

X.—THE ELECTIONS TO THE LONG PARLIAMENT IN NEWCASTLE: SOME NEW EVIDENCE

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The history of the election of members to represent Newcastle in the Long Parliament in 1640 is considerably confused.¹ The original returns for the election being missing, it is difficult to reconstruct the sequence of events, although a number of attempts have been made. It is known that there were three candidates in the field: Sir Henry Anderson, Sir John Melton, and John Blakiston. The most plausible construction on the basis of evidence hitherto available was to suggest that Anderson was returned unopposed, while Blakiston and Melton contested the second place. Melton was declared the victor, but the legality of his election was subsequently disputed; he died before the issue was resolved and Blakiston was then seated in his place.

This interpretation of the sequence of events is confirmed by previously unnoticed comments on the election recorded in a letter from the Scottish preacher John Nevay to Lady Loudon, dated from Newcastle on 19 October, 1640.² The letter is also of some significance in assessing the political and religious stance of the candidates in the election. Ander-

¹ For a fuller statement of what follows see R. Howell, *Newcastle upon Tyne and the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 125 ff. and *A.A.* 4, xlii, pp. 210 ff.

² The letter is contained in a book of transcripts of letters, mainly from John Nevay to Lady Loudon and to the Presbytery at Irvine. The volume is now in the library of Princeton University (Gen. MSS. Misc. John Nevay). I am grateful to Professors Lawrence Stone and Elmer Beller for drawing my attention to this manuscript. Prof. Beller is preparing an edition of this interesting letter book. On Nevay, who was a Covenanter and nephew of Andrew Cant, see *DNB*.

son is not mentioned by name, but he is certainly the anonymous successful candidate referred to who had sat in Parliament before and was "against poprie but for the power of godlines hath little of thatt". Nevay goes on to record that for the other seat there was a great contest between those "yt voyced for on Mr Blackstone" and those that favoured Melton. Nevay notes that Melton had been made a burgess of the town for the purpose of the election and that he contested the seat with the recommendation of the Earl of Northumberland. Melton carried a close contest by 60 votes.

Nevay's account considerably clarifies the story. The sequence of elections is confirmed, and moreover, the positions of both Blakiston and Melton are made clearer than has been the case in the past. It was alleged at a later date that Blakiston owed his political rise to the backing of the Scots. It is obvious from Nevay's letters that he had a general sympathy for Blakiston, but there is no direct evidence that the Scots took any steps at all to aid Blakiston while he was actually contesting the seat. The story of Blakiston's reliance on Scottish support can be dismissed as a fabrication by later propagandists.³ It has also been asserted⁴ that Melton, who had had close contacts with Strafford in the past through his post as Secretary to the Council of the North, was Strafford's own candidate in the election. Nevay's statement that Melton had the patronage of the Earl of Northumberland would suggest that this view is false. It is interesting to note that Nevay had hopes for Melton as a supporter of the Scottish position. "He is ane able man, & it is thot may syde with ye better p^t." From Nevay's comment, it would appear that the town of Newcastle was even more solidly anti-Straffordian and "reformist" on the eve of the Civil War than has been indicated in the past. Anderson and Blakiston were both strongly anti-Straffordian, but Melton apparently was not so much an outsider to this attitude as his previous connection with Strafford would lead one to suspect.

³ I have discussed other evidence on this point in *A.A.*⁴, xlii, pp. 213-14.

⁴ Howell, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

The problem of when Blakiston assumed his seat in Parliament still remains. However, in letters to Lady Loudon and the Presbytery at Irvine, Nevay affords proof that Blakiston was in London soon after the assembling of the Parliament. On 16 November, Nevay reported in letters to both that a communication had been received in Newcastle from Blakiston "who should have been burgesse to the Parliament from this place." In his letter, Blakiston, who had been observing affairs at London, reported on the early activity of the Long Parliament, including the petitions to set Burton, Prynne, and Bastwick at liberty.⁵

⁵ The petition concerning Burton and Bastwick was read in the House on 7 November, *C.J.*, 3:22. A petition on behalf of Prynne was presented by his servant John Browne on the same day. J. Rushworth, *Historical Collections* (London, 1706), 3:250.

