

Appleby in Westminster: John Robinson, MP (1727-1802)

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Of the middling sort, John Robinson was raised out of the closed, connection-driven public life of his native Appleby to the Westmorland elite, then to the House of Commons, through the patronage of the Cumbrian grandee whom he served diligently for three decades, Sir James Lowther. After Lowther's capricious temper broke the connection, Robinson's deployment of skills he had acquired in Westmorland – persistence, mastery of detail, man-management and electoral manipulation – enabled him to develop a crucial role at the heart of Westminster for more than a decade, successively sustaining, breaking and creating governments in the service of his revered King. That Robinson has not secured greater recognition from regional history is attributable to his withdrawal from Westmorland; to family misfortunes; to the anti-climactic end to a career he did not know how to end gracefully; and to the very gradual way in which sources have come to light.

Forever Appleby

IN January 2009 Appleby town council was, not for the first time, berated for the opacity of its proceedings, transacted in 'an uncomfortable, ill-lit mausoleum', recorded in 'uninformative' minutes, with frequent 'secret sessions'.¹ It has not proved easy for the governance of the town to escape from the shadow of its past. For centuries, a self-perpetuating oligarchy of local worthies went with the grain of connection and kinship, relying on nods, winks and discreet confidences, committing as little as possible to the official record. The minutes of the eighteenth century corporation reveal far less than those now complained of.² They consist largely of lists: the freeholders, aldermen and freemen who attended or failed to attend the courts leet; the sixteen-man common council; the year's office-holders from mayor to scavenger; and the oaths of loyalty they were required to take. Fines exacted and orders issued by the grand jury are intermittently and tersely recorded; but the historian finds little or no indication as to why decisions were made, or whether they occasioned any debate.

A few of the names recorded would subsequently appear in the Dictionary of National Biography by virtue of their fame or infamy in other spheres. Disappearing from the list of freeholders in 1732 following his premature death in Spain is Philip, Duke of Wharton, former president of the Hellfire Club, Jacobite, alcoholic and convert to Rome. The unobtrusive location of Sir James Lowther among the borough freemen after 1760 hardly does justice to the impact of his capricious will upon two counties.³ Two other freemen were Charles Jenkinson, MP for Appleby from 1767 to 1772, but listed until his death, as Lord Liverpool, 35 years later, after five decades in government, and William Paley, vicar of Appleby from 1777 to 1785, who achieved celebrity through mass-marketed little volumes adapting Christian theology to fashionable rationalism.⁴

To the majority of yearly entries – familiar Appleby names such as Thwaites, Parkin, Atkinson, Harrison, Winder and Longstaff – there is nothing to add. But there are

locally raised exceptions: Admiral Richard Pearson, knighted for losing gallantly to John Paul Jones in 1779; and John Robinson, the only native Applebeian ever to play a significant role in national politics. Robinson entered the Commons in 1764, aged 36, and was a fixture until his death in 1802. From 1770 to 1782 he held the position of Treasury Secretary, a title that scarcely does justice to the ubiquity and centrality of his role in government.⁵ In the watershed general election of 1784 he played a crucial role,⁶ and a month later contrived that his son-in-law would shortly become Earl of Abergavenny. The earldom, now a marquessate, remains with Robinson's descendants.

Though Robinson spent the last third of his life far from Westmorland, he never sought to cast off his origins. Even if the dogged bailiff on his Middlesex estate hailing from Kirkby Thore is fictitious,⁷ it is certain that, after dismissing two grooms in 1790, it was through the mayor of Appleby that he sought someone 'sober, bred in stables, understands horses'.⁸ In 1798, in one of her periodic literary assaults on Robinson, the novelist Charlotte Smith represented him as the odious Sir Appulby Gorges, a lawyer-politician hailing from a small northern town and talking in 'a north country snapping sort of croak', whose solicitor is Anthony Cancer of Petrify & Co,⁹ identifiably Anthony Parkin of Appleby. Nothing in his correspondence suggests that London life ever awakened in Robinson a taste for literature or the arts, any more than for gambling or loose women. A perfect summer Saturday was to clear his desk, 'dine off Sandwich's & Wine & Water, and ... survey my ffarm'.¹⁰ In later years he would write to his friend Jenkinson less about politics, more about the principal occupants of his native county. 'The sheep are arrived and the Drovers Man sets off tomorrow Morning ... I am glad you do not think your sheep too dear', he wrote in 1795; but in 1801 he advised against buying Westmorland sheep because the price was too high.¹¹ When he died the following year, he bequeathed £177 to Appleby corporation, the interest on which was to provide local poor children with copies of specified devotional works, some old, some recent; and £100 to provide £5 a year for the town organist.¹² Throughout his time in and around the corridors of power Robinson remained an Appleby man, holding to the values and maxims acquired in his formative years; and yet, despite his solid achievements, his native town and county barely remember him.

Sir James Lowther's man of business

John Robinson belonged to one of Appleby's more prominent families. His grandfather, John, owned seven hearths in 1674-5,¹³ probably in the vicinity of the King's Head near the town bridge,¹⁴ acquired more, and between 1713 and 1740 was four times elected town mayor. He sent his eldest boys, Thomas and Hugh, to Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge,¹⁵ but Charles, born in 1703, sixth of 14 children, went no further than Appleby Grammar School. The first of John's sons to raise a family, he is said to have been a shopkeeper – draper, grocer or vintner – but the only contemporaneous evidence is that he owned a butcher's shambles in 1736; none of his sons went into trade.¹⁶ The corporation minutes show Charles Robinson, gent., with the status of freeholder, a member of the 16-man common council for three decades, for most of that time an alderman, though never mayor.¹⁷ In 1733 he jointly set up a charity for the apprenticing of boys from poor local families.¹⁸ In 1736 his eldest child, John, aged nine, followed his father's footsteps on the short walk to the Grammar School.

Early eighteenth century Appleby was enjoying a modest revival following Lady Anne Clifford's renovation of the castle, the church and the broad, tree-lined thoroughfare of Boroughgate that connects them. Kendal, with its burgeoning cloth trade, might cast a shadow from the south-west, but Appleby remained Westmorland's county town and only parliamentary borough. The main property-owners were the families of Tufton and, with the Whartons disgraced, Lowther. The isometric relationship between them was the governing factor of Appleby public life: at least one enterprising councillor came to grief by accepting bribes from both sides.¹⁹ In a typical arrangement, from 1743 to 1776 the position of town clerk alternated between the sons of Charles Robinson, a Lowther client, and the unrelated Daniel Robinson, who was Tufton's man.²⁰

John's uncle, Hugh Robinson, had been vicar of Lowther and chaplain to Viscount Lonsdale since 1738; but John, though always respectably devout, was not destined for the Church. No grammar school in the four northern English counties sent more boys to university during the eighteenth century than did Appleby;²¹ the only surviving evidence, however, suggests that he was not a distinguished pupil.²² When he left school in February 1744, he went not to Cambridge but to Sockbridge, to serve articles with his aunt Mary's husband, Richard Wordsworth, who acted as Lowther legal agent and land steward.²³ We may infer that John was a sound trainee attorney: although later recalled as 'unadorned with any accomplishment of education',²⁴ he had a neat hand, kept tidy accounts, and followed his mentor into Lowther service.

Robinson's duties as a man of business widened his horizons. In addition to extensive English landholdings, primarily in Westmorland and Cumberland, the Lowthers owned sugar plantations on Barbados, where Robert Lowther of Meaburn Hall had been governor from 1711 to 1720. Transaction of their West Indian business in the City seems the most likely explanation for Robinson's having in 1748 an account from which 'a Bill for £2 2s. upon Mr John Robinson' enabled the vicar of Crosby Ravensworth to pay for embroidery lessons for his niece in London.²⁵ It also explains an event imagined by historians to have happened at least six years later, in Appleby: on 30 April 1752 at the church of St. Michael, Crooked Lane, London, 'John Robinson bachelor of Applebee in Westmoreland' married 'Mary Crow, spinster'.²⁶ The bride was daughter of the deceased Nathaniel Crow, like the Lowthers a Barbados planter; her mother had remarried to Richard Smith, another West Indies merchant.

Simultaneously John Robinson's local status grew. In 1751 he was commissioned in the Westmorland militia, reaching the rank of colonel. In 1752 he became clerk to the county magistrates, and belatedly paid his leaver's subscription to the library of Appleby Grammar School.²⁷ But what really established him as indispensable to the Lowther machine was the titanic 1754 Appleby election. Following agreement in 1725 the parliamentary representation of the borough had been shared in a series of uncontested elections;²⁸ but Sackville Tufton, who became 8th Earl of Thanet in 1753, had been buying up burgage plots in a bid to secure the election of both MPs. Opportunity was presented by the death of Robert Lowther of Meaburn in 1745, followed by that of the childless 3rd Viscount Lonsdale of Lowther in 1751, bequeathing a dual inheritance to the 15-year-old Sir James.²⁹ But the young baronet, urged on by his ambitious mother,

Katharine, did not shrink from the challenge. While Thanet drafted in Sir Anthony Abdy³⁰ to help secure both seats in collusion with a partisan mayor and town clerk, the Lowthers looked to John Robinson's knowledge of each burgage plot and voter to defend their position. The man Abdy described as a 'dirty attorney from Appleby' did not disappoint them. As soon as Tufton's candidates were declared the winners, Robinson challenged the legitimacy of several votes from Appleby Castle Park, and took the case to the House of Commons, which duly restored the compromise of one Tufton and one Lowther MP.³¹ Horace Walpole estimated the combined cost to the 'two young Croesus's' of the borough's last parliamentary election at £55,000.³²

Evidently enjoying the confidence of his young master, Robinson was in 1754 installed as tenant of the White House on Boroughgate, which Lowther had the year before purchased and handsomely renovated as a fitting home for his newlywed agent.³³ Robinson's star continued to rise. In 1757 and 1758 he managed by-election campaigns which, at the price of lavish treating,³⁴ sent unopposed to the House a brace of MPs elected before they were 21: Sir James for Cumberland and his brother Robert for Westmorland. In 1760, a year after the birth of Robinson's only child, Mary, his father died, leaving him 18 burgages, and the borough aldermen made their



FIG. 1. The White House, Appleby-in-Westmorland. (Photo: Zoltán Connell)

former clerk mayor.³⁵ In the 1761 general election his developing electoral skills were again called upon. So effectively did he deploy his patron's wealth and influence that eight Cumbrian MPs attached to Sir James Lowther were returned, among them, for the pocket borough of Cockermouth, Charles Jenkinson, from well-connected Oxfordshire gentry stock and already a Treasury official. Robinson's early dealings with him primarily concerned securing civil and military appointments for Lowther clients along with his own friends and relations; but their correspondence was soon tinged with mutual regard and affection.³⁶ Meanwhile Robinson continued his steady climb into the county elite. In 1762 he was appointed a Westmorland magistrate, and in 1763, aged 35, deputy lord-lieutenant, shortly after his uncle Hugh's death had added to his properties two substantial farms in the heart of Lowther country, Winder Hall and High Winder, east of Ullswater.

The break with Lowther

Robinson's translation to Westminster was fortuitous. In December 1762 Jenkinson had recommended him to Sir James Lowther as a suitable candidate for the forthcoming Westmorland by-election.³⁷ The advice was not taken, and Robert Lowther, who had stood down in 1761 after a brotherly quarrel, reclaimed the seat unopposed. Within months another dispute erupted. In November 1763 Robert voted against the Commons resolution to condemn as seditious libel number 45 of the North Briton, written by John Wilkes MP, rakish champion of 'Liberty' and tormentor of the pompous former prime minister the Earl of Bute, who was Sir James's father-in-law. Confronted by his furious brother, Robert insisted that it was his duty to 'give my free vote according to the best of my judgement'.³⁸ Sir James demanded his resignation and refused ever after to see him or hear his name spoken.³⁹ To fill the parliamentary vacancy he turned to Robinson. Henry Curwen, the independent-minded MP for Carlisle, hoped that Robert Lowther would 'oppose the tyrant' by standing against his brother's man of business;⁴⁰ but the January 1764 Westmorland by-election was uncontested. After handing some Lowther work on to his cousin, John Wordsworth, also an attorney, Robinson settled to the unobtrusive role of patronage MP, never speaking, voting as Sir James wished, and using his position to advance the fortunes of his relations. He secured naval commissions for his brother, Hugh, and his cousin, Joseph Deane.⁴¹ Another brother, Thomas, an army captain, spent several weeks in London with John in 1778, before being despatched with a letter of introduction to seek promotion at Plymouth, but died there, his health at last broken by recurrent heavy drinking.⁴² Personal profit may, however, have been John Robinson's prime motive when in 1768 he solicited Jenkinson's good offices to enable him to purchase up to £100,000 worth of national lottery tickets.⁴³

By then another general election was looming, and Lowther faced a stiff challenge in both counties from William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, with whom he was embroiled in fierce dispute over the ownership of Inglewood Forest.⁴⁴ 'I flatter myself we shall beat them',⁴⁵ Robinson said; but it took an expensive campaign to return Sir James in second place for Cumberland,⁴⁶ only for him to be unseated on petition within weeks and excluded from the House until an inglorious return in March 1769 as MP for his pocket borough, Cockermouth. In Westmorland, however,

Robinson finished comfortably ahead of the Portland candidate, Thomas Fenwick, who took the second seat from John Upton, the other Lowther nominee. This was 'a personal triumph for Robinson ... the result, not so much of Lowther's influence, as of his agent's popularity'.⁴⁷

Perhaps Sir James's temporary absence gave Robinson opportunity to ensure that his equable temperament, grasp of detail and devotion to the established order became better known at Westminster. In the winter of 1769-70, when petitioning the crown for constitutional reform by 'the lower sort of freeholders' had spread from southern counties to Yorkshire, he devoted himself to ensuring that nothing of the kind surfaced at the Appleby or Kendal quarter sessions,⁴⁸ and was swiftly rewarded. Learning from Jenkinson, who had promoted his cause and to whom he had just despatched 'one of our Country Goose pies' made by Mrs Robinson,⁴⁹ that the newly-appointed premier, Lord North, was minded to appoint him Secretary to the Treasury, he hastened south. 'I will cheerfully undertake it, and if I fail in Ability, I never will ... in Attention, Assiduity, Application & Fidelity'.⁵⁰

Sir James Lowther, enjoying the exercise of political influence though never seeking office for himself, had supported a promotion that would ease access to perquisites for his clients, but soon discovered that Robinson would not always defer to him. In 1768 Humphrey Senhouse of Netherhall, with 'anxiety and sorrow', had agreed to be Lowther's running mate in the hard-fought Cumberland election, in return for future favours. Senhouse was defeated, but got his reward in 1770 with the appointment of his son, William to the post of Surveyor-General of the Customs in Barbados and the Leewards. William met John Robinson in London, and found him not only 'most uncommonly civil and kind', but also direct. Robinson told him what a good offer he was getting and 'recommended to me a clerk wch. I've excepted and thanked him for ... His name is Johnson, born near Appleby'. A subsequent letter from Sir James Lowther urging a different clerk was embarrassing, but William Senhouse stuck to Robinson's choice.⁵¹

Notorious for uncontrollable rage when his will was crossed, Sir James restrained himself on this occasion; but not in December 1772, when he made a routine application for the reversion of a customs post at Whitehaven for a Mr Fearon, only to discover that John Robinson had three years earlier applied for it on behalf of his barrister brother, Jeremiah. The enraged Sir James despatched George Johnstone, his fellow Cocker mouth MP, former commodore and governor of Florida, on a mission of intimidation. But Robinson insisted that he had notified Sir James at the time, and stood his ground.⁵² In an intemperate letter Sir James accused Robinson of treachery. Robinson's conciliatory response acknowledged his patron's right to 'the disposition of many little places in the two counties', promised that the application would be withdrawn, 'that there may not be the least foundation for the Idea that I am acting to your prejudice', and concluded, 'I trust you will one Day be convinced that my Regard to your Welfare hath been invariable, and that I have never acted any part but that becoming your sincere Friend'.⁵³ Lord North wrote, too, confirming that the office was open to Sir James's client, Robinson having waived his brother's claim. His anger unabated, the baronet responded by challenging his agent to a duel, an offer prudently declined.⁵⁴

Robinson was no longer Lowther's man, but he had no intention of quitting the Commons. His friend Jenkinson had already broken with his domineering patron, resigning his Appleby seat in 1772 and being returned for the Treasury borough of Harwich; in the 1774 general election he obligingly moved on to Hastings, and John Robinson was returned for Harwich. It is doubtful, in any case, whether the Lowther connection would have survived the government's coercion of the recalcitrant American colonies, escalating into war and the Declaration of Independence in 1776. By virtue of both inclination and office, Robinson supported the war; Lowther, sympathetic with plantation owners, was passionately opposed. Gradually, Robinson moved his financial and property interests south, leasing, and in 1779 buying, Wyke House on Sion Hill, Isleworth.⁵⁵ Improvements designed by Robert Adam were funded by the 1780 sale of the Appleby burgages and some other Westmorland properties, not to Sir James Lowther, but to the Earl of Thanet for £25,000. Robinson retained the Winder farms and the 999-year lease on Appleby's White House, sublet to his barrister brother, Jeremiah, the borough recorder.⁵⁶ There was a further affront to Sir James from his former man of business in 1784. Mary Robinson had in 1781 married the Hon. Henry Nevill, eldest son of Viscount Abergavenny. In May 1784, at her father's instigation, the viscount became an earl. Simultaneously, Sir James Lowther was created first Earl of Lonsdale, but the London Gazette listed Abergavenny first, and Sir James was reportedly 'very much discontented and violent about his peerage on account of the precedent John Robinson's grandson will have over the Lowthers'.⁵⁷

However, the attack on Robinson in the Commons in April 1782, following the resignation of Lord North's entire ministry, had not been made by Lowther clients. It was John Sawbridge, a London MP, who demanded to know why the former Treasury Secretary merited a £1,000 annual pension, when he owned 'a most superb villa in the vicinity of the metropolis' and 'a very fine' town house in St. James's Square, 'furnished in a most magnificent style', which he could have afforded only by 'having made a fortune in the place which he had held'.⁵⁸ In a rare speech, Robinson explained that he had inherited property, on which he raised £25,000 to settle his recently-married daughter. His rented town house he shared with the young couple; to pay for his 'small house in the country' he had borrowed £12,800, most of it still to be repaid. Sawbridge shifted his attack, calling on Members to condemn the grant for a peppercorn rent of crown properties in Harwich, worth £3,500 per annum, to a man who had made £5,000 a year at the Treasury.⁵⁹ Robinson again defended himself robustly: the annual value of the Harwich properties was only £250, and 'neither directly nor indirectly' had he ever profited from a government loan or contract. Several members remarked that there were more serious issues to discuss; Lowther's mouthpiece, Johnstone, deplored the folly of those who 'censured gentlemen without having good grounds for so doing'; and the House turned to other matters.

The spider in the web

Robinson remained an MP for the last 20 years of his life, but never held office again. His obituary concluded, 'Few men have been more indebted to their talents and industry than Mr Robinson, either for their own elevation or the promotion of their connections'.⁶⁰ MPs who successfully feathered their own nests were hardly a rarity in

Georgian parliaments. Robinson would be noteworthy only by virtue of being the sole Applebeian among them, were it not for his key role in government. That 'Mr Robinson sat like a spider at the heart of all the intrigues'⁶¹ became apparent only when his papers and voluminous personal correspondence began to be catalogued and analysed a century after his death. Evidence of the extent to which this unassuming man of Westmorland changed the course of British political history is still being uncovered.⁶²

As Treasury Secretary from 1770 to 1782 John Robinson was for Lord North what he had been for Sir James Lowther, a man of business. Like a modern civil servant, he supplied the Cabinet with the information it required to reach decisions, and saw to it that decisions were progressed. He hardly ever made a speech, but, like the diligent town clerk he had once been should, spared no effort to master the details of every issue. When William Senhouse called on him, Robinson had been 'up all night upon business and was then in the greatest hurry go to Lord North's'; they conversed during a brisk walk.⁶³ As the situation in America escalated into war, Robinson was charged with arranging contracts to supply British forces and supervising the flow of ships. Simultaneously he became an expert in the complexities of the East India Company and in 1778 drafted a plan for reform of Indian administration, but North, preoccupied with America, put it to one side.⁶⁴ In 1779, when Irish rebellion threatened, he read up and reported on the island's administration,⁶⁵ despite complaining that overwork was giving him indigestion, as well as gout.⁶⁶

Alongside all this, Robinson had the highly political role of prototype whip, getting the right people in the right place to vote in divisions and sustain government majorities in the House of Commons. Understanding connection was crucial at Westminster, just as in Appleby: Robinson must know which MP acted at the behest of which patron, and whose wavering loyalty could be secured by what perquisites for themselves, their friends and relations. In preparation for general elections in 1774, 1780 and 1784, he deployed for the government the skills he had developed in Lowther service. Where once he had annotated every item of election expenditure,⁶⁷ now he compiled analyses of each constituency, not in terms of voter inclination, but of patronage, calculating which seats could be secured for the government unopposed, and what sums of money needed to be spent. By the time of a dissolution he could predict to within a handful the number of government votes in the next parliament.⁶⁸

The most important of all his functions was that of 'indispensably necessary Channel' to Lord North.⁶⁹ Their different social origins notwithstanding, the Eton and Oxford aristocrat and the Appleby Grammar School attorney's clerk were both homely, unaffected men, equable in public, worriers in private. But while North would sink into fatalism and inertia, Robinson would respond to 'all this Anxiousness'⁷⁰ with redoubled activity. In private meetings he would speak 'from the dictates of my Heart ... in which perhaps I am often wrong, too free and too open ... regardless of Self consequences'.⁷¹ At times, Robinson's fussiness irritated North, North's procrastination exasperated Robinson;⁷² but their mutual trust and affection survived even North's chance discovery in 1779 that his financial and medical problems were being divulged⁷³ in secret, albeit well-meaning, letters to the king.⁷⁴ In 1780 Robinson was instrumental in dissuading North, increasingly 'fretful' about America, from

either resigning or going into coalition with his parliamentary opponents,⁷⁵ of whom Charles James Fox was the most influential, calling for an end to the war. But late in 1781 hopes of ultimate victory in America were finally dashed with the news that in Yorktown, Virginia, George Washington had taken the surrender of 7,000 besieged British troops and a crippled flotilla,⁷⁶ including the frigate *Guadalupe*, captained by John Robinson's younger brother Hugh.⁷⁷ Though George III refused to accept that the colonies were effectively lost, Robinson could not prevent the Commons voting to petition for an end to the war. In March 1782 Lord North's entire ministry resigned.

Robinson assured Jenkinson, 'I have already set to work to reduce myself into a narrow Compass and thank God for a Mind that can suit myself to any Situation'.⁷⁸ But 'Duty and Gratitude' still called.⁷⁹ In Appleby Moot Hall, beneath the gaze of a portrait of William of Orange, Robinson had taken the corporation's oaths of allegiance to the crown and renunciation of Popery, doubtless mindful that a few years before, when he was 18, the invading Jacobite army was only a valley away. His devotion to George III was visceral;⁸⁰ 'base indeed' was the man who 'stands not forth in Support of His King and the Constitution of his Country'.⁸¹ Throughout 1782 Robinson again did his utmost 'honestly, candidly and fairly to the best of my Abilities', to dissuade Lord North from forming an alliance with the king's *bête noir*, the radical libertine, Fox.⁸² When in March 1783 Fox and North did combine their parliamentary support to overthrow the ministry of Lord Shelburne, and force an outraged king to accept them as his Secretaries of State, under the nominal premiership of the Duke of Portland, Robinson, who regarded this coalition as 'deplorable',⁸³ knew that duty to his old friend must take second place to duty to his sovereign. Though he still appeared in the Commons as a supporter of North, by November 1783 he was acting as a double agent, sounding out the practicalities of a coup by the king against his ministers.⁸⁴

The key figure was – despite never setting foot in the town – MP for Appleby. By virtue of his family name and political precocity, the 24-year-old William Pitt, briefly Chancellor of the Exchequer under Shelburne, was the only credible figure to whom the king might turn to form an administration to replace the Fox-North coalition. But Pitt, an MP for less than three years, was reluctant to head a government certain to be in a minority in the Commons. Robinson's task was to persuade him that lame-duck status would be only temporary: the Coalition majority could and would be wiped out in an early general election. He hardly knew the youthful Lowther protégé,⁸⁵ and had to rely not on personal meetings or frank correspondence, but on an array of constituency charts and computations, updated with extraordinary speed, to demonstrate how, and at what cash price, victory could be ensured. After an intensive week at Sion Hill, Robinson could report that, 'a compleat revision of the Canvass has been made ... the Numbers have been Ratified and proved'.⁸⁶ Pitt, apprehensive but calculating, was ultimately persuaded following a series of secret meetings at which Robinson's figures did the talking. On 17 December 1783 the king summarily dismissed Fox, North and their colleagues, and Pitt became prime minister. Though Robinson was exhilarated, it took him a month to admit his duplicity to North, who rejected his explanations and refused to see his newly-discovered 'enemy'.⁸⁷

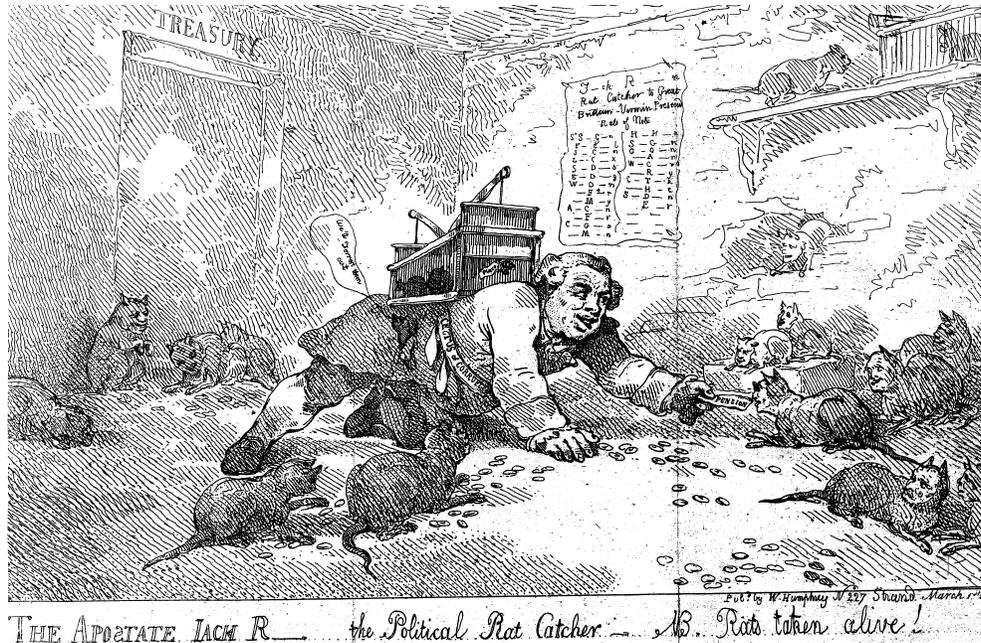


FIG. 2. Robinson as Rat Catcher. (Thomas Rowlandson, 1 March 1784)

Robinson neither sought nor was offered a place in Pitt's ministry, but worked diligently in its service. The coalition had no doubt that he secretly used the resources of the Treasury as bait for 'vermin', preparing the ground for a successful general election by persuading venal MPs that their future interests would be best served by switching allegiance from Fox or North to Pitt. Among the 'Rats of Note' listed in the print of 1 March 1784, depicting 'the Apostate Jack R_____ Political Rat-catcher',⁸⁸ can be identified William Chaytor, brother-in-law of Robinson's sister Anne, thrice mayor of Appleby and now MP for the Treasury borough of Hedon. After several letters and clandestine meetings,⁸⁹ Robinson induced him to transfer his vote from North to Pitt. By the time of the dissolution on 25 March, the coalition's Commons majority was in single figures, and in the April general election nearly a hundred supporters of Fox and North lost their seats. 'It is amazing how every Thing seems in favour of Mr Pitt,' Robinson remarked;⁹⁰ but he did not doubt that he personally 'had clearly managed' favourable electoral outcomes, though pleased that 'the People have indeed behaved with noble Attachment to Duty to Our Sovn'.⁹¹

In decline

His speedy reward was the raising of the ailing Viscount Abergavenny in May 1784 to the title of earl, inherited the following year by Robinson's son-in-law, Henry; 'dear Mary' was countess and 'Little Lord Nevill' the heir. Despite talk of 'compleat retirement' to a cottage in Harwich, he stayed at Sion Hill, fretting that Pitt needed 'Men of Business, Attention and Abilities',⁹² and offering advice largely ignored by

the ministers who so little appreciated 'what I have done for them'. He was surprised and hurt that Pitt treated him with 'disregard or contempt'.⁹³ But at least Robinson had the satisfaction of conscientious performance of his duties in the post of Surveyor General of Woods and Forests, taken up in 1788, and in 1801 celebrated in his only portrait.⁹⁴ There were occasional encounters with the king in Windsor Forest: in 1795 he reported, 'I assure you that his Majesty appeared to return from Weymouth in the best of Health and Spirits I have for some time had the Happiness and Honor to see him Clear in his Complementation and in Bloom'.⁹⁵ When he appeared in the Commons, Robinson was apt to sleep through inaudible debates, though he made a point in 1792 of fulsomely praising the long-winded maiden speech of Jenkinson's son Robert, who had followed his father in being returned for Appleby, as 'one of the best Speeches ever delivered by any Man on his first Effort ... do not think it Flattery or too great partiality from me ... you will hear the same from all Quarters'.⁹⁶ His increasingly infrequent letters to his old friend dwelt more on ailments than on politics; but he had no truck with Treasury hints that he might retire from his Harwich seat. Lowther-like, he treated it as a personal fief.

Robinson might be yesterday's man, but he still had enemies. By some his betrayal of the popular Lord North was never forgiven;⁹⁷ and for entirely non-political reasons he was a recurring target in the popular romantic novels of Charlotte Smith,⁹⁸ the estranged wife of Mrs Robinson's stepbrother. Convinced that as head of the trust administering the will of her father-in-law, Robinson was denying to herself and her children money rightfully theirs, she lampooned him as Sir Richard Crofts in *Emmeline* (1788), a low-born lawyer become MP through aristocratic patronage, with 'neither eminent talents nor any other education than what he had acquired at a free school', by turns 'supercilious and insulting' and a 'cringing parasite'. This was the first of several recognisable and unflattering depictions, culminating in the blatant Sir Appulby Gorges.⁹⁹ Nothing in Robinson's correspondence suggests he ever read a novel, but he is unlikely to have been unaware of this vilification.

Bereavements also took their toll. He had dreaded the effect on his 'dear Sister' Anne of the death of her husband, the Rev. Henry Chaytor, in 1789. In June 1790, he received 'with a sorrow that I want words to describe' the news that she too had died.¹⁰⁰ There were debts to be settled and children to be temporarily accommodated in the White House, which his unmarried brother Jeremiah vacated. Presumably consumptive, 'Jerry' was successively in Buxton and Bath, where he died in January 1793, aged 50.¹⁰¹ John, his heir, commemorated Jeremiah with a plaque on the wall of St. Lawrence's church.¹⁰² His 'books, paper, plate and pictures' were taken from Appleby to Stockton-on-Tees, but were lost in a shipwreck before reaching London.¹⁰³ Apart from John, only Hugh now survived. He had retired from the Navy with the rank of admiral, got married in 1787, at the age of 51, to Mary Myers, a cousin once removed, settled in York and fathered 13 children in 14 years. John meanwhile lost his only child, Mary, probably to consumption. In the summer of 1796 she sought recovery at Clifton Hotwells, but so 'very dangerous and precarious' was her condition that her father joined her and sent away the children, 'a dreadful Task', as he awaited another of 'many severe Trials thro' life ... the loss of dear Lady Abergavenny'.¹⁰⁴ Mary lingered until 26 October and was taken home to Isleworth for burial.

There were still Wordsworths to be taken care of. When Robinson's cousin, John Wordsworth, died prematurely in 1783, he bequeathed a claim of £4,500 for unpaid fees against Sir James Lowther, shortly to become Earl of Lonsdale.¹⁰⁵ Lonsdale fought the law with characteristic obduracy, and it was August 1791 before the Wordsworth suit reached Carlisle Assizes. There were some 2,000 documents and 200 witnesses, but the only one who could shed light on John Wordsworth's terms of employment as Lowther agent was John Robinson.¹⁰⁶ Subpoenaed, but with no desire to take the stand, he buried the hatchet with Lonsdale, spent the evening before the case was listed with him, and persuaded both parties to accept arbitration. Soon after the aborted trial, Robinson offered William Wordsworth, recently graduated from Cambridge, a curacy in Harwich, with the prospect of the reversion of the benefice, currently held by a cousin of Mrs Robinson, who had fled his creditors. William politely declined, pointing out that he was not yet 23, the legal minimum age for a curate.¹⁰⁷

Other Wordsworths were more inclined to 'pay attention to Mr Robinson, for it is much in his power to be of service to you'.¹⁰⁸ The future Laureate's cousin and younger brother, both named John, were officers on the East India Company merchantman the *Earl of Abergavenny* which Robinson part-owned.¹⁰⁹ He also installed their cousin Thomas Myers, brother-in-law of Admiral Hugh Robinson, in the post of Accountant-General of Bengal. After fathering an illegitimate mixed-race daughter, plans for whose settlement in England under Dorothy Wordsworth's care never materialised,¹¹⁰ Thomas Myers returned from India and headed for the home of his patron. He and his brother lived 'all most constantly with Mr Robinson at Sion Hill', John Wordsworth reported to his sister in 1801.¹¹¹ Myers got his feet further under the table when on 2 January 1802 he married his 18-year-old second cousin, Robinson's grand-daughter Lady Mary Catherine Nevill.

To complement his titled bride, Myers now sought a parliamentary seat. In the August 1802 general election he was a surprise third candidate for Harwich nominated by his cousin Robinson Wordsworth, collector of customs in the borough. In a rare poll, the Harwich electors cast 15 votes for John Robinson, 12 for Myers and ten for John Adams, brother-in-law of Henry Addington, the new prime minister, who had expected an unopposed return. Robinson was embarrassed and bemused.¹¹² John Wordsworth wrote, 'The Myers's are sadly going to Leeward most shockingly ... I have seen Mrs Robinson – she laments the folly of Myers & I thought spoke with a great deal of sense and impartiality both of the Election and his marriage'.¹¹³ A few weeks later he reported, 'Mr Myers will most certainly be kicked out of Parliament'.¹¹⁴ Myers was duly unseated on petition and Adams declared elected. Within weeks the other seat fell vacant. A month after learning that Hugh had died in York, John Robinson suffered a fatal stroke at Harwich on 23 December 1802.

In obscurity

Nearly half a century passed before sketchy, fanciful accounts of John Robinson's life were published. Atkinson's *Worthies* told the tale of a 'sober-minded, clever' Appleby boy who became the King's 'great favourite'; Burke's *Vicissitudes* presented

the story of 'Jack' in rags-to-riches vein.¹¹⁵ Their inaccuracies provoked Admiral Hugh Robinson's grandson into compiling an exhaustive family chronicle stressing, with ostentatious reference to primary sources, the standing, integrity and achievements of the Robinsons.¹¹⁶ The 1897 *DNB* entry drew on all three sources, but the extent of his role, particularly in electoral management, was better understood 30 years later, when many of his papers and letters had been read, catalogued and analysed. For all his secretiveness, like a good country lawyer John Robinson threw nothing away, and his confidant Jenkinson, in whom he confided with naive frankness, was another obsessive hoarder and annotator of correspondence.

By the mid-twentieth century Robinson had a secure if unglamorous place in textbooks and monographs on eighteenth-century political history, and had been the subject of two articles.¹¹⁷ Recent scholarship has, however, placed greater weight on party identity and public opinion than Robinson himself ever did, particularly in respect of the crucial election of 1784 that confirmed Pitt's premiership.¹¹⁸ He has dwindled to a conscientious though acquisitive civil servant, more diligent than influential; taking into account relatively little-used sources, it can be argued that his significance is now undervalued.¹¹⁹ That Robinson has not cut a better historical figure can in part be explained by his preference for staying out of the limelight, partly by his association with British failure: the ministry he sustained and prolonged was that of Lord North, 'the prime minister who lost America'.¹²⁰ The historical standing of the Younger Pitt is all that North's is not; but though he owed much to Robinson, he was so unwilling to acknowledge any obligation that for more than a century after their deaths three years apart, Robinson had no part in Pitt's heroic narrative.¹²¹

Nor has local history embraced him. He died far from Appleby, and though Sir Bernard Burke might claim in 1860 that local people would say of the White House, 'Thaat pleeace? wya! it's t'hoos et Jack built',¹²² in 1890 a potted history of the town devoted three pages to Lady Anne Clifford, and one line to John Robinson.¹²³ In a wider Cumbrian context, Robinson has not fared well in studies of his kinsman, William Wordsworth. The compromise negotiated at Carlisle in 1791 has been depicted as the cynical betrayal:¹²⁴ Lonsdale never paid a penny of the £5,000 settled. But it can equally be represented as the prudence of a lawyer only too well aware of the hazards of a court battle against an influential and irrational opponent with vast resources. At least Robinson lived to see Lowther money finally committed to the Wordsworths.¹²⁵ Evaluation of his offer of the Harwich curacy to William Wordsworth has also divided the poet's biographers. It has been claimed that Robinson was presenting a 'poisoned chalice' of poorly rewarded clerical drudgery; conversely that 'Robinson contributed a good deal to the creation of the Poet' because 'pressing his opportunities and duties on him ... forced him to dream up other alternatives'.¹²⁶ In November 1791 Wordsworth went to Revolutionary France, supposedly to improve his French, and came back a changed man.

John Robinson was buried at All Saints, Isleworth, on 2 January 1803.¹²⁷ He was comfortably off, and his descendants were of the nobility; yet so far had obscurity already enshrouded him that no inscription was added to his daughter's tomb when he joined her there. Nor at St. Lawrence's in Appleby, where there were no longer any

close relatives living, did any stone¹²⁸ mark the passing of the most effective national politician the town, and indeed the county, has ever nurtured.

11 Mill Hill, CA16 6UR

Four Myths

1. 'As quick as you can say Jack Robinson'

This was a fashionable simile in John Robinson's time. The suggestion that he was its origin because of his 'habit of jumping up to ask questions in Parliament'¹²⁹ is preposterous. The phrase probably dates from the late seventeenth century.¹³⁰ Although John Robinson was known to his siblings as Jack,¹³¹ in political circles the name was only applied to him satirically. An often told tale is that of Sheridan in the House complaining that a government supporter was winning over MPs by bribery and corruption, declining to name him but artfully adding that he could do so 'as quick as you can say Jack Robinson'. A recent account dates this to 1 March 1784 when Fox presented a motion calling for the dismissal of the ministry.¹³² However, records of the debate indicate that Sheridan did not contribute to it.¹³³ This may be a case of what someone would like to have said.

2. Appleby's High and Low Crosses

Robinson-Norcliffe states that the obelisks at either end of Boroughgate were provided for the town by John Robinson,¹³⁴ attributing the failure of Nicholson and Burn to mention this in their contemporaneous county history to their anti-Lowther political bias.¹³⁵ But although the corporation minutes do not record when the 'crosses' were erected, they are referred to as landmarks in various rulings, from which it is apparent that the Low Cross was already there by 1714,¹³⁶ and the High Cross by 1748, John Robinson's 21st year. There seems no reason to doubt the view of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments that the obelisk at the foot of Boroughgate is late seventeenth century, and the one at the top of the hill an eighteenth century copy.¹³⁷ There are no clues as to who was responsible for the inscription on the plinth of the High Cross, 'Retain Your Loyalty, Preserve Your Rights': it would accord with the sentiments of almost any local worthy.

3. Admiral Hugh Robinson and George Washington

There is an attractive story that, following the capitulation of the British at Yorktown, General George Washington was so delighted to discover that one of English prisoners, Captain Hugh Robinson, hailed from Appleby, where his half-brothers had been to school, that he invited him to dinner.¹³⁸ The sole source is the Jackson Collection of Miscellanea held at Carlisle Library, consisting of a newspaper column evidently of the late nineteenth century, pasted in a scrapbook, with no provenance, author or date: the incident is said to have 'recently come to light' in the papers of an un-named 'Westmorland family'. If this was published after 1874, it would explain why Hugh Robinson's grandson, Robinson-Norcliffe, does not mention this remarkable event in the four pages devoted to the admiral. But since it does not appear in any contemporaneous British source and the Washington Archives contain no evidence of a meeting with any Hugh Robinson, we may conclude it is probably another case of what someone would like to have happened.

4. George III and 'Friend Jack'

Atkinson lovingly described friendship and regular socialising between George III and his 'great favourite ... friend Jack', and told the heart-warming tale of the Westmorland-reared retainer whom the king commended for his devotion to duty in refusing to open a gate to his sovereign, insisting 'ye mun gang about'.¹³⁹ There is no more evidence for this than for Atkinson's claim that after Robinson's death over 300 letters from the king were found in his desk, repeated by W. P. Courtney in the first *DNB*. The Abergavenny archivist assures me these letters do not exist. The Windsor archives include only a few unpublished Robinson letters, all relating to Forest business. Both were bucolic, garrulous men with simple tastes, but there is no evidence that their relationship was more than formal.

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Bibliography

I have mentioned in the notes most of the sketches and academic articles that have focused on aspects of Robinson's career, but as yet he has attracted no biographer. In the paper I have suggested why. Certainly not for want of documentary material: there is a comprehensive list of documentary sources in John Cannon's 2004 *ODNB* entry on John Robinson. But there is one important omission: British Library Loan 72/29 from an undisclosed source made in 1977 consisting of some 60 letters from Robinson to Jenkinson between 1777 and 1787. Hundreds of others from these years appear in the various volumes of Jenkinson Papers in the British Library, and it may be that the Loan papers, many marked 'Most Private', were kept separately because of their confidential nature. Since no-one has written seriously about Robinson for some 40 years, the Loan volume has been hitherto barely touched. The same is true, though they are mentioned in *ODNB*, of the Chaytor Papers and some of Robinson's letters to North. Charlotte Smith's polemics have previously been remarked only in the context of literary studies.

Some of these sources are drawn on more fully in my article, 'The potency of the black-browed Jacko': a reappraisal of John Robinson (1727-1802)', which at the time of writing is being reviewed for publication by a national historical journal. This focuses more on Robinson's role in high politics, less on the Westmorland connection, and also looks at how he fits into the historiographical debate on the 'Namierite' interpretation of the late eighteenth century House of Commons. A helpful introduction, which many readers may have to hand, is the volume in the old Oxford series, Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III* (1959), in which there are nine references to Robinson.

Notes and References

- ¹. Appleby in Westmorland Society Newsletter, Jan 2009, 3.
- ². CRO (K), WSMB/A2, *Appleby Corporation Memoranda and Minute Books.*, vol. III 1685-1729, vol. IV 1729-1764, vol. V 1764-1795, vol. VI 1795-1809. The more interesting decisions are transcribed in C. M. L Bouch, 'Local Government in Appleby in the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries', *CW2*, li, 147-69.

3. J. V. Beckett, 'Inheritance and fortune in the Eighteenth Century: the rise of Sir James Lowther, Earl of Lonsdale', *CW2*, lxxxvii, 171-8. *Idem* on Sir James Lowther, *ODNB* vol. 34.
4. Paley's much-reprinted *Natural Theology* (1802) sums up the arguments of earlier works. He spent 'spent some of the happiest days of his life' in Appleby. See J. E. Crimmins, *ODNB*, vol. 42.
5. See e.g. H. Butterfield, 'Lord North and Mr Robinson, 1779', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, V (1937), 255-279.
6. W. T. Laprade, (ed.), *Parliamentary Papers of John Robinson*, Camden third series, XXIII, (London 1922), 65-132.
7. G. Atkinson, 'John Robinson' in *Worthies of Westmorland, or Notable Persons born in that County since the Reformation* (London, 1849), 156-7.
8. N[orth] Y[orkshire County] R[ecord] O[ffice, Thirsk] ZQH 11/2 491 26 July 1790. Chaytor's fourth mayoral term was 1789-90. His brother Henry had married John's sister Anne. All letters from this source are Robinson to Chaytor, unless stated otherwise.
9. Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher* (1798), A. A. Markley, (ed.), (London, 2006), 217-8. The spelling of Appleby alludes to his accent.
10. B[ritish] L[ibrary] Loan 72/29 f. 38-9, 17 June 1780. All BL letters cited are from John Robinson to Charles Jenkinson, unless otherwise stated.
11. BL Add. MSS 38472, 7 October 1795, 17 August and 12 September 1796, 30 July 1801.
12. Whellan, 719, col. ii. The improving books ranged from *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658) to *Glasse's Exposition of the Commandments* (1801).
13. C. Phillips, C. Ferguson, A. Wareham, (eds.), *Westmorland Hearth Tax* (British Record Society and CWAAS, London, 2008), 195-6.
14. This is evident from unpublished work by L. H. Thwaytes on property titles scrutinised when the 1754 Appleby parliamentary election result was challenged.
15. F. J. G. Robinson, 'Trends in Education in Northern England during the Eighteenth Century: A biographical study' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Newcastle University 1972), vol. II, R. 342.
16. C. B. Norcliffe, *Some Account of the family of Robinson of the White House, Appleby, Westmorland* (London, 1874), 33. Bouch, 'Appleby Local Government', 158, notes that in 1736 Charles Robinson applied to extend a shambles he owned. For the careers of the sons, see A. R. Jabez-Smith, 'Captain Thomas Robinson's Pocket Ledger for 1778' *CW2*, lcv, 199-245.
17. CRO (K), *Appleby Corporation Minutes*, vols III and IV.
18. CRO (C), Hill MSS vol. III, 633. details the 1733 donation to the Mayor and Corporation by Charles Robinson and the Rev. W. Bird of Crosby Garrett of £60 to fund an annual grant of £3 to fund apprenticeships for 'poor boys, the sons of decayed burgesses of the freemen of the borough'.
19. Bouch, 'Appleby Local Government', 152. In 1714 Thomas Harrison was expelled from the Council for accepting £100 to £150 to vote for Lord Lonsdale as Mayor, and up to £200 from Sackville Tufton 'to vote for officers in his interest'.
20. CRO (K), *Appleby Corporation Minutes*, vols. IV and V. Daniel Robinson, first made town clerk in 1738, held the office from 1743-50. John Robinson was Clerk in 1750-1, then Daniel until 1756 when he was replaced by John's brother Joseph. From 1756-66 Joseph and Daniel alternated; then Joseph was clerk to both the Corporation and the Westmorland magistrates until his death in 1776.
21. F. Robinson, 'Trends in Education', vol. I, Table IX, between 71-2.
22. CRO (C), Hill MSS, III, 649: notes of Richard Yates on his pupils' progress at 'Xtmas' 1736. Robinson is 'opt' in Rules, but 'haud opt' in Vocabulary and has 'scaped whipping by lot'. For Yates's 56-year headship, see E. Hinchcliffe, *Appleby Grammar School from Chantry to Comprehensive* (Appleby, 1974), 45-53.
23. Richard Wordsworth (1690-1760) of Sockbridge, near Penrith, married Mary Robinson, who was three years older than Charles.
24. Sir N. Wraxall, *Historical Memoirs of My Own Time* (London, 1815), I, 428. Robinson's letters are free of literary allusions or Latin tags: the nearest he gets is 'in vino veritas'.
25. T. Relph (ed.), *Diary of the Rev. George Williamson* (Crosby Ravensworth, 2009), vol. II, 2 December 1748.
26. Guildhall Library MS 11368, confirming IGI search: no further information recorded. Previous secondary sources all dated the marriage to 1758 or 1759, and assumed that Robinson married in Appleby. But no Robinson-Crow(e) wedding is to be found in the register of St. Lawrence or any other Westmorland parish. We now know why.

27. CRO (K), WDS 46/11/5, Appleby Grammar School Library Accounts and Roll of Benefactors. On 20 June 1752 Robinson paid half a guinea, the minimum sum expected.
28. R. Hopkinson, 'Elections in Cumberland & Westmorland 1695-1723' (Ph.D. thesis Newcastle University, 1973).
29. Beckett, 'Inheritance and Fortune'. Sir James became richer still in 1756 when the Whitehaven branch of the family died out.
30. Abdy (1720-1775) was fifth baronet of Felix Hall, Essex.
31. B. Bonsall, *Sir James Lowther and Cumberland and Westmorland Elections 1754-1776* (Manchester, 1960), 17-34, 47-8.
32. Horace Walpole, *Letters*, vol. II, 211, letter 103 to Sir Horace Mann, 5 June 1754.
33. B. Tyson, 'Two Appleby Houses in the Eighteenth Century: a Documentary Study', *CW2*, lxxxv, 193-218.
34. CRO (C), D/Lons L1/1/66, Robinson to Sir James Lowther, 3, 5, 11, 24 April 1757.
35. Unlike his grandfather, father and brothers Joseph, Jeremiah and Thomas, John was never a common councilman.
36. For their early correspondence see Add. MSS 38198-38202 *passim*, and N. S. Jucker, *Jenkinson Papers 1760-66*, (London, 1949).
37. Jucker, *Jenkinson*, 108. Jenkinson to Sir James Lowther, 27 December 1762. Following the death of a Cumberland MP, Sir James, elected for Westmorland in 1761, had transferred himself to Cumberland.
38. CRO (C), D/Lons L1/1/54, letter of Robert Lowther to Sir James Lowther, 16 November 1763.
39. Bonsall, *Lowther and Elections*, 61.
40. E. Hughes, *North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1965), 238-9.
41. BL Add. MSS 38205, f. 178, 5 June 1767; Add MSS 3206, f. 134-5, 6 September 1769. Jenkinson was one of the Lords of the Admiralty.
42. Jabez-Smith, 'Thomas Robinson's Pocket Ledger, 1778', punctuates references to ill-health with drinking bouts. He usually refers to John as his 'Bror', who was 'very open and candid'. There is one mention while he was in London of being 'At Jackes all night'.
43. BL Add. MSS 38206, ff. 8-9, 16 January 1768. It is not clear how far the request was met. Professor Peter D. G. Thomas tells me that, since demand exceeded supply, the tickets could be sold on for more than their £10 face value.
44. Hughes, *North Country Life*, 239-243 explains the Inglewood Forest dispute. See also R. B. Levis, 'Sir James Lowther and the Political Tactics of the Cumberland Election of 1768', *Northern History*, XIX (1983).
45. BL Add MSS 38205, f. 310, 20 December 1767.
46. CRO (C), D/Lons/1127 includes a foolscap 36-page exercise book detailing the expenses of the 1768 Cumberland campaign, with meticulous accounts in Robinson's own hand, itemising bottles of Madeira, coach and horse hire, postage etc.
47. Bonsall, *Lowther and Elections*, 120.
48. BL Add. MSS 38206 f. 175, 5 January 1770, from Appleby.
49. BL Add. MSS 38206 f. 190, 10 January 1770, from Appleby.
50. BL Add. MSS 38206 ff. 285-7, 26 September 1770. North was a younger son of the Earl of Guildford, and a commoner despite his courtesy title.
51. Hughes, *North Country Life.*, 242-253, quoting letters from William Senhouse in London to his father in Netherhall on 8 and 10 May 1770, and from William Senhouse in Netherhall to his father in Bath on 26 June 1770. But in 1774 his first child was christened James Lowther Senhouse.
52. D/Lons L1/1/71: letter from George Johnstone to Sir James Lowther, 2 January 1773. Johnstone was unhappy at having upset both Robinson by trying to bully him, and Sir James by not succeeding.
53. CRO (C), D/Lons L1/1/55, letter from John Robinson to Sir James Lowther, 22 February 1773, recalling a discussion he had with Sir James in February 1770.
54. H. Owen, *The Lowther Family* (London, 1990), 296 for Sir James Lowther's formidable record as a duellist.
55. Adjacent to Sion House, home of the Duke of Northumberland, on the north side of the Thames, opposite Kew Palace and Gardens.
56. Norcliffe, *Robinsons*, 42 says the properties were first offered to Lowther, but Tyson, 'Two Appleby Houses' believes the sale to Thanet was a calculated affront to Lowther. For Jeremiah, see Norcliffe, *Robinsons*, 35.

57. *London Gazette* 11 May 1784; Owen, *Lowther Family*, 289.
58. *Parliamentary History* vol. XXII, cols. 1345-47, 26 April 1782.
59. *Parliamentary History* vol. XXII, cols. 1352-56, 29 April 1782 .
60. *Gentleman's Magazine* 1802, col. 1172 for 23 December, probably written by Sir John Macpherson.
61. H. Butterfield, *George III, Lord North and the People 1779-1780* (London, 1949), 119.
62. See Bibliography.
63. Hughes, *North Country Life*, 248.
64. L. S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics* (1952), 337-52.
65. BL Add. MSS 38212, ff. 115-6, 126-7, 27, 30 September 1779. Butterfield, 'North and Robinson', 265-70.
66. BL Loan 72/29 f.7, 17 November 79, 'Most Private'. 'I have contracted so much Bile that I was ill with it all last Week.'
67. CRO (C), D/Lons/1127 includes a foolscap 36 page exercise book detailing the expenses of the 1768 Cumberland campaign.
68. Laprade, *Parliamentary Papers*, *passim*.
69. BL Add. MSS 3829, f. 38, 8 October 1776, Welbore Ellis, Navy Treasurer, to Jenkinson.
70. BL Loan 72/29 ff. 31-4, 21 April 1780.
71. BL Loan 72/29 ff. 100-3, 12 September 1782.
72. BL Loan 72/29 f.57, 23 July 1780: Robinson complains of 'Lord N___s inactivity and indecision ... the dead Clog upon everything ... when the utmost manliness and exertion was required.'
73. Alan Valentine, *Lord North* (Oklahoma University, 1967) vol. ii, 143.
74. Sir John Fortescue, (ed.), *Correspondence of George III* vol. vi (1927-8), letter 1966, Robinson to the king, 1 Mar 1777 on North's health: 'his Pulse greatly moderated, His Tongue moist ...' .
75. BL Loan 72/29, ff. 47-8, 10 Jul 1780; BL Loan 72/29, ff. 47-8, 10 July 1780.
76. The surrender at Yorktown was on 19 October. The *Cumberland Pacquet*, published every Thursday in Whitehaven, reported it on 3 Dec 1781.
77. See exeterflotilla.org/history-misc/drake/dr-trophies. Penned into the Chesapeake Bay by a French fleet, the *Guadalupe* was disabled by on-shore American hotshot.
78. BL Loan 72/29 ff.85-90, 22 March 1782, 'Private'.
79. BL Loan 72/29 ff.112-113, 31 October 1782.
80. I. R. Christie, 'Political Allegiance of John Robinson, 1770-84' in *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XXIX, (1956), expanded as 'John Robinson, MP' in *Myth and Reality in Late Eighteenth Century British Politics and other papers* (London, 1970), 145-182.
81. BL Add. MSS 38206 f. 207, 4 February 1770, from Lowther Hall.
82. BL Loan 72/29, ff. 104-11, 13 September 1782, 'Most Private'.
83. BL Loan 72/29, ff.126-9, 11 March 1783, 'Most Private'.
84. BL Loan 72/29, ff. 150-2, 13 November 1783, an unsigned letter.
85. CRO (C), D/Lons/L1/1/55, letter from the Duke of Rutland to Sir James Lowther, 29 July 1779, requesting his 'interest' on Pitt's behalf. When Pitt failed to gain election for Cambridge University in 1780, Lowther arranged a by-election at Appleby to provide him with a seat in January 1781.
86. BL Loan 72/29 ff. 161-2, 10 December 1783, 'Near midnight'.
87. BL Add. MSS 61682 ff. 67-9, Robinson to North, 31 January 1784.
88. Figure 2. It is recognisably the work of Thomas Rowlandson.
89. NYRO ZQH 11/2/346, 20 March 1784.
90. NYRO ZQH 11/2 353, 13 April 1784, from Harwich.
91. Add. MSS 38567 f. 187, 11 April 1784, 'Private'.
92. BL Loan 72/29 ff. 177-80, 27 October 1785.
93. BL Loan 72/29 ff. 183-6, 17 January, 20 January 1787.
94. A black-and-white engraving of the portrait, attributed to G. F. Joseph, hangs in Appleby Moot Hall; there is a painted copy in the library of Appleby Grammar School. It details the planting of 11,000,000 acorns in Windsor Forest from which grew 20,000 oaks.
95. Add. MSS 38472 f. 96, ff. 228-9, 7 October 1795.
96. Add. MSS 38567 f. 207, 1 March 1792 from the Office of Woods. As second Lord Liverpool, Robert Jenkinson was prime minister from 1812 to 1827.
97. E.g. *The Rolliad in two parts, Revised corrected and enlarged by the original authors* (1795), 485. Did North forgive Robinson on his deathbed in 1792? In 1839 North's daughter Lady Charlotte Lindsay told

- Henry Brougham so in a letter; there is no corroborative evidence, however. See Reginald Lucas, *Lord North* (London, 1913), vol. I, 319, vol. II, 322.
98. Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: a Critical Biography* (London, 1998), 66-88.
99. See note 9 above.
100. NYRO, ZQH 11/2 f. 488, 20 June 1790. Norcliffe, *Robinsons*, 36. She died in Appleby, but was buried in the church at Croft-on-Tees, her husband's former living.
101. NYRO, ZQH 11/2 f. 499, Jeremiah Robinson to William Chaytor, 4 November 1791. CRO (K) Appleby St. Lawrence Registers record his burial there, 28 Jan 1793.
102. Grandfather John, Charles and his brother Hugh and son Joseph are all named on a plaque on the south wall of St. Lawrence's, Appleby, overlooking the font. It seems likely that John and/or Joseph provided it. Jeremiah has a separate one in the Lady Chapel, probably provided by John and/or William Chaytor. It is headed by the motto *Virtutis Gloria Merces*, 'the reward of virtue is a good reputation'.
103. Norcliffe, *Robinsons*, 35.
104. Add. MSS 38472, 12 September 1796 from Clifton Hotwells.
105. S. Gill, *William Wordsworth, a Life* (London, 1989), 34. The claim eventually rose to £10,400.
106. CCRO D/Lons/ L 10 Box 984 contains Robinson's 'Statement of Matters as to Agreement with Mr Wordsworth', dated 14 August 1791.
107. *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Early Years [EY] 1787-1805*, (ed.). E. de Selincourt, Rev. C. L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), 57-8, William Wordsworth to Mr Mathews, 23 September 1791.
108. *EY*, 666: letter from Christopher Cookson to Richard Wordsworth, 22 March 1789.
109. NYRO, ZQH 11/2 f. 400, 12 Dec 1788. See also Gill, *Wordsworth*, 51, and *Letters, EY*, 25.
110. *EY*, 147, Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs Marshall of Halifax, 2 September 1795.
111. C. Ketcham, (ed.), *Letters of John Wordsworth* (Indiana University, 1969), 108: letter to Dorothy Wordsworth dated 24 Mar 1801.
112. Thorne, *History of Parliament 1790-1820*, vol. II, entry on Harwich.
113. *John Wordsworth Letters*, 126, letter to Dorothy Wordsworth 22 October 1802.
114. *Ibid.*, 131, letter to Dorothy Wordsworth 2 December 1802.
115. Atkinson, *Worthies*, 151-160; Sir B. Burke, 'The House that Jack Built' in *Vicissitudes of Families*, second series (1860), 150-65.
116. See n.16 above. It is apparent that the unnamed author of *Robinsons* was the Rev. Charles Best Robinson, born in 1830. His widowed mother changed her surname to that of her maternal forebears, Norcliffe, and her son followed suit, as can be seen in contemporary editions of *Crockford's*.
117. See notes 6, 16, 80 and 118.
118. W. T. Laprade, 'Public Opinion and the Election of 1784', *English Historical Review*, xxxi (1916), 224-37, which presented it as a triumph for Robinson's management was challenged by M. D. George, 'Fox's Martyrs: the General Election of 1784', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, xxi (1939), 133-68, and P. Kelly, 'Radicalism and Public Opinion in the General Election of 1784', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xlv, (1972), 73-88.
119. See Bibliography.
120. The title of the most recent biography of North, by P. Whiteley (London 1997).
121. J. Holland Rose, *Life of William Pitt* (London, 1911) makes no mention of Robinson. J. Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: Years of Acclaim* (London, 1969) he has become a key figure. W. Hague, *Pitt the Younger* (London, 2004) makes fewer references, some disparaging.
122. Burke, *Vicissitudes*, vol. II, 154.
123. W. A. Mathews, *A Guide Book to Appleby in Westmorland and its Vicinity* (Appleby, 1890).
124. J. Barker, *Wordsworth, A Life* (London, 2000), 93-94, points out that Edward Burrow, the arbitrator recommended by Robinson, became MP for the Lowther borough of Cockermouth in 1795.
125. M. Moorman, *William Wordsworth, a Biography: Early Years* (London, 1957), 167-9. In May 1802, 'William the Good', second Earl of Lonsdale, began the payment of £8,500 in instalments. There followed a Wordsworth family quarrel over the disposition of the money.
126. Barker, *Wordsworth*, 94. cf K. R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (London, 1998), 276-283.
127. His obituary states he died in Harwich; Kevin Brown has identified a damaged burial entry at All Saints, Isleworth, as that of Robinson.
128. See note 102 above.
129. Barker, *Wordsworth*, 818 n8.
130. D. Hinchcliffe, *CW2*, lxxxviii, Notes 7.

131. Jabez-Smith, *CW2*, lcv, 'Thomas Robinson's Ledger', entry for 12 May: 'At Jackes all night'.
132. L. Kelly, *Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (London, 1997), 123-4.
133. William Cobbett, *Parliamentary History* (1815) vol. XXIV, cols 687-713, 1 March 1784.
134. Norcliffe, *Robinsons*, 43.
135. N & B, I, 310 describes the crosses without explanation.
136. CRO (K) *Appleby Corporation*, vol. III, 1714: 'Also it is ordered that no persons shall lay any dunghills in the street between the Low Cross and the high end of the shambles'.
137. RCHM, *Westmorland*, 4-14.
138. The story is repeated in E. Hinchcliffe, 'The Washingtons at Whitehaven and Appleby', *CW2*, lxxi, 152-3.
139. Atkinson, *Worthies*, 155-7.