest content with the promise of some future accommodation.

The general election of 1713 went by without Sir Richard attempting to press his claims to a seat. He had now taken complete control of his own affairs and estates, and was busy establishing himself at Eaton Hall. On 1 August 1714, however, Queen Anne died, and almost immediately plans were set afoot in Cheshire, as elsewhere, for contesting the new elections which were bound by law to follow within six months. As befitted his standing in the county, Grosvenor was consulted by his Tory neighbours about the steps that ought properly to be taken at so critical a juncture, but he declined to be committed, believing himself to be 'but an Indifferent Judge what turn affairs may have on this Malancoly occasion'.¹³ Nevertheless, at the same time, he was being actively encouraged to stand at Chester, and in pursuing his object to 'take care of being as good an husband as you can of your expences which I hope will not be very considerable amongst your friends'.¹⁴ Thus when Sir Henry Bunbury wrote asking for his 'favour and interest' for the next Parliament,¹⁵ Grosvenor wrote back informing him that he intended to stand himself. He expressed his hope that both Bunbury and Shakerley would make good their engagements to him, that one of them would stand down if he desired to offer his service, and further cautioned Bunbury to 'consider the consequence of deviding an Interest that hath bin established att the expence of my family'.¹⁶ The following day he wrote in similar vein to Shakerley.¹⁷ Shakerley, however, was disinclined to give way before the implied threat of a contest, and reminded Sir Richard that the terms of their agreement in 1710 had stipulated that Grosvenor should not be opposed at the next election thereafter; since, therefore, he had not seen fit to offer himself in 1713, their engagement was no longer valid. 'Whether the city will accept of my service again in a new Parliament is at their Election,' Shakerley told him, 'but if they do I hould my self obliged to serve them in it'.¹⁸

A bitter struggle seemed inevitable, and more than likely to involve fierce competition for outside support. If, by virtue of his marriage to Wyndham's sister, Grosvenor could regard himself as being well connected in Tory circles, it had to be admitted that Bunbury and Shakerley were hardly less so. Both had been part

¹² Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Forrester to Grosvenor, 25 Nov. and 19 Dec. 1710.

¹³ *ibid.*: Charles Cholmondeley to Grosvenor, 5 Aug. 1714; Grosvenor to Cholmondeley, 9 Aug. 1714.

¹⁴ *ibid.*: A. Trevor to Grosvenor, 12 August 1714.

¹⁵ *ibid.*: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 17 Aug. 1714.

¹⁶ *ibid.*: Grosvenor to Bunbury, 23 Aug. 1714.

¹⁷ *ibid.*: Grosvenor to Shakerley, 24 Aug. 1714.

¹⁸ *ibid.*: Shakerley to Grosvenor, 25 Aug. 1714.

of the Earl of Nottingham's North Western connexion prior to Nottingham's defection to the Whigs in 1711, whereafter they were numbered among the parliamentary followers of the sometime Speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Thomas Hanmer.¹⁹ Indeed, Bunbury was Hanmer's brother in law, and through his good offices had been appointed a Commissioner of the Irish Revenue during the Duke of Ormonde's Lord Lieutenancy.²⁰ Shakerley, for his part, had been Governor of Chester Castle before being dismissed in 1705; more recently, he had acted as unofficial Tory whip responsible for Members in Lancashire and Cheshire, and in the months ahead was to play a prominent part in arranging the 'Compromise', by which it was intended to settle the representation of the county at the coming election for Knights of the Shire.²¹

At first, it seemed that Sir Richard's interest might prove less than irresistible. 'The old members having hitherto behav'd themselves like gentlemen,' wrote back one voter in reply to his application for support, 'I cannot finde any reason either to slight or reject them for whilst they endeavour to continue I hope you will excuse me, but if either decline I shall be at your service.'²² At the beginning of October, writing from Brasenose College in Oxford, his younger brother Robert was a shade more encouraging: 'They talk here that you are like to have great opposition, but beleive it will be to little purpose. Its said here Mr. Shakerly will not resign, but I can scare [sic] beleive he will do such an ungentlemanlike action, as long as he knows you intend to stand.'²³ Yet another correspondent had some constructive advice to offer about measures that might be taken to secure Sir Richard's interest against opposition, both now and in the future. The writer pointed out that there were about a hundred young men, some freemen's sons, others apprentices, who though qualified to take up their freedom, were unable to meet the thirty shilling entry fine. For a total outlay of £150, Grosvenor could remove this obstacle, and might legitimately expect their gratitude to manifest itself in an appropriate manner.

Each Man by this Method will have as Free a Vote at Elections as the greatest Alderman in his Furrs and Sables, And you will at least secure to your own share above a Hundred more Votes than any other Candidate whatsoever; and that, upon such a Foundation, that they will be firmly fixed to the Intrest of you & your family for ever: and in all subsequent Elections you will be freed from the Charges of Treating Saucy-Innkeepers, and other Pragmaticks; which other Candidates will be obliged to do. This Sir (with Submission) is a method which if approved of & pursued by you, None can withstand you at this or any other Election hereafter.²⁴

¹⁹ G. Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, 1967, pp. 274, 281.

²⁰ Sedgwick, *History of Parliament*, vol. 1, p. 507; H.M.C., Series 36, *Ormonde, New Series*, VIII, 1920, p. 320.

²¹ Holmes, *British Politics*, p. 301; W. A. Speck, *Tory and Whig: the Struggle in the Constituencies, 1701-1715*, 1970, p. 107.

²² Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: R. Crompton to Grosvenor, 7 Sept. 1714.

²³ *ibid.*: Robert to Sir Richard Grosvenor, 3 Oct. 1714.

²⁴ *ibid.*: R. Minshull to Grosvenor, 8 Sept. 1714.

In the event, Grosvenor appears to have ignored this well intentioned if somewhat over optimistic advice, for the present at least; during the next thirty years the family's interest in the borough was repeatedly bolstered up in just such a manner, though at considerably greater expense, and on a much larger scale, than this correspondent ever envisaged.²⁵

What really turned the tide in Grosvenor's favour as the election approached, was the so called 'Compromise' agreement reached as the result of a county meeting held at Northwich on 11 November. According to this arrangement, one of the sitting Tory Members, Charles Cholmondeley, was to stand down in favour of a Whig candidate, Langham Booth, younger brother of the Earl of Warrington. The avowed purpose of the 'Compromise' was to avoid both the expense and the bitterness of a contested election. However, in putting the idea across to the staunch Tory squireens of the county, a more compelling argument was used. It was stated simply that many of the principal landowners who had lent their tacit support to the Tories in 1713 were now, with the future of the Hanoverian Succession hanging in the balance, determined to exert their full influence on behalf of the Whigs; and this being the case, it seemed highly probable that neither of the sitting Tory Members would be returned. A set of complex psephological calculations was circulated to prove the point, and every effort was made to stress the state of harmony which now existed between the rival interests.²⁶ Seeking to vindicate the measures entered into at Northwich, John Egerton of Oulton, one of the 'Compromise's' Tory sponsors, wrote confidently to Peter Legh at Lyme about this newly found sense of neighbourly understanding: 'All this matter was done in the Friendliest manner imaginable not an undecent word or a reflecting speech offered on either side nor could any body guess we were 2 Parties but by our separation at Dinner Time.'²⁷

But in fact the 'Compromise' was not quite such a straightforward transaction as its advocates maintained. In the first place, it was difficult to explain what the Whigs stood to gain by it if, as was asserted, they were in a position to win both seats on their own interest. Furthermore, when Cholmondeley refused to be sacrificed without a fight, it soon became evident that there were many people who viewed the 'Compromise' as an attempt on the part of self styled Tory moderates to secure the Hanoverian Succession at the price of abetting their own party's electoral defeat. Thus, with Peter Shakerley emerging as one of the scheme's principal architects, and with the Tory ranks in Chester, as elsewhere, split wide

²⁵ J. H. E. Bennett, ed., *Rolls of the Freemen of the City of Chester, Part II, 1700-1805*, R.S.L.C., vol. 55, 1908, pp. 234-36. A total of 48 freemen were created between the beginning of October and the election, 28 of these in January alone; but this seems to have been in conformity with the then customary pre-election rate.

²⁶ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Shakerley to the Mayor, Corporation, and citizens of Chester, 2 Dec. 1714; John Rylands, University Library of Manchester (hereafter cited as J.R.L.), Legh of Lyme MSS.: J. Henshall to unnamed correspondent, 15 Nov. 1714.

²⁷ J.R.L., Legh of Lyme MSS.: Egerton to Legh, 12 Nov. 1714.

open, Grosvenor found little difficulty in marshalling support against his opponent as a traitor to the cause. One contemporary election squib makes the point clearly:

Chester. Thy Tale is next, the Trick thou't Thought
Suffer thy Self not to be Sold or Bought
For S[hakerley] in Principle is Nought.²⁸

By the end of January 1714-15, the election was thought to be going well for Grosvenor,²⁹ and on 16 February he was returned at the head of the poll, with Bunbury taking the second seat, and Shakerley a long way behind in third place.³⁰ Despite this definite setback, however, the 'Compromise' candidates were successful in the county, and as the returns came in from elsewhere round the country it became obvious that the Tories had been decisively beaten. Grosvenor's own election had been untypical, though not unique, in that both his opponents had been Tories; and if the result seemed to indicate a marked distaste among Chester voters for the politics of reconciliation, there was nothing in it to suggest that the City was in any sense at Sir Richard's disposal at this date. Rather, whilst it did demonstrate that the Grosvenor interest in Chester was still a force to be reckoned with, it also proved the importance of working within the existing framework of party allegiances.

What Sir Richard as yet lacked, was his father's intimate knowledge of, and close working relationship with, the leading figures of Chester Corporation. During the first session of the new Parliament, his dealings with the City fathers were formal and courteous. In May 1715, he and Bunbury sought their opinion as to how they should proceed with regard to a bill for making the River Weaver navigable;³¹ and a month later John Parker, one of the Sheriffs, wrote to Grosvenor on behalf of some of his 'best friends' in the City, to discover his sentiments in the matter of choosing a new Alderman. Several candidates were said to be making 'great interest' in the affair. 'We shou'd be highly oblig'd,' Parker told him, 'if your honour wou'd put an end to these disputes, in filling up that vacancy, or at least ways recommend whome you esteeme an honest man. We are of oppinion,' he thought fit to add, 'that Mr. Comberbach is a violent Whig [and] therefore wou'd be glad to have him postpon'd.'³² As a consequence of these approaches, Grosvenor's name was put forward to fill the vacancy, and the following October he was chosen without opposition to serve as Mayor. What is significant, however, is that this involvement in City affairs began with the

²⁸ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: election squib, undated.

²⁹ *ibid.*: Robert to Sir Richard Grosvenor, 25 Jan. 1714-15.

³⁰ Grosvenor polled 783 votes, Bunbury 603, and Shakerley 491.

³¹ Chester City R.O.: Mayors' letters, 1674-1715, Ref. ML/4/665: Grosvenor and Bunbury to the Mayor and Corporation of Chester, 14 May 1715.

³² Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: J. Parker to Grosvenor, 8 June 1715.

encouragement of leading Tories in the Corporation. Eaton Hall did not actively seek to impose its will on the City; it was rather the City which solicited the patronage and prestige of Eaton Hall.

The Elections of 1722 and 1727

During the military occupation of the City after the Rebellion of 1715, Sir Richard proved himself to be a staunch defender of civic liberties.³³ By the Autumn of 1721, another general election was in prospect, and at Chester, despite the optimistic forecasts of his friends in 1715, Grosvenor was again faced with the likelihood of a bitter contest. 'I'm heartily concern'd . . . for the opposition you meet with in Chester,' wrote Thomas Assheton, a former Tory Governor of Chester Castle, in October.

I wish it does not end in a breach amongst the Torsys, not to be made up, and a dissolution of the best established interest in England. You may please to remember, that I told you at Eaton, that there were some designing people behind the curtain, and that if you did not act with the greatest caution, it would prove very expensive.³⁴

The object of his concern was almost certainly Thomas Brereton, who in a recent pamphlet had attacked the Grosvenor interest, and was calling for an all out opposition against Sir Richard's candidate for the Mayoralty.³⁵

According to the diarist Lord Egmont, Brereton was the son of a Chester innkeeper. He had been articled as clerk to an attorney at law,³⁶ and about 1708 had gone up to London at the instigation of Bunbury and Shakerley, to seek some employment under the Crown. He did, in fact, find a suitable place in the office of the Receiver General of the Admiralty Perquisites, until the office was closed down after the Treaty of Utrecht had put an end to the war with France. By the end of 1713, he was soliciting the Earl of Oxford for some new preferment, though with what result is not known.³⁷ Some time later, however, he came to the attention of Sir Richard Grosvenor himself, and was advanced by him to an employment of a hundred pounds or so a year.³⁸ By 1721, though, Brereton had evidently fallen out with his new benefactor, or more probably, to judge from the tenor of the pamphlet already referred to, with Grosvenor's steward, Robert Pigot.

'Honest Robin', the epithet referring to his politics rather than to his business

³³ See S. W. Baskerville, 'The Management of the Tory Interest in Lancashire and Cheshire, 1714-1747', D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1976, pp. 86-88.

³⁴ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Assheton to Grosvenor, 9 Oct. 1721.

³⁵ *Considerations, Offer'd to the Citizens of Chester*, printed by W. Cooke, Chester, 1721, *passim*.

³⁶ H.M.C., Series 63, *Egmont Diary I*, 1920, p. 87.

³⁷ British Library (hereafter cited as B.L.), Loan 29 (Portland Papers)/127: Brereton to Oxford, 10 Nov. 1713. Brereton describes himself as now applying 'in the absence of all my Friends'.

³⁸ H.M.C., *Egmont Diary I*, p. 87.

ethics, was a remarkable man in his own right, whose relationship with the Grosvenors and with the City of Chester spanned a period of almost forty years. Few of them were free of controversy. As far back as July 1714, Sir William Wyndham had advised his brother in law to dismiss Pigot from his service, for having used his position as steward at Eaton to feather his own nest during Sir Richard's minority.³⁹ The advice was ignored, and Pigot went on to become the Grosvenors' chief electoral agent in Chester, being made first an Alderman and, in 1723, Mayor. According to a memorandum prepared at the time of Sir Richard's death in 1732, Pigot continued to cheat his master throughout his life, withholding accounts, selling Sir Richard malt from his own kilns at inflated prices, and leasing himself portions of the Eaton demesne at a rent one third less than their market value.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in spite of these activities, he proceeded to serve both of Sir Richard's younger brothers in turn, retiring at last in the late 1740s to enjoy a comfortable old age.

In 1721, however, it appears that he had crossed not only Brereton but also one Alderman Burroughs, to whom Grosvenor had already promised his interest for the Mayoralty. The upshot of their quarrel was that Sir Richard agreed to transfer his support to a second nominee, supposedly at his steward's request. 'Thus every Free-Spirited Citizen may discern the extream Partiality, and uncommon Method of Proceeding Practis'd in this Affair,' asserted Brereton's pamphlet.

And why? what is all this for? Is it any Party-Cause? Is the Difference between *Whigg* and *Tory*? Or is the Church concern'd in this Dispute? No such Thing. The Question is whether this City, that subsists principally upon the inhabiting Gentry, who are worthy and numerous, ought to Idolize and exalt one only Neighbouring Family, in contempt of all the rest? Whether the *Bunburys*, the *Hurlestons*, the *Lees*, the *Warburtons*, the *Mainwarings*, the *Williams's*, and many others, have not long oblig'd and adorned this City? have not Estates to spend in it as well as the Family of *Eaton*? Nay, whether other Gentlemen that might be Instanc'd, who not withstanding all the Noise made about the Name of *Grosvenor*, have twice their real Estate, are not discourag'd from coming and settling here, according to their Inclination, by reason of the absolute Dominion claim'd over Us of late Years by that single House . . . This is the Struggle that *Friday's* Voting must determine; whether *Chester* is to be henceforth a free City, or under the Government of a Lord Paramount; whether its Assemblys are to be Courts of Council or Court-Leets, whether Mr. *Pigot* is to sit Judge, as over the rest of his Master's; and whether a Citizen thereof is to be consider'd as such, or hereafter plac'd in the same Class with a Burgess of *Holt*.⁴¹

³⁹ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Wyndham to Grosvenor, 3 and 4 July 1714.

⁴⁰ Grosvenor MSS., Estate papers, Box 42/1: 'Observations upon Mr. Robert Pigot's Service under Sir Richd. Grosvenor as his Steward at Eaton', undated.

⁴¹ *Considerations*, pp. 3-4. Holt was the Grosvenors' pocket borough in Denbighshire.

This tirade did not go long unanswered; for a spirited reply in the form of an open letter to Brereton himself was soon going the rounds in manuscript. In it the familiar and conventional abuse of party conflict was much more apparent:

The purport of your libell, contains malicious insinuations, injurious sarcasms, and base reflections upon a deserving Patriot, and worthy Magistrates, and to add life to your senceless Jargon, you call liberty property and slavery with the same canting air as the Puritans fulminated their K[in]g killing principles, who were a vermin that call'd upon the Lord whilst they destroy'd his Anointed.

As for Alderman Burroughs:

I answer to those illustrious bright qualifications lately discover'd in [him] (according to the dictates of reasone or policy) 'tis uncertain and fickle principles renders him unfit for the seat of Justice . . .⁴²

Whether Chester voters weighed such claims and counter claims in the balance, cannot now be ascertained; but it was Sir Richard's candidate who was duly elected to serve as Mayor.

Clearly Brereton's accusations, if capable of substantiation, would go some considerable way towards vindicating the assertion of later reformers, that the Grosvenor family and their minions had dominated the political life of the City from the time of the Restoration. As we have seen, though, it was with some difficulty that Sir Richard had managed to reassert his family's influence in 1715, and then only with the fullest co-operation of the Tory group inside the Corporation. If the name of Grosvenor carried greater sway in civic affairs than any other, it was because the City fathers had gone out of their way to engage Sir Richard's interest in their affairs, in the certain knowledge that through him they had the most potent link locally available with the wider Tory movement of which they were a small, insignificant, and vulnerable part. Sir Richard's relationship with them was not so much as a tyrant, but more as a patron and protector in a world increasingly dangerous for Tories to live in.

Nothing daunted, Thomas Brereton now turned his attention to the coming parliamentary contest, and at considerable personal expense set about purchasing the freedom of the City for indigent apprentices, as Grosvenor had himself been advised to do in 1715. Sir Henry Bunbury, wintering in Bath for the good of his health, was much disturbed in early November at the suggestion that he might be willing to join with Brereton against his colleague; he wrote hastily both to Grosvenor and to the Corporation, reaffirming his satisfaction with the existing arrangements.⁴³ His overtures to Bunbury having thus fallen on deaf or timid

⁴² Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: open letter from J.H. to Thomas Brereton, 13 Oct. 1721.

⁴³ *ibid.*: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 9 Nov. 1721; Chester City R.O.: Mayors' file, 1721-22, Ref. MF/138: Bunbury to the Mayor and Corporation of Chester, 10 Nov. 1721.

ears, Brereton abruptly altered his tactics and declared himself openly for the 'Good Old Cause', that is for the Whigs. He began to treat lavishly in the taverns and alehouses, canvassing votes on whatever basis seemed most likely to succeed, and thereby obliging Grosvenor to issue a public denial of any association existing between them. By the end of November, Sir Richard could inform Bunbury that 'the Whigs espouse his Interest as one man.'⁴⁴ As the campaign progressed, however, it became clear that Bunbury's interest was rendered all the more precarious by his enforced absence in the West Country, and that all the efforts of his wife and steward, and for that matter of Grosvenor himself, were no real substitute in the eyes of the voters for his personal presence.⁴⁵ Yet as it turned out, all this activity and expense was a trifle premature, since the old Parliament had not been dissolved, and Brereton could not seriously expect to be a match for Sir Richard when it came to the length of his purse. Brereton seems to have been deceived by popular rumour, into believing that the dissolution would come before the end of 1721; whereas in the event it did not occur until the following March. Perhaps the effects of this major miscalculation finally tipped the balance against him.⁴⁶

From Grosvenor's point of view, however, the most disturbing feature of the situation was the support which Brereton seemed to be enjoying among his Tory neighbours. Peter Shakerley, for instance, still smarting perhaps from the drubbing he had received at Sir Richard's hands in 1715, wrote a fulsome circular letter on Brereton's behalf,⁴⁷ and Watkin Williams Wynn, a rising star among the Tory gentry of North Wales, was also rumoured to be in his interest. It was with no little relief, therefore, that Grosvenor received word from Wynn that Brereton had no authority for canvassing his tenants, and that in fact he was strongly in favour of the *status quo* in Chester being preserved.⁴⁸ Ultimately far more damaging to Brereton, though, were the measures being set afoot by the Whig Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, the Earl of Cholmondeley. On 12 December, his lordship wrote to Grosvenor with an offer to support him for the City, provided that he in turn would agree to declare his interest in the county for the Tory candidates, John Crewe, and the Earl's cousin, Charles Cholmondeley.⁴⁹ Sir Richard was only too willing to oblige. Thus Brereton's main hope of success,

⁴⁴ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Grosvenor to Bunbury, 28 Nov. 1721.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 2 Dec. 1721; Grosvenor to Bunbury, 12 Dec. 1721.

⁴⁶ Bunbury was also aware of these rumours but discounted them: *see ibid.*: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 9 Nov. 1721. Further evidence of Brereton's error may be adduced from the freemen rolls. Between September 1721 and April 1722 a total of 560 freemen were created, many at Brereton's expense; but no fewer than 468 of these creations took place before the end of October 1721. *See Rolls of the Freemen, Part II*, pp. 246-69.

⁴⁷ University College of North Wales Library, Baron Hill MSS. 6802: Shakerley to the Mayor and Corporation of Chester, undated.

⁴⁸ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Wynn to Grosvenor, 9 Dec. 1721.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*: Lord Cholmondeley to Grosvenor, 12 Dec. 1721. This corroborates the reports made subsequently to the ministry by the Earl of Warrington: *see* B.L., Blenheim MSS. D.I.33: Warrington to Sunderland, 9 March 1721-22 and 7 April 1722.

lying as it did in the organised and wholehearted support of the Cheshire Whigs, was being jeopardised by clandestine negotiations conducted without his knowledge.

By the end of the year, the prospects were looking somewhat brighter for Grosvenor and his friends; the Tories too had now begun to treat the freemen, and Brereton was said to be 'not soe chearfull as usuall'. His supporters were of the view that he could not now secure a majority at the hustings, though they still hoped to see him returned after a petition to the House of Commons. Nevertheless, speculations about likely voting patterns continued to exercise the minds of the interested parties, encouraged by the unsettling intelligence that the Chester Presbyterians, having formerly assured Grosvenor of one vote at least, were now resolved to plump for Brereton. But this having been taken into account, Sir Richard remained confident that even Bunbury, undoubtedly the weaker member of the partnership, would beat their opponent by two hundred votes.⁵⁰ When at last the Chester election came on the following April, Grosvenor and Bunbury did indeed succeed in routing Brereton, despite the late intervention of a second Whig, Hugh Williams, intended doubtless to mop up Brereton's second votes.⁵¹

Sir Richard Grosvenor had now shown himself and his Tory associates to be firmly in control of the electoral representation of Chester, and for 'the best established interrest in England',⁵² the future seemed assured enough. Unaided, the Chester Whigs were clearly unable to do much to alter the political balance that had prevailed in the City since 1698, and the only cause for concern lay in the fortunately remote prospect of ministerial intervention in some form or other. It was equally the case, however, that the responsibility for maintaining, organising, and financing the Tories' electoral forces in Chester, was being left increasingly in the hands of Sir Richard and his agents. The City fathers gave no indication that they found this situation anything other than totally satisfactory, and Sir Henry Bunbury, the only other Tory with an axe to grind in the matter, was rapidly becoming a political cipher, the more so since his re-election in 1722 had been wholly the work of others.

The unexpected death of George I, in June 1727, caught everyone unprepared for the election which it necessitated. Almost nothing at all is known of the circumstances that persuaded Sir Richard to substitute his younger brother Thomas for his old colleague Sir Henry. The idea had, in fact, been discussed some years before,⁵³ and was perhaps all the simpler to engineer, now that the Grosvenor interest had successfully fought the 1722 election single handed in consequence

⁵⁰ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Grosvenor to Bunbury, 28 Dec. 1721.

⁵¹ Grosvenor polled 980 votes, Bunbury 908, Brereton 545, and Williams 144. Though each elector had two votes, he could choose to cast only one of them, or, in the jargon of the day, to 'plump for' a particular candidate.

⁵² This expression had been used by Thomas Assheton the previous October: *see above*, n. 34.

⁵³ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 20 Nov. 1721.

of Bunbury's illness. Nevertheless, it was a rather spiteful coup, and one that did Sir Richard little credit. Indeed, it became all the most embarrassing when the Chester Whigs seized upon Bunbury's discomfiture, and ran him as their own candidate. It is not clear whether or not he actively campaigned against the Grosvenor interest, but certainly the evidence of the surviving poll book would seem to show that, after more than a quarter of a century as champion of the Tory and High Church interest, the elderly baronet found himself obliged in the main to Whigs and Presbyterians for the meagre 424 votes that he did receive. In fact, an unusually large number of freemen split their votes on this occasion, many choosing to continue their support for the old Members, whilst a number of others voted for Bunbury and Thomas Grosvenor, presumably by way of protest against Sir Richard's callous behaviour.⁵⁴ Yet protest was all the dissidents could do, for the Grosvenors' position was evidently impregnable, unless some major upset occurred to weaken their credit inside the Corporation, or lessen their influence with the freemen as a whole.

The Dee Navigation and the By Elections of 1732-33

Within five years, however, events had conspired to produce just such an upset. The remarkable sequence of political events that were to dominate life in Chester during the next three years, were triggered off by a new scheme for making the River Dee navigable to the sea by means of a new channel.⁵⁵ Indeed, the issue seemed perfectly straightforward. In March 1732 a private bill, supported by members of both parties,⁵⁶ was laid before the House of Commons, read twice, and referred to the further consideration of a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Richard Grosvenor himself. Even before the bill was presented, there was a good deal of unrest in Chester, on account of a rumour given wide currency there that Sir Richard was really opposed to the scheme in principle. The navigation was evidently popular with a broad cross section of the City's inhabitants, and the Whigs inside the Corporation did their utmost to exploit such sentiments and to identify themselves as the bill's chief promoters.⁵⁷ Almost immediately after the bill's committal, a number of petitions were presented objecting to some of its technical provisions,

⁵⁴ There are copies of the 1727 and 1747 poll books preserved among the personal papers of Sir Richard and Sir Robert Grosvenor, 4th and 6th Baronets, respectively. Of the 424 freemen giving Bunbury a vote in 1727, 174 can be identified as still voting in 1747; of these 70 voted Tory, 81 voted Whig, and 23 split their votes.

⁵⁵ For the best discussion of this and earlier schemes see T. S. Willan, 'Chester and the Navigation of the Dee, 1600-1750', *J.C.A.S.*, new series, vol. 32, 1937-38, pp. 64-67. Many of the contemporary pamphlets putting the cases for and against the 1732-33 scheme can be found among the Grosvenor MSS.

⁵⁶ The bill's sponsors in the Commons were Sir Richard Grosvenor, Thomas Grosvenor, and Charles Cholmondeley, Tories; Sir Robert Cotton and Hugh Williams, Whigs.

⁵⁷ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: T. Bolland to Grosvenor, 4 March 1731-32.

and by April, despite the addition of new members, the committee was hopelessly deadlocked.⁵⁸

In Chester itself, the mood of the populace now began to grow ugly. While prominent Whigs like Alderman John Williams were fêted by the townsfolk, a number of Tory Aldermen found themselves threatened with violence, and at the races one of Grosvenor's servants was 'mob'd off the ground on account of the navigation'.⁵⁹ A few days later, the mob was raised again on a well attested report that Robin Pigot was at Hawarden to whip up a further petition against the bill; and that Grosvenor had himself prevailed with the local squire there, Sir John Glynne, to oppose the measure. Faced with such accusations, Sir Richard's friends in the City found themselves powerless to defend his interest. As one of them informed him:

soe confident are your enemys that it is already ruin'd, that [I] my self saw [it warged] that neither your self nor any supported by your Interest are return'd members for this city for the two next coming parliaments . . . I shall only add that the very best of your friends are dumb on these occasions & hang down their heads, like Bullrushes.

The constables were refusing point blank to arrest those who rioted nightly in the City, whilst the Whigs were making preparations for a thousand people to go and meet Hugh Williams, the Alderman's son, when he came down from London.⁶⁰

In fact the situation was not perhaps quite so bleak as this writer suggests. There was still a good deal of loyalty to the family of Eaton that no amount of rumour mongering could erode. Another letter from a freeman living outside Chester will perhaps serve to demonstrate the point: 'I was always In your Interest,' he told Grosvenor at the beginning of April,

and soe zealous that this day I engaged In a Quarill and a wager in support of it; for as I was at a Barbers, some workmen swore that none from Eaton should ever goe up to parliament again. I struck one of the fellows and his master a Bricklayer lay'd me 5 guineas to 2 to the same purpose as his man had spoak . . . The Barber got me away or I had been worse used than I was; they follow'd me out of doors with a shout of down with the Grosvenors and hey for the Navigation. The mob took the cry out of doors and I was forced to take into the White Bear from whence I write this. The People of this house and everywhere are quite mad and as I am told the mob threatens to do mischief to your house and gardens. I hope to see some of them hanged.⁶¹

⁵⁸ For full details of this first bill, the parties for and against, and the Commons proceedings, see *Commons Journals*, vol. 21, pp. 790, 812-13, 849, 853-54, 857-58, 860, 863, 865, 867, 887. For Grosvenor's own account of the bill's preparation and his confidence that it would be passed see personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: Grosvenor to [T. Bolland], 7 March 1731-32.

⁵⁹ Personal papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: J. Brown to Grosvenor, 1 April 1732; Rev. T. Aubrey to Grosvenor, 4 April 1732.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*: T. Bingley to Grosvenor, 8 April 1732.

⁶¹ *ibid.*: J. Brown to Grosvenor, 1 April 1732.

Sir Richard's position was indeed difficult. He had no strong views about the navigation either way, but probably sympathised with those who opposed the bill as it was then framed. These could be divided into four main categories. Firstly, there were a number of experts who questioned the technical competence of the engineer, Nathaniel Kinderley, claiming that he had been responsible for a similar scheme at Rye, where widespread flood damage had resulted from his efforts.⁶² Allied to this was a second complaint that the primary objective of improving the navigation was being sacrificed to the desire for land reclamation, at the expense of those Welsh squires, mainly Tories, who farmed the mud flats through which the channel was to be dug. Thirdly, the cheesemongers of London and Westminster, their monopoly of cheese buying from Cheshire farmers seemingly threatened, objected on the twin grounds of too high a tonnage duty, and too shallow a depth of water in the proposed cut. Lastly, Liverpool Corporation opposed the bill in conjunction with Sir Roger Mostyn, who owned the wharves at Parkgate then used for loading and offloading goods carried by sea and destined for Chester. They maintained that silt from the new channel would obstruct the entrance into Liverpool and its outports, especially Hoylake.⁶³ Some of these objections were doubtless rooted in self interest, but that fact alone did not render them any the less legitimate. Particularly serious, from Grosvenor's point of view, was the number of his Tory friends and neighbours who stood to lose by the scheme,⁶⁴ and it is hardly surprising that supporters of the project should blame him with impeding its progress in the Commons committee.

At last, it seemed, the Chester Whigs had found the ideal stick with which to beat their opponents, and the Tory Earl of Barrymore for one believed it to be no mere coincidence, as he told a close friend at Overton: 'Your Chester men are mad. I alwayes thought that navigation was sett on Foot to Destroy Sir Richard's Interest and Will in Time turn out the old Inhabitants & people the place with a new Colony. They are very fond off what must ruine them but that you nor I can help.'⁶⁵ By May the Earl of Cholmondeley's son, Lord Malpas, together with Brereton, Williams, and a Whig lawyer, Richard Manley, were being widely identified in Tory circles as the principal architects both of the navigation scheme itself, and of the recent violent outbreaks in the City. 'The Revolution at Chester is beyond thought,' wrote Barrymore from Ireland on the 9th. 'Who has instilled these true revolution principles in them? I fancy Brereton has a finger in the pie. This will occasion the spending of £10,000. If Sir Richard thinks it worth while to keep Chester, all his antagonists cannot spare

⁶² National Library of Wales (hereafter cited as N.L.W.), Chirk Castle MSS. E. 1136: W. Travers to R. Myddelton, 20 April 1732.

⁶³ For a discussion of these points and of the pamphlet literature relating to them see Willan, 'Chester and the Navigation of the Dee', p. 66. There are further pamphlets relating to the cheesemongers in the Grosvenor MSS.

⁶⁴ Glynn, Mostyn, and Wynn all opposed the bill in Parliament.

⁶⁵ N.L.W., MSS. 3582E (Puleston letters)/3: Barrymore to F. Price, 16 April 1732.

so much, add my Lord Malpas to them!’⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Grosvenor must have been disturbed to hear of the machinations going on inside the Corporation, where two associates of Lord Malpas had attempted suborning the Mayor to create his lordship’s brother, Colonel James Cholmondeley, a freeman of the City, and to sponsor his candidacy at the next general election. Only the prompt intervention of Robin Pigot had prevented a very dangerous situation from developing. There was some consolation, however, in the news that Hugh Williams’ entry into Chester had turned out to be a less impressive demonstration than his friends had anticipated, thereby leading to the speculation that perhaps popular passions were beginning to cool.⁶⁷

With the end of the parliamentary session on 1 June 1732, the navigation bill lapsed without the committee making any report. Yet from a political standpoint, in Chester at any rate, this event was completely overshadowed by the news that Sir Richard Grosvenor was on his deathbed, and that his brother Thomas, the heir to his title and estates, was himself dangerously ill.⁶⁸ Sir Richard’s demise on 12 July could not have come at a worse time for the Chester Tories, for it made necessary a by election in the City at the very moment when popular resentment had again been whipped up to new heights by the loss of the navigation bill. Moreover, the vacancy having occurred during the parliamentary recess, they would have to wait several months for the start of the next session, before the writ for a new election could be issued. In this situation a contested Mayoral election in October was all but unavoidable, since if they were able to capture the Mayoralty, the Whigs would have it in their power to create sufficient new freeman to give them a voting majority at the ensuing parliamentary by election. Well aware that his own health would not permit him to winter in England, Sir Thomas Grosvenor was concerned to see his interest in Chester secured before his departure for warmer climes, and so set about mobilising the support of his Tory friends and neighbours in Cheshire and North Wales.⁶⁹ This being once achieved, he then retired to the continent, leaving the management of his affairs in the capable hands of his agents.

From the start it was Robert, the youngest of the three Grosvenor brothers, who was looked upon as the most likely Tory candidate for the parliamentary vacancy, though Lord Barrymore expressed some regret that Sir Henry Bunbury

⁶⁶ H.M.C., Series 43, *15th Report, Appendix VII*, 1898, Puleston MSS., p. 313: Barrymore to Price, 9 May 1732. See also *B.L.*, Additional MSS. 46,400, Puleston correspondence, ff. 3-3b: G. R[oss] to Price, 13 May 1732 — Barrymore’s postscript.

⁶⁷ Grosvenor MSS., Estate papers, Box 42/1: Pigot to Grosvenor, 14 May 1732.

⁶⁸ N.L.W., MSS. 3582E/5: Barrymore to Price, 11 June 1732. There were also apparently some disheartening rumours circulating about Robert Grosvenor, but the details are obscure.

⁶⁹ His principal concern was to bring to an end the long standing feud which existed between the Wynn and Myddelton families in Denbighshire. See Chirk Castle MSS. E. 37: Sir T. Grosvenor to R. Myddelton, 2 Aug. 1732; *ibid.*, C. 17: agreement between Wynn and Myddelton, undated but before July 1732; N.L.W., Wynnstay MSS. L. 917: renewal of this agreement, Aug. 1732.

was not considered, and there was some suggestion that Major Peter Warburton of Arley might contest the seat with a measure of bipartisan support.⁷⁰ But the main burden of Tory electoral organisation fell as always on the shoulders of Robin Pigot, who according to Lord Barrymore's estimate knew 'better how to manage the City than any man alive'.⁷¹ By the end of August the political hubbub in Chester was attracting national attention; it was fast becoming clear that control of the City was a party totem for which the Whig and Tory legions of all the surrounding counties were prepared to do battle to the death. The expense was reckoned to be prodigious.⁷² Pigot later produced accounts to show that he alone had spent more than £6,000 on Sir Thomas's behalf, and all of it able to withstand scrutiny in the Court of Chancery.⁷³ How much was paid out in direct bribes one can only surmise, but the *Gentleman's Magazine* spoke of votes being bought for £20 or £30 each.⁷⁴ The navigation remained the most divisive factor, particularly inside the Tory dominated Corporation, where throughout September a revised version of Kinderley's proposals, intended as the basis for a new bill when Parliament reassembled, was the subject of heated argument.⁷⁵ But although the Aldermen and Council members were split on the issue, the majority continued in electoral terms to support the Grosvenor interest.

The poll to elect a Mayor for the year 1732-33, due to begin on 13 October, was preceded by a week of riots and street fighting between the Whig and Tory mobs, sparked off by an attempt on the part of Grosvenor's supporters to create more than a hundred honorary freemen during the night of 10 October.⁷⁶ As the violence grew in ferocity, each side brought in reinforcements from outside: a large contingent raised by Watkin Wynn and Sir John Glynne for the Tories; 'soldiers disguised, sailors fetch'd from Liverpool, and other desperate rabble' for the Whigs.⁷⁷ After a bloody confrontation had taken place in Bridge Street, it was

⁷⁰ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 4th Baronet: R. Grosvenor to an unnamed correspondent, 21 July 1732; N.L.W., MSS. 3582E/6: Barrymore to Price, 3 July 1732. Warburton's niece had been Sir Richard Grosvenor's wife.

⁷¹ N.L.W., MSS. 3582E/6: Barrymore to Price, 3 July 1732.

⁷² H.M.C., *15th Report, Appendix VII*, pp. 313-14: Barrymore to Price, 27 Aug. 1732.

⁷³ Grosvenor MSS., Estate papers, Box 58/2: Robert Pigot's Account book for the Mayoral election of 1732; *ibid.*, Box 42/1: memorial of Robert Pigot, 12 Sept. 1745. Pigot accounted for a total expenditure of £6,476 12s. 9½d.

⁷⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 2, 1732, p. 1029; vol. 3, 1733, p. 87.

⁷⁵ Grosvenor MSS., Estate papers, Box 42/1: Pigot to R. Grosvenor, 10 Sept. 1732.

⁷⁶ The creation of new freemen had been taking place on a lavish scale ever since Sir Richard's death, with no fewer than 618 names being added to the rolls between July and October 1732: see *Rolls of the Freeman, Part II*, pp. 282-307.

⁷⁷ Chester City R.O.: 'Collectanea Devana', two MS. volumes compiled in or after 1763 by William Cowper, Ref. P/Cowper [1956], vol. 1, pp. 270-03. For details of the violent events leading up to the election see *London Evening-Post*, 14-17 Oct. 1732; *Daily Courant*, 25 Oct. 1732; *Craftsman*, 24 Feb. 1732-33; *A Letter from a Freeman of the City of Chester to his Friend in London*, 1733; *Free Briton Extraordinary*, cited in *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 3, 1733, p. 126; personal papers of Sir Thomas Grosvenor, 5th Baronet: G. Shakerley to Grosvenor, 19 Oct. 1732. The newspaper accounts are extremely partisan, whereas Cowper and Shakerley, though both Tories, are a good deal more candid about the failings of their own side.

decided at length to put an end to further hostilities. Six gentlemen from each party were appointed to meet at Alderman Williams' house to conclude a truce, the strangers were all sent out of town, and on the eve of the poll the leaders of the Whig interest dined with their opponents at the Feathers Tavern, with a promise that this gesture of good will would be reciprocated the following day. The agreement was printed and posted up around the town.⁷⁸ After three days of polling, the two Tory candidates carried their election by majorities of 239 and 237 respectively over their Whig rivals, and the more senior, Alderman Johnson, was chosen to serve as Mayor.⁷⁹

Although the day to day management of the Tory campaign had been the work of Pigot and his agents, the strategic planning, so to speak, had been left to the care of Watkin Wynn and William Leveson-Gower, Sir Thomas's brother in law; Robert Grosvenor was permitted only a very subordinate role during his brother's absence. In consequence a good deal of friction developed, particularly between him and Leveson-Gower; so much so that Wynn was hard pressed to avoid an open breach between them.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the painstaking efforts of all those involved to marshal support among the Tory gentry of Cheshire and North Wales, and to bring to the polls every single out voter they could contact, were wholly successful. 'I never saw nicer or more clever management then those you entrusted have shewn in this Criticall Juncture,' one observer told Sir Thomas after it was all over.⁸¹ Once the result of the election became known, adherents of the victorious interest over a wide area were ecstatic: drink flowed, bonfires were lit, and windows were illuminated in scores of towns and villages from Caernarfon to Shrewsbury and from Wrexham to Manchester.⁸²

Yet in spite of such celebrations, the battle was far from being over. At the end of January 1733, the by election came on at last, and after a contest with Richard Manley, one of the Dee project's principal promoters, Robert Grosvenor was returned at the head of the poll.⁸³ Already, though, moves were being set afoot in the Commons to procure a second navigation bill. This time it was to be a distinctively Whig measure from the start, the strong support it received from the Government being due no doubt to the fact that Lord Malpas was Sir Robert

⁷⁸ Personal papers of Sir Thomas Grosvenor, 5th Baronet: Shakerley to Grosvenor, 19 Oct. 1732.

⁷⁹ The figures were: George Johnson, Tory, 1,097; Peter Ellames, Tory, 1,095; Henry Bennett, Whig, 858; James Mainwaring, Whig, 858. The reason for each side fielding two candidates is unclear as the precise method of polling is not laid down in the City Charters.

⁸⁰ Personal papers of Sir Thomas Grosvenor, 5th Baronet: Robert to Sir Thomas, 30 Nov. and 6 Dec. 1732; J. Sparrow to R. Grosvenor, 28 Jan. 1733 (new style); Grosvenor MSS., Estate papers, Box 42/2: R. Andrews to [R. Grosvenor], 23 Jan. 1732-33.

⁸¹ Personal papers of Sir Thomas Grosvenor, 5th Baronet: Shakerley to Grosvenor, 19 Oct. 1732.

⁸² *ibid.*: Robert to Sir Thomas, 20 Oct. 1732.

⁸³ For a partisan Whig account of the proceedings at this by election see H. Taylor, ed., 'An Unpublished Diary of the Rev. Peter Walkden in 1733-4', *J.C.A.S.*, new series, vol. 3, 1888-90, pp. 153, 159-60.

Walpole's son in law. Robert Grosvenor, having taken his seat, was the only Tory among the four Members charged on 16 February with bringing in the bill; but he took no subsequent part in its preparation, and the final version was entirely the work of his Whig colleagues: Hugh Williams, Lord Malpas, and James Cholmondeley.⁸⁴ During the committee stage the proceedings became even more partisan, as attention turned to investigating alleged financial malpractices on the part of several Tory Aldermen in Chester, said to have been perpetrated under a former Dee Navigation Act of 1700.⁸⁵ In March and April a large number of petitions, both for and against the Kinderley scheme, were referred to the committee for consideration, and its membership was augmented so as to greatly increase the size of the Whig majority, thereby ensuring a favourable report to the House.⁸⁶ This report, when delivered at the end of April, was debated for two days, and a week later, on 2 May, the bill passed the Commons and was taken up to the Lords.⁸⁷

In the meantime two further blows had shaken the Tory managers in Chester. About the middle of February 1733, the first news was received that Sir Thomas Grosvenor had died of consumption in Naples; and almost simultaneously it was learnt that the Chester Whigs intended lodging a petition against the validity of Robert Grosvenor's election. Sir Thomas' family and friends were most concerned to keep secret the news of his death for as long as possible, so that plans might be laid for a further by election. The first consideration was to find a suitable candidate; for while the Tory Aldermen were ready enough to accept Sir Robert's recommendation, they insisted nevertheless on being consulted before any public declaration was made. Randle Wilbraham, a rising Tory lawyer from Rode Hall near Congleton, was mentioned as a possible choice, but after some deliberation it was decided to set up Sir Charles Bunbury, whose father had only recently died, provided only that he could secure the approval of his uncle, Sir Thomas Hanmer.⁸⁸ Both Grosvenor and Wynn used their good offices to obtain Hanmer's compliance, and assured Bunbury that he would not be put to any expense.⁸⁹ 'In my opinion,' Wynn commented, & [I] find it meets with the concurrence of our

⁸⁴ *Commons Journals*, vol. 22, pp. 6, 44-45, 69-70; personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: Grosvenor to H. Williams, 22 Feb. 1732-33.

⁸⁵ 'Unpublished Diary of Peter Walkden', p. 154: 20 Feb. 1732-33. See also the entries for 6 and 13 March 1732-33 in the original MS. preserved in the Chester Archaeological Society Collection at the Chester City R.O. (Ref. 92 WAL); personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: paper headed 'Answer to the objections about the Navigation Accounts layd before the Committee of the House of Commons', undated. For details of the 1700 scheme see Willan, 'Chester and the Navigation of the Dee', pp. 65-66; personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: T. Tyndale to Grosvenor, 26 May 1733.

⁸⁶ *Commons Journals*, vol. 22, pp. 74, 80, 88, 92, 94-95, 96-97, 100-01.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 125-26, 132, 136.

⁸⁸ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: E. Partington to Grosvenor, 19 Feb. 1732-33.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 22 Feb. 1732-33; Bunbury to Wynn, 22 [misdated 26] Feb. 1732-33.

friends in the country, no man is so likely to succeed at this time . . .⁹⁰ By 24 February, however, the general report of Sir Thomas Grosvenor's death had reached the City, and Brereton, together with Alderman Bennett and two Whig squires, Ralph Leycester of Toft and Francis Jodrell of Twemlow, was busily canvassing votes for Richard Manley against a new election.⁹¹ On the same day, Hanmer's agreement having been obtained, Grosvenor wrote warmly to Bunbury expressing his own approbation and assuring Sir Charles that his agents in Chester would 'make it their care to serve you on this occasion as my self & make not the least doubt of baffling our adversarys'.⁹²

The petition against Sir Robert's own return in the January by election was laid before the House of Commons on 21 February. It claimed that the right of election at Chester lay exclusively in the *resident* freemen, and that Richard Manley would have had a clear majority of these, had his supporters not been subjected to gross intimidation by a number of special constables needlessly created by Grosvenor's friends in the Corporation. More than 200 freemen had set their signatures to these allegations contained in the petition, though that of the defeated candidate himself was not to be found among them. The petition was read out and ordered to be heard at the Bar of the House on 5 April.⁹³

As far as Bunbury's election was concerned, the main bone of contention during the short campaign leading up to the poll was inevitably the navigation. Although both Grosvenor and Bunbury joined the Corporation in still publicly supporting the navigation in principle, albeit with serious reservations about the scheme as it was then framed,⁹⁴ most of their Tory friends, in North Wales particularly, objected to it now on any terms; and the publication in Chester of how various Tory Members had voted in committee did nothing to dispel the impression that the bill's passage depended on the efforts of the Whigs alone. 'It is true,' wrote one anonymous well wisher to Grosvenor, 'that insinuations can take no place with a man of Honour; But that Rascal Brereton has sunk all sense of that in this place, when in pursuit of Whig work; & his Understrappers are inflaming the Citizens with hourly prejudices against Your Interest.'⁹⁵ Thus, less than five months after their triumph at the Mayoral election, the Chester Tories were beset on all sides: by the malicious propaganda of their opponents, by the petition lodged against Sir Robert in the Commons, and by the parliamentary inquiry into the alleged malversation of the navigation accounts. Against this, their discovery of an informant at Nantwich, prepared to testify that an excise officer there had incited

⁹⁰ *ibid.*: Wynn to Grosvenor, 23 Feb. 1732-33.

⁹¹ *ibid.*: Partington to Grosvenor, 24 Feb. 1732-33.

⁹² *ibid.*: Grosvenor to Bunbury, 24 Feb. 1732-33.

⁹³ *Commons Journals*, vol. 22, pp. 53-54. Copies of the petition, with lists of the signatures appended, are in the Grosvenor MSS., and in Wynnstay MSS., L. 1214.

⁹⁴ *Letter from a sincere Friend to the Gentlemen and Freemen of the City of Chester*, a printed handbill among the personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet, dated 24 Feb. 1732-33.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*: 'An Old Englishman' to Grosvenor, 25 Feb. 1732-33.

the townsfolk to join the Whig mob at Chester the previous October, could scarcely begin to redress the balance.⁹⁶ On 27 February, however, with Bunbury's parliamentary aspirations officially declared, Grosvenor's friends and agents began to canvass in earnest, and were encouraged to find a considerable measure of support for their candidate; the only complaint was against his youth, '& that . . . out of the mouths of some bawling people'.⁹⁷ Little more than a week later George Shakerley, a close friend of both Grosvenor and Wynn, could report 'that the Opposition Party looses ground so fast that I can hardly think they will stand a Poll this time'.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, when on 13 March Richard Manley made his public entry into the City, accompanied by an impressive muster of Whig gentlemen and a large number of his followers in the town, he seemed determined to press ahead.⁹⁹ He defended his reasons for undertaking the navigation, and endeavoured to play down the suggestion that his opponents were ready to bring in a bill of their own less prejudicial to the interests of the Tory gentry.¹⁰⁰ On 23 March, after three days of polling, Bunbury was declared duly elected, and apart from some minor scuffles around the hustings, there was no trouble from the mob. Sir Charles and Manley 'parted very good friends', however, and no danger was apprehended of a further petition.¹⁰¹

Grosvenor, meanwhile, was preparing to fight the petition against his own election, assiduously searching out precedents for the swearing of special constables during elections in other boroughs.¹⁰² In the event his labours proved to be unnecessary; for after being postponed on several occasions, on 18 April the hearing at the Bar of the House was finally put off to a date in June, making it virtually certain that the petition would lapse when Parliament was prorogued for the summer.¹⁰³ The Dee bill, however, despite further petitions against it, went through all its readings in the Lords, and received the Royal Assent on the last day of the parliamentary session.¹⁰⁴ It being perceived in April that the petition against Sir Robert was effectively dead, the Chester Whigs reacted to the news with ill grace. Some believed that Manley had been bought off, whilst others blamed Walpole and his fellow ministers for not prosecuting the case with more vigour.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*: Partington to Grosvenor, 26 Feb. 1732-33.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*: same to same, 27 Feb. 1732-33.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*: G. Shakerley to Grosvenor, 6 March 1732-33.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*: Partington to Grosvenor, 14 March 1732-33; 'Unpublished Diary of Peter Walkden', p. 156.

¹⁰⁰ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: *To the Citizens of Chester*, a printed handbill dated 19 March 1732-33 and bearing the name of Richard Manley.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*: Bunbury to Grosvenor, 24 March 1732-33. Compare *ibid.*: Partington to Grosvenor, 24 March 1732-33.

¹⁰² *ibid.*: T. Stringer to Grosvenor, 21 March 1732-33.

¹⁰³ *Commons Journals*, vol. 22, pp. 56, 114, 120, 204.

¹⁰⁴ *Lords Journals*, vol. 24, pp. 254, 256, 265, 273-74, 277, 281, 288, 296-07. Local Whigs apart, the undertakers included a number of prominent London merchants and financiers, five of whom sat in Parliament as Whigs. For details of the Dee Navigation Act, 6 Geo. II, cap. 30, the names of the undertakers, and the work carried out, see Willan, 'Chester and the Navigation of the Dee', p. 66; B.L., Additional MSS. 11,394, Miscellaneous papers, ff. 28-30.

In a letter to Ralph Leycester, widely circulated in Cheshire, Hugh Williams ascribed the petition's failure to more parochial causes: the death of Lord Cholmondeley, the indisposition of James Cholmondeley, and the death of Alderman Bennett's son, though precisely why these should have affected the issue was not made clear. Whatever the reason, Grosvenor's supporters were well satisfied with their reprieve. 'Be pleas'd to accept this testimony of my joy for your victory over the Whiggish faction,' wrote one Tory cleric at the end of April. 'I hope the Defeat is such as will lay a lasting Foundation of our Tranquility in this City.'¹⁰⁵

A total victory it was not. The Dee navigation project had received parliamentary approval, and by challenging the right of non resident freemen to vote in parliamentary elections, Grosvenor's opponents had clearly touched a sensitive nerve. Nobody doubted that it was a point that could, if raised again at some future date, menace the very foundations of Tory electoral supremacy in Chester; for increasingly as the years went by, the Tories were growing ever more dependent upon the support of neighbouring squires and their tenants, to ensure for themselves a continuing majority among the electorate. If this prop were to be removed, it was by no means certain that the Grosvenor interest in the City itself was strong enough to withstand a determined Whig assault.

The General Elections of 1734 and 1747

Even in the short term, there was no diminution in the strength of party feeling, and further opposition to the Grosvenor interest was virtually assured. Whereas Sir Richard and Sir Thomas had normally resided for the greater part of their time at Eaton Hall, Sir Robert lived principally in London or at Swell Court in Somerset, with the result that the independent role of the City's Tory Aldermen and Councillors, with regard to the management of their party's electoral interest in the borough, was greatly expanded after 1732. Exhortations to Sir Robert for his return to Chester became the rule in times of crisis, and grumbling among members of the Corporation became endemic; but more and more the City fathers were obliged to act upon their own initiative, whether they liked it or not.¹⁰⁶ For the time being, though, his presence was not crucial, and in his absence his friends pressed ahead with measures first attempted during the Mayoral contest of the previous year, though at the time unsuccessfully, to strengthen further the Tory interest in the City by the wholesale creation of honorary freemen, including many of the leading Tory squires from the surrounding counties.¹⁰⁷ Grosvenor did appear in person during the general election campaign of 1734.¹⁰⁸ Opposed by

¹⁰⁵ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: Rev. T. Willcocks to Grosvenor, 25 April 1733.

¹⁰⁶ For the first sign of these developments see *ibid.*: Partington to Grosvenor, 20 June 1733.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*: lists of those voted free gratis upon the recommendation of the Mayor, 22 June, 10 July, and 16 Aug. 1733. Not all took up their freedom straight away, however: see the dates of their enrolment in *Rolls of the Freemen, Part II*, especially pp. 308-11.

¹⁰⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 3, 1733, p. 379.

Manley and Hugh Williams, he and Bunbury were returned easily at the head of the poll, but their opponents again petitioned to exclude the votes of non resident freemen from consideration. Once again the petition was never heard at the Bar of the House.¹⁰⁹

Even before the election, though, the Whigs had committed themselves to pursuing a completely new line of attack by threatening a legal challenge to the Corporation's practice of co-opting new members, rather than filling vacancies by means of popular elections. Encouraged by Wynn, Grosvenor instructed Randle Wilbraham to prepare a defence case; but though the issue was hotly debated in the local press, the cause was not ready for trial until after the election was over.¹¹⁰ However, on 29 July 1734 Wynn wrote to inform Grosvenor, who was then back in London, that the case was down to be heard at the next Assizes.¹¹¹ A week later he wrote again, and this time pressed Sir Robert to return immediately to Cheshire. 'You cannot possibly come down before you are wanted,' Grosvenor was assured, 'for the Cestrenians begin to murmur damnably, & think themselves almost deserted. . . . The assizes in all probability will be definitive & Your freinds will be better able to judge their doom. I would therefore upon no account that you be absent at this critical juncture.'¹¹² Wynn, himself rather optimistic about the chances of success, had taken upon himself the task of briefing the Lancashire lawyer Nicholas Fazackerley on the case, and when the matter came into court that Autumn, it was discovered that vital evidence had been falsified; whereupon Fazackerley, appearing on behalf of the Corporation, had little difficulty in getting it put off again.¹¹³

Early in 1735, however, the cause was revived once more. The Crown as plaintiff charged that Mayor Johnson, and eighteen members of the City Corporation, had usurped to themselves the privilege of electing Aldermen and members of Common Council, which by the Charter of Henry VII, 1506, and its subsequent confirmations was expressly vested in the citizens at large; that indeed there were those still alive who could remember the franchise being so exercised during the Whig supremacy of the 1690s. At first, counsel for the defence argued in King's Bench, before Lord Chief Justice Hardwicke, that the right of co-option had been sanctioned by the Charter granted in 1685 by Charles II; but meeting with little encouragement for this line of reasoning, they were obliged to change their tack,

¹⁰⁹ Hemingway, *History of Chester*, vol. 2, p. 398; *Commons Journals*, vol. 22, pp. 335, 509, 730.

¹¹⁰ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: Wynn to Grosvenor, 11 Nov. 1733; *Adams's Weekly Courant*, 16-23 Jan. 1733-34.

¹¹¹ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: Wynn to Grosvenor, 29 July 1734. In April the Chester Whigs had been confident that the case would be brought to a final determination before the election; they were, however, disappointed. See Chester City R.O.: Cotton of Combermere MSS., Ref. CR 72/6: J. Mainwaring to Sir R. S. Cotton, 10 April 1734.

¹¹² Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: Wynn to Grosvenor, 6 Aug. 1734. The papers also include several concerning the legal issues raised by this case.

¹¹³ J.R.L., Egerton of Tatton MSS. 1/1/54: J. Egerton to S. Hill, 4 Sept. 1734.

and had the case transferred back to Chester for determination at the next Assizes. On 1 April 1735 the matter came to trial before Chief Justice Verney. The defendants now conceded that they were incorporated under the Charter of Henry VII; but following the authority of Lord Coke, they went on to plead a bye law of the following reign as justification for their customary method of co-option, even though this was contrary to the specific terms of the Charter. The Crown maintained that such a bye law would have been nullified by the acceptance of another Charter of Charles II dated 1664. They were, however, unable to prove that this last Charter had been accepted, and after a trial lasting fourteen hours, a special jury of Cheshire gentlemen brought in their verdict for the Corporation. Though the cause was afterwards reckoned to have cost both parties a total of £10,000,¹¹⁴ nevertheless, from the Tory point of view it was money well spent; for had the case succeeded, the Tory interest in the City must inevitably have gone under. Receiving an account of the decision from a friend in Cheshire, and being fully aware of its importance, Lord Barrymore for one was delighted; it was, he told another friend, 'the most agreeable news I have heard for some time'.¹¹⁵

Demoralised and defeated, the Chester Whigs contemplated one last effort. In September 1735 it became known that they had it in mind to contest the forthcoming Mayoral election. Upon hearing of this, Wynn immediately wrote again to implore Grosvenor's return to the City. 'We hope there will be no dispute,' he told Sir Robert candidly, 'but there is no certainty of preventing it but by your coming down and tarrying some little time at least amongst your friends.' The corporate body, he believed, was secure; 'but two thousand voters may be easily lead & may as easily by any ill conduct of your self or friends be misled.'¹¹⁶ Grosvenor, however, had no intention of visiting Cheshire,¹¹⁷ and in spite of Wynn's entreaties left his friends to manage as best they could. In the event, the election passed off without trouble, and the Whig interest in Chester lay dormant for more than a decade. The Charter decision had sapped their strength and exhausted their finances, and the deaths of Alderman John Williams in 1737 and Alderman Henry Bennett in 1741 must have lowered their flagging morale even further. At the same time Sir Robert Grosvenor's reluctance to appear in Cheshire at all greatly increased Watkin Wynn's influence in the City. In October 1736 he was himself elected Mayor, and like Sir Richard Grosvenor in 1715 served the office in person.¹¹⁸ Perhaps worried by the growth of Wynn's interest in Chester,

¹¹⁴ Hemingway, *History of Chester*, vol. 2, p. 398; *Gentlemen's Magazine*, vol. 5, 1735, p. 217. A detailed account of the legal arguments put forward in court can be found in N.L.W. MSS. 4876D, Bodelwyddan papers.

¹¹⁵ N.L.W. MSS. 3582E/25: Barrymore to Price, 5 April 1735.

¹¹⁶ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: Wynn to Grosvenor, 16 Sept. 1735.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*: Grosvenor to Lord Warrington, 11 Aug. 1735.

¹¹⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 6, 1736, p. 619; Public Record Office, State Papers Domestic, George II, Ref. SP 36/42, ff. 185-86: Wynn to Newcastle, 3 Sept. 1737.

Sir Robert was himself elected Mayor the following year, thereby providing a brief interlude of concern in an otherwise barren waste of near total indifference. The result was inevitably a growing estrangement between the family of Eaton and their supporters in the Corporation: a widening rift in the Tories' power base which in 1747 came close to overturning the 'best established interest' altogether.

The dissolution of the old Parliament, in June 1747, took everybody by surprise, as in the calculations of the Whig prime minister, Henry Pelham, it was intended to do; and the writs for new elections being issued almost immediately, there was scarcely time to organise a proper campaign strategy. As the Whigs had not contested any election in Chester since 1734, it must have come as something of a surprise when James Mainwaring, junior, Baron of the Exchequer in Chester, declared his intention of offering his service to the freemen, and proceeded to mount a determined campaign for the second seat. Sir Charles Bunbury had died in 1742, to be followed in the representation of the City by another Tory, Philip Henry Warburton. It was clear from the start that Warburton was not Grosvenor's nominee, and relations between the two men were cold and formal at the best of times. Now with the election pending, the situation was made infinitely worse by a persistent rumour that Sir Robert would leave his friends and dependants free to vote for whomsoever else they chose.¹¹⁹ Grosvenor did little to dispel the fears and speculations to which such stories gave rise; indeed, such was his apparent indifference to the political future of the City that at length the Tory Corporation were obliged to declare a joint interest between him and Warburton on their own initiative and without his consent.¹²⁰ The atmosphere was all the more fraught since, as a result of his involvement in the abortive Jacobite rebellion of 1745, Sir Watkin Wynn had withdrawn from active participation in the affairs of the City, and was now contriving to maintain a low profile, to use the modern jargon, on his estates at Wynnstay. With some help from Robin Pigot, Warburton succeeded in holding on to his seat. Subsequently, however, two petitions were lodged against the validity of his election, and ordered to be heard at the Bar of the House. The hearing took place in February 1748, and whilst the return itself was upheld, the decision was accompanied by a resolution which determined the right of election as residing solely in such freemen as were resident within the City and its liberties.¹²¹ At a single stroke the Tory squires of at least eight surrounding counties, together with substantial numbers of their more reliable tenants, were disfranchised; the honorary freemen, who for thirty years or more had formed the cornerstones of the electoral régime so carefully built up by the

¹¹⁹ Personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet: P. H. Warburton to Grosvenor, 27 June 1747; Partington to Grosvenor, same date.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*: W. Cowper to Grosvenor, 2 Jan. 1747-48.

¹²¹ *Commons Journals*, vol. 25, pp. 425, 492, 497-98, 504-05. An extensive correspondence relating to the petition can be found in the personal papers of Sir Robert Grosvenor, 6th Baronet.

Grosvenors and their friends, suddenly found themselves powerless to affect its future for either good or ill.

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that this was in fact the last electoral contest in Chester until 1784: the start of a long period of stability and political quiescence in the City. But in February 1748 this could hardly have been foreseen. The shock of what could so easily have been the end of Grosvenor and Tory influence in Chester, at last roused Sir Robert from his apathy and neglect, and in the remaining years of his life he made every effort to repair the damage done to his interest. Henceforth, though, the Tories were cut off from their partisan supporters and well wishers in the surrounding countryside; from now on they would become increasingly dependent upon the patronage and protection of Eaton Hall. The Commons resolution of 1748 destroyed for ever the independent Tory interest in Chester; but it also succeeded in establishing the Grosvenor family as the only possible guarantors of continuing Tory dominance within the Corporation, creating thereby the adamant stability of the autocratic political system, against which later reformers would rail so eloquently.

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