

A Decade of Newcastle Parliamentary Elections, 1774–1784

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SUMMARY

The double-member Parliamentary borough of Newcastle upon Tyne was contested only four times between 1741 and 1832, with three of these elections close together in 1774, 1777 and 1780. There was a further abortive election, where one candidate withdrew at the last minute, in 1784. This paper uses the Poll Books from these four events, alongside other material from local archives and newspapers, to analyse the background and history of these four contests. It concludes that the contests were the part of a wider phenomenon of discontent and radical thinking among the ‘middling orders’ of the borough. Electoral defeat was probably inevitable, but they did make some gains in governance.

INTRODUCTION

THE DOUBLE-MEMBER PARLIAMENTARY BOROUGH of Newcastle upon Tyne was contested only four times between 1741 and the Great Reform Act of 1832. Three of these elections took place within six years (1774, 1777 and 1780), with a further election in 1784 where the third candidate withdrew only on the eve of poll. There were more than 2,000 voters in each of the three elections, with Newcastle being classed as a ‘large open borough’. All those who had been admitted as freemen (see below) were entitled to a vote, regardless of where they lived. Their votes were public, and recorded in Poll Books published after each election. A number of copies of all of these survive in local and national archives. In addition, a large stock of printed material — handbills, songsheets, pamphlets, sermons and newsletters — is held in different archives in Newcastle (see Bibliography). Along with the local newspapers, this material can be drawn upon to build a rounded picture. Analysis of all this material shows that the contests were part of a wider phenomenon of discontent among the ‘middling orders’ of the borough, the artisans, traders and professionals, on national issues as they translated into local terms.

There has been considerable research and analysis of these elections by academic historians, but in Newcastle itself the contests, and especially their depth and bitterness, have been largely ignored in recent years. Four very detailed articles were published in the 1980s and 1990s by Thomas Knox (1979a, 1980, 1986 and 1992). His analysis has been used extensively by James Bradley (1990), in a study of the relationship between radicalism and nonconformity, and by Kathleen Wilson (1998), and has been touched on elsewhere. Local historians such as John Grundy (2016) and Bill Purdue (2013, 277), however, do not mention the electoral contests, and both they and the 2016–17 exhibition in Newcastle’s City Library give the impression of harmonious and united relations among the freemen, except for a minor tiff over the Town Moor.

A recent project to transcribe the poll books from all three elections and upload them onto the SANT website, undertaken by volunteers and commissioned by the University of

Newcastle, has provided the impetus to re-evaluate these closely-spaced elections.¹ To understand the context of the 1774 election, the origins of the discontent just after the 1768 general election must first be examined.

BACKGROUND

To make a broad generalisation, at a national level Great Britain in the later eighteenth century was a prosperous, inventive country generally at peace with itself (none of that applies to Ireland, where the picture was entirely different). It was militarily strong and with an expanding empire. To pay for the long series of wars, however, it has been estimated that the country was the most heavily taxed in Europe (O'Brien 1994, 212), with 80% of tax revenue paying for either a current war or interest on debts incurred from previous ones, and only 20% available for central government or the court. An increasing proportion of this revenue (56% by 1775; Ashworth 2003, 11) came from excise taxes on a wide range of commodities. The excise service was the most efficient (and least corrupt) part of the government machinery, but it was also intrusive and its powers of enforcement were often seen as an affront to liberty — as one correspondent complained in *The Times* in 1786, it was 'as much as to be dreaded as the inquisition' (quoted in Ashworth 2003, 299).

The aristocratic politicians in power at the time in Westminster are often portrayed as if they were simply playing games of musical chairs between different factions, out of touch and more interested in personalities than in the wellbeing of the country. In reality, there was a complex web of interactions between them and those lower in the social order. To get its business through, a government needed substantial support from the two hundred or so 'independent country members' ('country' in this context meaning in antithesis to 'court', and not 'non-urban'), among whom Newcastle's two MPs would always have been included. These might have a predisposition to support the government of the day, but were willing to remove their support when no longer convinced of its competence (Evans 2001, 21). There was much lobbying over Parliamentary bills, and at local level a keen popular interest in politics. Patronage from above was necessary to get things done, but the electorate was able to exert influence on its patrons by what Daunton (1995, 481) has called 'a process of bargaining'.

The Septennial Act provided for parliamentary elections at least every seven years, but there were no electoral contests in the large majority of seats. As W. A. Speck (1992, 164) explains, in the election of 1761 only 46 out of 245 English constituencies were contested:

Thereafter there was something of a recovery, the average number of contests in English constituencies at the three general elections held between 1768 and 1780 being 75.7, with the highest incidence occurring in 1774 when 88 polls took place.

The electorate was entirely male and, for the county seats, any man owning a freehold property worth more than forty shillings had a vote. For the boroughs, however, electoral qualifications varied (House of Commons 2013). It has been estimated that the large land-owners could decide elections in thirty-nine out of forty English counties through their influence on the electors, and that about half the boroughs were controlled by patrons through the influence of property, donations to charity, offers of patronage and outright bribery (Namier 1957, 68–9; 73). At the extreme, there were pocket boroughs with no or very few electors, and rotten boroughs with a few more electors but 'patrons' who in some cases openly bought and

sold them, often to the Government. In 1780, for example, £62,000 of secret service funds was used on such purchases (O’Gorman 1989, 379). In many others, including Newcastle for long periods, no election was held because the local gentry and nobility would reach an ‘accommodation’ and only two people ever stood for the two seats.

According to O’Gorman (1994, 142) there was less intimidation and outright bribery than is often thought, and more appeals to ‘natural interest’, the operation of influence and paternalism in the electoral contest. Crude attempts to replace natural interest with money or intimidation were frowned upon. There were a few monstrous bullies like Lord Lowther, whose activities in Cumberland in 1768 became notorious (HoP, Cumberland), but in a sense they were doing a service to the rest. They evicted and ruined potential opponents so that others did not have to.

Legally, bribery was defined very narrowly and it was very expensive to prove cases in the House of Commons Committee which heard them. As explained in a handbill issued by Sir Walter Blackett’s friends in 1774:

you have all seen a Copy of the [Bribery] Oath, and there it stands point blank, that there is NOT the *most distant* Idea of *Perjury* in any person’s taking the same, unless an *actual* Agreement be made at or before the time of accepting such Employment, Gift &c as are there mentioned, and that such Employment, Gift &c was for *the Purpose alone* of the *Receiver* being thereby *obliged to give his Vote and Interest to the Donor, at the General, or any Election* for Members to serve in the British Senate (SEP 1).

However, ‘treating’ and payment of expenses at elections was general, and almost inevitable with big county constituencies, or those like Newcastle where the franchise depended not on residence but on freeman status. Candidates were expected to meet their voters’ costs. Each person had two votes, and generally they would use them for a pair of candidates working together, but they could ‘split’ their vote across two different candidates, or ‘plump’ for just one candidate, though normally few did, and costs were allocated accordingly by co-operation between the parties. The system was explained by Sir Matthew White Ridley in 1782, in the brief prepared for him when he was expecting to defend himself before a Parliamentary Committee against charges of bribery in the 1780 election:

14. ... A Gentleman in the Interest of each Candidate attended as a Committee for advancing the Sums necessary to convey the Non-resident Voters back to their Homes. If the Voter polled for Sir Matthew Ridley and Mr Bowes, the Friend who attended for Sir Matthew Ridley advanced one half of the Sum, and the Friend of Mr Bowes the other half: — if he polled for Sir Matthew and Mr Delaval, then Mr Delaval contributed his moiety with Sir Matthew: — if for Mr Delaval and Mr Bowes, then the Friends of these latter Gentlemen advanced the Sum required in Moieties; — These Friends met for this purpose were denominated the Split-Vote-Committee

15. The Non-resident Voters were brought to the Place of Poll, — supplied with reasonable Accommodations during their Stay, and returned to their Homes at the Expence of the Candidates: — All concurred in thinking this an innocent Act.

No one, Sir Matthew explained, was paid more than ‘after the rate of six Guineas a man (save in a very few instances where the voters expressed a wish to have only two in a Chaise & their situation in Life justified it)’ (Ridley 1782).

In effect, voters living elsewhere received a free journey home and back. As one 1780 song looking back at the 1777 election had it, ‘It was a pleasant jaunt!/ Without any expence I saw *Dolly* and *Aunt*.’ (LS 1777 Poll Book)

Given the wide geographical spread of eligible voters in Newcastle under the franchise, and similar constituencies, the cost of this would be high. The three Poll Books give details of the ‘abode’ in each case, and allow us to see that though those based within the borough’s boundaries were in a majority, considerable numbers travelled in from elsewhere, as Table 1 illustrates.²

In passing, one might add that Newcastle’s London-based freemen formed a special group; they had their own clubs, which were accustomed to interview the candidates or their representatives, and their views were widely reported. In 1774, for example, ‘upwards of 150

Table 1 Abodes of voters by geographical area for all 3 elections.
Source: author’s analysis of 1774, 1777, and 1780 Poll Books.

	1774		1777		1780	
abroad	0		0		2	0.09%
County Durham	88	4.06%	90	4.03%	81	3.62%
London and environs	165	7.62%	200	8.96%	219	9.78%
Newcastle and environs	1240	57.25%	1217	54.55%	1152	51.45%
Northern England	62	2.86%	67	3.00%	83	3.71%
Northumberland	186	8.59%	200	8.96%	212	9.47%
Scotland	9	0.42%	6	0.27%	14	0.63%
Southern England	8	0.37%	2	0.09%	20	0.89%
Tyne and Wear	364	16.81%	433	19.41%	441	19.70%
unknown	44	2.03%	16	0.72%	15	0.67%
Totals	2166		2231		2239	

respectable free burgesses, residing in and near London, friends to Sir Walter Blackett and Sir Matthew White Ridley’ met at the Queen’s Arms tavern in St Paul’s Churchyard in September, while supporters of their rivals Phipps and Delaval had already met two months earlier in July, in the Hole in the Wall pub in Fleet Street, ‘being almost all young genteel men, they made a fine appearance’ (*Chronicle*, 24 September and 30 July 1774). The lack of Scotland-based voters may seem surprising, but a number of guilds excluded Scots, a legacy of historic enmity that was maintained due to fears of Scottish immigrants undercutting the local artisans (Bradley 1990, 271).

Voting was a lengthy business. Each candidate would ask his supporters who had not yet polled to assemble at a particular place — usually a public house — each morning while the poll lasted (up to a fortnight) and would send them to the polling booths in batches of 20. First one pair of candidates and then the other would send in its group of 20, and so it went on until one side had exhausted all its voters, or gave up. There could then be challenges and lengthy arguments between the candidates, their agents, and the lawyers employed by each side (O’Gorman 1989, chapter 2; Murray (1775, 6–23) for a description of the process in action in Newcastle in 1774). So even for the 1,200 or so electors who lived within Newcastle and its

environs or across the river in Gateshead, voting might take up much of a morning, and an individual who had taken time away from work would expect at least a drink before returning. For others there would be lengthy journeys, in many cases requiring nights on the road, and accommodation when they arrived. Before the abortive election of 1784, Ridley's agent listed 'Houses for Reception of Country Votes', 21 of them totalling 135 beds (Ridley papers).

The candidates were also expected, according to Ridley (1782), to pay the costs of those admitted as freemen, and therefore voters, in the course of the election:

This Admission of the Claimant consists in his being sworn by the Mayor or one of the Aldermen, and by his Name being entered as a Burgess in a Stamp Book kept for that purpose by the Town Clerk, called the Admission Book: and such Entry in the Admission Book is at all times admitted as complete Evidence of a Right to Vote as a Burgess. — On the Admission of every Burgess the Fees of Admission amount to some 24 or 25 shillings, & it has been usual at every contested Election in Newcastle for some Friend, or Body of Friends of each Candidate to pay the Admission Fees of new Freemen voting in the Interest of the Candidates they Espouse:

The payment was in many Cases made even after the Voter had polled, and without any previous Knowledge of his intention to poll for the Candidate making such payment. He was reimbursed what he had expended in qualifying himself to give his Voice at the Election, if he alledged that it was inconvenient for him to pay it out of his own Pocket.

In 1774, when over 600 freemen were admitted in the course of the election (see below), this would have been a heavy cost, though much less in the later elections when very few additional freemen were admitted.

Standing for Parliament, then, was a business for a rich man, and only a possibility for a limited and interconnected class. Although Newcastle is categorised as a 'large open borough' in Parliamentary elections, its practices are described as 'quasi-feudal' by one historian (Christie 1958, 31). Two families, the Whig Riddleys and the Tory Blacketts, had reached an 'accommodation' after the ruinously expensive election of 1741 (HoP, Newcastle-upon-Tyne), that each would take one of the two seats without needing an election, and they carried on that way until challenged in 1774. The Parliamentary arrangements were mirrored in local government. As Wilson (1998, 292–300) explains, a tight little oligarchy dominated both Corporation and Parliamentary seats; Blackett was an alderman from 1729, mayor five times including 1771; the older Matthew Ridley was mayor four times, as was his son Sir Matthew, including 1774 (Blair 1940). (The son was a Sir when his father was not, because he had succeeded by special arrangement to the baronetcy of his maternal uncle in 1763).

The mayor and aldermen were rich but not idle; they were hardworking and hard-headed businessmen. The Blackett family, in particular, ran a major lead-mining and smelting business in Hexhamshire and Allendale, employing up to a thousand people (Dukesfield Documents, online). Blackett's man of business, his cousin John Erasmus Blackett, also served terms as mayor in 1756 and 1772.

In theory, the mayor and aldermen shared power with the Common Council and the Guild of Freemen. These were the men who had been admitted to membership of one of the incorporated companies to whom this privilege applied, having qualified by being sons of freemen, by finishing an apprenticeship with a freeman, or occasionally by marriage, and then sworn in by the mayor or aldermen (see above). The process of admission was lengthier for anyone taking the 'apprentice' route than for the 'son' route, requiring the aspirant to be 'called' at three separate meetings as against one.

In practice, the process of election to the aldermen's numbers had been made so complex, and so open to manipulation, that they effectively controlled all the power themselves. The only companies which really counted were the Hostmen (who controlled the coal trade), the Merchant Adventurers, the small group of Goldsmiths, and to some extent the Mariners (Wilson 1998, 288–97).

However, given that they did actually have rights to assert, in national elections and local government the members of the other incorporated companies should also be considered part of the oligarchy, if only the bottom layer. Though described as the 'raggamuffin' party by their opponents (see below), they were skilled artisans, traders, small businessmen, 'markedly different from the industrial labouring population', and a distinctive economic and political class, literate and well-informed (Wilson 1998, 198–200). Though some might fall on hard times, becoming a pauper led to disfranchisement (Murray 1775, 22).

There is no definite figure for the population of Newcastle in the 1770s, estimates ranging from 20,000 to 30,000, nor for how many Freemen there were. However, turnout at elections generally is estimated to have been around 90% of qualified voters (Phillips 1982, 88). So the total may have been something under 2,000 at the start of the 1770s, rising to 2,500 or so during the three elections, of whom a little over half would be resident within the borough. Freemen could therefore have constituted 7–10% of the total population of Newcastle, and perhaps 25–30% of the adult male population.

THE WILKES CONTROVERSY AND ITS AFTERMATH

Stresses within the country were very apparent in 1768, with agitation around the disputed election of John Wilkes (1725–1797). His political life was long and convoluted (Thomas 2004b), but from 1768 to 1770 he was in prison for what Parliament considered 'false and seditious libel' in his periodical *The North Briton*, in which he had campaigned against Government arbitrary actions, corruption, and taxation. Despite his imprisonment, Wilkes was elected MP for Middlesex in the 1768 General Election, expelled by the House of Commons, re-elected by Middlesex, re-expelled and so it went on, four times in succession. His supporters, organised into the Society of Gentlemen Supporters of the Bill of Rights, called for nationwide petitioning of Parliament. The Newcastle burgesses, as the ordinary freemen called themselves as opposed to the 'magistrates', took up the call, becoming, according to Horace Walpole, 'a town not less remarkable than London or Lynn for its attachment to liberty and the cause of Wilkes' (Walpole 1910, vol. IV, 132). The local weekly newspapers all gave the case extensive coverage, with the *Newcastle Chronicle* including a copy of the Middlesex petition in every copy of its issue of 10 June 1769.

Knox (1980, 23–25) gives a detailed narrative of the agitation around the issue in Newcastle, commencing in April 1769 when Thomas White, a glazier, asked permission to use the Guildhall for a meeting about the issue and to instruct the town's representatives. The mayor turned down this and every ensuing request to use the Guildhall for the burgesses' business, so that this became in itself one of the grievances.

The meeting was held elsewhere, and the instructions already given in London were endorsed. The magistrates refused to sign the statement, but it was sent to the MPs, Sir Walter Blackett and Matthew Ridley, anyway. In reply, the MPs stressed their 'freedom of judging' as 'independent and uninfluenced representatives of Newcastle's freemen'.

When the London campaigners began to call for petitions for the dissolution of Parliament, in the words of the polemical pamphlet *The Contest* (Murray 1774, 23):

A petition was accordingly presented at one of the guilds, ready drawn up, and desired to be read, and the question put – the magistrates ... treated it with all their wonted haughtiness and insolence of office; with difficulty suffered it to be read; – the recorder branded it with high-treason; and Sir Walter went so far as to say, he thought the subject had not even a right to petition, and before he would either sign, or present such, He would have his right hand cut off.’

Meetings of freemen and freeholders nonetheless produced two petitions, presented to the Crown by Sir Francis Blake Delaval and his brother Thomas Delaval. Wilkes’ release from prison in 1770 was met with wild celebrations. In a later meeting, chaired by Thomas Delaval, a remonstrance to the crown was signed by the stewards of 23 incorporated companies and a committee of freeholders.

This support for Wilkes was due in part to the fact that the issues he was campaigning on had a real resonance in a growing mercantile and seafaring community like Newcastle’s. There also happened at the time to be some key figures in Newcastle society pushing this message: George Greive (also spelt Grieve), an attorney from Alnwick, where three generations of his family had clashed with the Corporation; the Reverend James Murray, a Presbyterian Minister at a chapel in High Bridge Street; his much younger disciple Thomas Spence ‘the Radical’; physician John Rotheram and sea-captains Matthew Huntley and Thomas Maude (Brewer 1980, 332). Greive was a busy and well-connected organiser, a friend of Wilkes and on his London committees, and a lively orator (Knox 1979b). Murray was a great sermoniser, and a prolific writer, with a good turn of phrase (Anon 1819b). In 1768 he had published *Sermons to Asses* and it is worth giving a few quotations to provide the flavour of the radical message at the time:

We lose our liberty by not asserting it properly. It serves no purpose to cry out against the government, and the prime minister, when we are ourselves to blame (Murray 1768, 78–9.)

It is not disloyalty to your King, nor in any way injurious to the constitution and laws of your country, to give instructions to the candidates you chuse for your members of parliament, and take their obligations that they will follow these instructions — Members of Parliament are your servants, and the servants of their country; it is but reasonable that they be made accountable for their conduct When any duke or lord, knight or ‘squire, come with their drunken rabble of attendants, to solicit your votes by treats and entertainments, put them in mind what they are about, and what they ought to be (Murray 1768, 87–88).

Around this group were collected a number of activist freemen, mocked by the elite as ‘raggamuffins’, a term they took up for themselves. As one commentator remarked (*Chronicle*, 3 September 1774), ‘the raggamuffin party puffs their cause with such vigour, as promises fair, that RIGHT will not be overcome the next election by MIGHT’. Their committee, chaired by Thomas Maude, liaised with the elected stewards of the artisan companies.

The radicals also had the general support of Thomas Slack, the editor of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, and could persuade around a thousand people or more, freemen and non-freemen residents, to vote with them or sign their petitions, with a large proportion following their line consistently over a decade. Knox (1979b, 233–34) has traced a continuity in personnel from the original Wilkesite petitioning movement right through to the 1780s; ‘Individually and collectively, a single group of men took the lead in raising local grievances and in

advancing all ‘patriot’ endeavors’. Newcastle, like many such towns, had a large number of clubs and societies in which policy could be formed and discussed. Wilson (1998, 61–68) has counted 16 political clubs formed between 1769–84, plus other debating societies. The Constitutional Club, founded in 1772 under the chairmanship of George Greive, provided the organising ability while Murray, Spence and others provided the propaganda (Dickinson 1979).

The radical Burgesses considered they were being blocked at almost every turn by the Magistrates, among whom they included the MPs who refused to take their petitions to Parliament or the Crown or to accept instructions. In fact the position was not quite so clear-cut. Wilson (1998, 339) states that mayor John Baker signed the Wilkesite petition in 1769 (though this is not mentioned by Murray), and both Blackett and Ridley voted with the Opposition over Wilkes at the beginning of the controversy. However in November 1770 Blackett stood up in the House of Commons, to general surprise, and repudiated his previous votes, saying that he now thought that Wilkes was ‘incapacitated, constitutionally incapacitated, from sitting in this House during this Parliament’ (HoP, Sir Walter Blackett; Matthew White Ridley).

Agitation over Wilkes merged into agitation about the local questions of the Town Moor, the large area of common land to the north of the borough boundary that had historically been used for grazing by the freemen and freemen’s widows. There had already been issues over roads being driven over the moor for the benefit of private owners. A committee of freemen had been set up to negotiate with the Mayor and Aldermen, but before it had resolved anything, the mayor, by now Sir Walter Blackett, and his colleagues decided to enclose and let the whole moor to a Durham farmer. The freemen tore down the fences and were taken to court, defended by leading Wilkesite lawyer Serjeant Glynn (Thomas 2004a); they won their case in August 1773 to much celebration (*Chronicle*, 14 August 1773).

This led to Parliament passing a reasonably satisfactory Act in 1774 regulating the control of the Town Moor. As Murray (1774a) narrates, ‘by this accommodation the exclusive right of the burgesses and widows to the Town-Moor and Leases is to be confirmed to them by act of Parliament for ever ... the late lease is declared invalid, and totally given up’.

THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1774

The General Election of October 1774 had been well-heralded, allowing much time for preparation. The burgesses’ party decided to challenge the Magistrates. As they stated in a *Chronicle* advertisement (2 July 1774) calling together the company stewards to a meeting to nominate candidates:

Their Motive for this Solicitation arises from the repeated Oppressions the Burgesses in general have received from the Members and ruling Part of the Corporation, endeavouring not only to wrest the Town-Moor, &c, out of their Hands, but in other influences of their parliamentary Conduct, and which must eventually cease by separating their Members from the Magistracy.

Old Matthew Ridley was being replaced by his son, the baronet (until then MP for Morpeth), so Blackett was their real target. He was very much a grandee, living magnificently and famed for his ‘princely benefactions’ (Anon 1819a: Xxvii), but his arrogation of power was souring his reputation. A derisive ‘epitaph’ for his popularity, ‘which departed this

transitory world' on the day the Town Moor Act was passed, was published in the short-lived *Freemens' Magazine*, edited by Murray (1774b, 133–35).

Uniquely for the whole period, all four constituencies in Northumberland (Newcastle, Morpeth, Berwick and the county itself) had contests in that election, and in two of them the challengers were victorious, although in Morpeth only temporarily (Speck 1992, 164). The Berwick election was not covered in the Newcastle newspapers, but Morpeth and Northumberland were, very extensively, and anyone taking an interest would have been aware that these elections were being fought on much the same issues.

The themes were essentially corruption, the concentration of power in a few hands, and its use in an arbitrary way. The burgesses' candidates were very respectable, though accused of being 'strangers'. Constantine Phipps, a naval officer from East Anglia who was soon to inherit a title and become Lord Mulgrave, gave up his seat in Lincoln to stand in the burgesses' interest. The other candidate was Thomas Delaval from Seaton Delaval, a few miles from Newcastle, who had helped present petitions for the burgesses.

These two candidates put a notice in the *Chronicle* (15 October, 1774) agreeing to a Wilkesite four-point 'Test' presented by the burgesses (SEP 1, 1774):

I. To exert himself to bring about triennial or shorter Parliaments

II. To procure a new Place and Pensions Bill, to reduce the number of Placemen and Pensions in the House of Commons

III. A MORE equal Representation of the People. And

IV. To get rescinded that resolution of the House of Commons (that vital Stab to the Constitution) which seated Colonel Lutterell a Member for *Middlesex*, instead of *John Wilkes*, Esqr, the legally elected Member.

This was elaborated in a longer ten-point manifesto, printed in the first issue of the *Freemens' Magazine* (Murray 1774b). The town was awash for several months with handbills, leaflets, and printed election songs and poems, with plenty of personal attacks as well as arguments about principles. Many were reprinted in the newspapers, along with long letters from correspondents on both sides. The indefatigable Murray also issued *The Contest* (1774a), advertised as '[A]n account of the Matters in Dispute between the Magistrates and Burgesses. With an examination of the Merits and Conduct of the four Candidates in the present contested Election for the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne' (*Chronicle*, 15 Oct 1774). Much of this material was issued free, and anyone who was interested could have read, or had read to them, the publications in the mass of clubs and societies, and also in the Guild Companies' own meeting halls (Wilson 1998, 67).

The magistrates' party played it tough, and not altogether straight. One election song (Harker 1981, 51–2), describes Sir Walter riding into the town with 'five score' (a hundred) horsemen behind him. Murray narrates how the magistrates flooded the poll with 'out-voters' from Northumberland and further afield, claiming to be freemen, and there were long legal arguments about the status of the lists provided. But, Murray asserts:

Yet the burgesses would have stemmed this united torrent with ease and success, had they not been crushed by their out-lying brethren ... and the accidental intervening of a guild, at which their opponents took the advantage of making no less than SIX HUNDRED and FIFTEEN, either legal or illegal voters in about eighteen days; out of which scarce TWO HUNDRED were made such for

their candidates: every one of whose titles were as clear as the sun, or they never would have been admitted. (Murray 1775, 24)

Murray alleges that while many were admitted in the formal Guild meeting (of members of all the companies meeting together) on 10 October, others were admitted in a private house where one of the candidates, Sir Matthew Ridley, was sitting in his role as mayor together with members of the Common Council in permanent session. The Register for the period shows that a far higher proportion of those admitted were ‘sons’ than was usual at other guild meetings.

Halfway through 17 October, Phipps and Delaval withdrew. Murray (1775, 21) considers this:

a proceeding not in my power to account for satisfactorily. Whether it arose from perceiving the number of new freemen which continually poured on them, were easily increased by the power the magistrates had assumed, and which their staying they thought might only serve to increase the exertion of; or from the tenderness they might feel for those who had promised them their suffrage ... is more than I shall presume to say: but cannot help thinking it would have been for their interest to stay.

The magistrates, however, did not end their muster of voters, but instead ‘ransacked every place, and brought voters from the most distant parts, and polled every man that they had ready: and ... gave out that they would convince opposition, their strength was incomparably superior, and prevent future attempts, by shewing the greatness of the present disparity’ (Murray 1775, 22). As Table 2 shows, the huge majority built up only in the last two days; indeed, Phipps was ahead on Monday 16 October.

Table 2 Total votes and daily votes (from Murray, 1775, 27).

Cumulative total for polls								
	Tue 11 Oct	Wed 12 Oct	Thurs 13 Oct	Fri 14 Oct	Sat 15 Oct	Mon 17 Oct	Tue 18 Oct	Wed 19 Oct
Blackett	81	206	333	481	596	756	1041	1432
Ridley	81	207	337	483	594	737	1038	1411
Phipps	83	210	341	494	620	769	791	795
Delaval	80	201	325	465	565	661	676	677
Daily totals for each candidate								
	Tue 11 Oct	Wed 12 Oct	Thurs 13 Oct	Fri 14 Oct	Sat 15 Oct	Mon 17 Oct	Tue 18 Oct	Wed 19 Oct
Blackett	81	125	127	149		160	408	268
Ridley	81	126	130	146		143	405	269
Phipps	83	127	131	153		149	24	2
Delaval	80	121	124	140		96	15	1

Note: the tables do not add up to multiples of 20, as might be expected from the normal election procedure, because split votes and single votes were added to the ‘tallies’.

Murray’s view (1775, 21–22) was that the Magistrates wanted to ensure that they had enough genuine voters in reserve to keep their majority even if many others were challenged in the courts, since he was certain there was illegality, the magistrates having ‘polled a great number of suspected minors — known paupers — and new voters’. Having fought an expensive court case in the previous year, however, it is unlikely that the Newcastle burgesses could have afforded another one on this issue and no challenge was mounted.

Members of the elite companies voted solidly for the magistrates’ party, not surprisingly; the artisan and maritime companies were much more split, as Table 3 shows.

This analysis excludes plumpers and split votes and three ‘unknowns’ for whom there is no sign of elite status. It should be stressed that company membership is only a broad indicator of occupational status; the Barber Surgeons and the Mariners, in particular, were very mixed. Among the Butchers, the votes were almost evenly split between burgesses and magistrates, with a limited number of plumpers and split votes, while the Bricklayers and Joiners gave a majority for the burgesses, as Table 4 shows.

Namier, in the *History of Parliament (HoP, Newcastle upon Tyne)*, suggests that the Butchers were ‘an interested party in the controversy over the Town Moor’, although it is hard to see how he reaches this conclusion, since the issue was whether the grazing rights should be let to farmers or made available to widows of freemen. He does not provide an explanation of the building trades’ interest, but Clephan (1887, 52) records that in terms of political action ‘not the least active and energetic were the members of the Bricklayers’ Company’.

Table 3 Voting figures by category, 1774.

Table 3 Voting figures by category, 1774.			
Elite		282	
	Burgesses	26	9.22%
	Magistrates	244	86.52%
Artisan		1526	
	Burgesses	535	35.06%
	Magistrates	892	58.45%
Maritime		355	
	Burgesses	107	30.14%
	Magistrates	215	60.56%

Source: Author’s analysis of 1774 Poll Book. The ‘elite’ consists of the Hostmen, Merchants, Goldsmiths, and a small group for whom no company was given, but have Esq. or Rev. after their names. The ‘maritime’ category is the mariners, shipwrights and sailmakers, while the ‘artisans’ are the rest.

Table 4 Voting patterns in selected guilds, 1774.

	Butchers		Bricklayers		Joiners	
Blackett Phipps	13	5.53%	2	3.45%	5	5.43%
Blackett plump	0	0.00%	35	60.34%	48	52.17%
Burgesses	111	47.23%	19	32.76%	35	38.04%
Magistrates	107	45.53%	2	3.45%	3	3.26%
Phipps Ridley	3	1.28%		0.00%	1	1.09%
Ridley plump	1	0.43%				
Grand totals	235		58		92	

Source: Author’s analysis of 1774 Poll Book.

Table 5 Support for the parties by region, 1774.

Burgesses			Magistrates		
County Durham	17	2.54%	County Durham	67	4.95%
London and environs	64	9.57%	London and environs	99	7.32%
Newcastle and environs	434	64.87%	Newcastle and environs	707	52.25%
Northern England	29	4.33%	Northern England	26	1.92%
Northumberland	19	2.84%	Northumberland	159	11.75%
Scotland	0	0.00%	Scotland	9	0.67%
Southern England	0	0.00%	Southern England	7	0.52%
Tyne and Wear	104	15.55%	Tyne and Wear	239	17.66%
unknown	2	0.30%	unknown	40	2.96%
total	669		total	1353	

Source: author's analysis of 1774 Poll Book. For simplicity, this ignores the numbers who 'plumped' by voting for one candidate only, or split their votes across the parties.

Knox (1980, 29) suggests that, contrary to Murray's analysis, the outvoters and new freemen affected only the size of the magistrates' victories, not the result. As Table 5 shows, a substantially higher proportion of the burgesses' supporters did come from within the borough and just outside it (within the boundaries of the modern Newcastle), but indeed probably not enough to have affected the result.

The printed Register of Freemen lists 280 or so admitted on 10 October (Oliver 1926, 94–101), but not those listed in the manuscript Register (TWAM 1774), for the following days up to 17 October. At the time of writing the register had not been transcribed, and it can be seen why the magistrates might have wanted an insurance policy, since the record switches abruptly on 15 October from entries written into a folio to slips of paper glued into it, probably not something that would impress a court.

Knox (1980, 29) has compared the new freemen made in the course of 1770–73 with those made in 1774 as a whole, arguing that throughout the year there might have been an 'unusual degree of political purpose'. He did not find very much difference between the two groups; 65% of the new 1774 freemen voted Blackett/ Ridley, compared to 58% of those made in earlier years.

The author could identify only 203 names from the 10 October list with voters in the election with any certainty.³ This is unlikely to be a statistically sound sample, but despite this, and again leaving aside the plumpers and split voters, these new freemen gave the edge to the magistrates; 70% to 27%, as opposed to 62% to 31% of voters as a whole, bearing out Murray's complaints. Knox (1980, 29) also linked the names of those signing the Wilkesite petition of 1769 with voters in 1774, and found the petitioner-voters almost equally split; 50.3% to Blackett/ Ridley, 49.7% to Phipps/ Delaval.

THE AFTERMATH

The burgesses lost, but political agitation continued. A new issue animating the core group of radicals was the national movement to petition Parliament against the coercion of the American colonies (Knox 1986, 150–53). The protest movement sprang partly from the feeling that

the colonists were 'people like us', but also that the philosophy and the demands of the colonists were much the same as those of reformers in England (Bradley 1990, 315-42). 'No taxation without representation' is a phrase bound to resonate with others who feel themselves unrepresented or unfairly treated.

This time, when the burgesses wanted to set up a petition and the pro-Government group wanted to send a supportive Loyal Address to the Crown, the mayor refused use of the Guildhall to both sides. Once again, meetings were organised elsewhere. There was a propaganda war, with Thomas Slack reprinting Jean-Paul Marat's *The Chains of Slavery*, which had been circulated to the incorporated companies back in 1770 (Clephan 1887, 59-53). It was, according to the advertisement, 'A Work wherein the clandestine and villainous Attempts of Princes to ruin Liberty are pointed out and the dreadful Scenes of Despotism disclosed ... in order to draw [Electors'] timely attention to the Choice of proper Representatives in Parliament' (*Chronicle*, 4 November, 1775).

The Addressers flooded the town with copies of John Wesley's *Calm Address to our American Colonies*, which informed the rebels that 'nothing can be more plain, than that the supreme power in England has a legal right of laying any tax upon them for any end beneficial to the whole empire' (Wesley 1775, 4). This seems to have been counterproductive; the book was burnt in the streets, along with effigies of the author and printer (*Chronicle*, 28 October, 1775).

The Petitioners achieved 1,210 signatures, the Addressers 169 (Knox 1986, 154). Petitioners were both freemen and non-freemen, and this was probably the peak of strength for the Burgesses' party. Blackett and Ridley again refused to present the Petition, and instead Sir George Savile did so (*Chronicle*, 8 Nov, 1775).

Meanwhile the quarterly Guild meetings were, as Knox (1986) explains, the main forum for continued contention particularly over the expenses of the 1774 election and the administration of the Town Moor. The Michaelmas 1775 Guild was disrupted, with normal business including all freemen's admissions blocked by the dissidents. Those regarded as the ring-leaders, Thomas White and mariner Thomas Maude, were later prosecuted by the Corporation for riot (*Chronicle*, 10 February 1776).

THE 1777 BY-ELECTION

A new challenge for the burgesses arose in 1777, when a by-election was needed after the death of Sir Walter Blackett at the age of 70, and the struggle degenerated into farce for a time. On 7 February Sir Walter was taken ill in London, and he died a week later on 14 February. The week's letters from Sir Matthew Ridley to Blackett's cousin and man of business John Erasmus Blackett show Ridley mulling over various names for the magistrates' candidate, while assuming the opposition would put up Thomas Delaval (Ridley letters).

Blackett's nephew and heir Sir John Trevelyan arrived from Somerset just in time to be at the deathbed. He suddenly found himself as the chosen man. An express was sent by Sir John to Newcastle the following day announcing his candidacy (SEP 2), and he and Ridley were both in Newcastle and canvassing within a very few days. Ridley had brought the election writ with him, and the first day of polling was set for 27 February. Meanwhile the burgesses, determined to challenge this 'CLOSET-COMBINATION' as they termed it (SC and SEP 1 and 2), were still hunting for a candidate.

Delaval, the obvious choice, was abroad. Phipps was now MP for Huntingdon, and from 1776 onwards was a Government supporter over the American war. He did offer to stand, but

then reported that it was not possible to go through the formality of applying for the Chiltern Hundreds for his existing seat in time.

However, a new man on the scene, Andrew Robinson Stoney Bowes, was eager for the nomination (SEP 1). He was an Irish Protestant ex-soldier, originally surnamed Stoney, an adventurer who had married a County Durham heiress a few years before. She had died in the summer of 1776, and he had remarried in scandalous circumstances Mary Eleanor Bowes, the widowed Countess of Strathmore, on 17 January 1777, and taken her surname of Bowes. Wills (1995) discusses the family's fortunes over the years, while Foote (1812) provides full and salacious details of this and subsequent scandals. Her lawyers had tied up all of her huge fortune for her son, the Earl of Strathmore, and Bowes was only able to make use of her £10,000 a year income. His marital activities were more mocked than reviled at this date, for example in a satirical poem *The Stoniad* (Anon. 1777), and he was not yet as notorious as he was later to become.

There was uncertainty whether even he would arrive in time, but he just made it, much to the relief of George Greive who was acting as chief agent (SEP 1). By this time, however, Trevelyan was well ahead in canvassing and obtaining promises of support. Going against such promises in person at the hustings was considered disreputable, whatever the circumstances, and Bowes later attributed his defeat to this factor (*Chronicle*, 5 August 1780).

Trevelyan was derided by opponents as a 'zealous Foxhunter ... who loves roast beef and claret as well as any fat-headed Country Squire in Zummersetshere' (SEP 2). Despite the shortage of time, the paper war was fought bitterly on both sides, including a single-page free *Electioneering Journal* which ran for four issues (SEP 1 and 2, SC, LS Poll Book 1777). The burgesses took up the slogan *Bowes and Liberty*, and once again put forward the 'Test' for the candidates to sign. The burgesses were refused permission to hold a meeting in the Guildhall to nominate a candidate, forcing them to meet elsewhere. Their handbills expressed anger at the magistrates' actions, in moving the writ so quickly and assuming they could impose a candidate on the electors. A typical example ran:

The Party, who have so long kept you in the most servile State of Vassalage, have, on the present Occasion, renewed their scandalous Endeavours to enslave you ... Is the great, the important Town of Newcastle.. to be entailed upon every Successor, however stupid and unworthy, of the Families of Wallington and Heaton?

The magistrates' behaviour during the election was also denounced as overbearing. On Trevelyan's side there were appeals to loyalty for Sir Walter; a 'Free Burgess' (SEP 1) wrote of him, after several paragraphs of eulogy of Sir Walter:

Though unknown to many of you, yet be assured he inherits the same generous Principles of his late worthy Uncle; and so much so, that the Loss of the one can alone be made up by the Possession of the other.

There were many aspersions on Bowes' character and trustworthiness. One handbill had the Devil supposedly commending Bowes who would, it said, 'prefer a Bill to confine *Honor* to a *Sound*, establish *Bawdy-Houses* by *Royal Authority*, to make *Killing no Murder*, and to have an *unbounded liberty* given to the *Indulgence of the Animal Passions*' (SEP 1).

Trevelyan won by 95 votes, a considerable swing from last time. More people voted than in 1774, a total of 2,231, not least because there had been more than 200 Freeman admissions since then. 55% of the maritime group voted for Bowes, but there were not enough of them to

outweigh the elite and artisan categories, which both gave a majority for Trevelyan. However, the elite's solidarity of 1774 was broken, with 38% of votes for Bowes. It can be assumed that there was annoyance here too about the behaviour of the small group at the very top of the hierarchy.

Two hundred Londoners made it to Newcastle despite the winter weather, of whom two-thirds voted for Bowes, while of the 290 coming in from the more remote districts of County Durham and Northumberland (those outside the modern Tyne and Wear), 78% voted for Trevelyan, compared to only 50% for those with less of a journey, as Table 6 shows.

Table 6 Voters within the region, 1777.

Voters	Northumberland and Co. Durham		Newcastle and environs and Tyne and Wear	
Bowes	65	22%	823	50%
Trevelyan	225	78%	827	50%
totals	290		1650	

Source: Author's analysis of 1777 Poll Book.

All of those coming in from these country areas were members of the artisan companies. The *Electioneering Journal* (no. 1, 24 February) complained that 'every gentleman's seat in the country is perpetually pelted with [Trevelyan's] runners, imploring their immediate assistance, from the apprehensions of an eternal crush to magistratical nominations'. Bowes seems to have gained little from his new connection with the Bowes estates in County Durham, although the family were old and well respected.

Knox (1986, 160) has traced voters who took part in both elections, and concluded that 80% of those who did so were consistent in their support for magistrates or opposition candidates; 70% of Trevelyan's supporters had voted for the Magistrates in 1774, while 45% of Bowes' supporters had voted with the Burgesses. The opposition share of the vote increased by 12%–18% across each residential or occupational group.

Bowes claimed in 1780 that he had spent £15,000 on the 1777 campaign (SEP 2). Some of the more extravagant gossip about his wife distributing cash in the town, as retailed by for example Edward Montagu (Moore 1989, 130), can probably be discounted, however. One handbill, headed *BEEF and Liberty* (SEP 2), mocked impartially at both candidates for their promised generosity if they won.

Bowes' speech after his defeat (*Courant*, 15 March 1777) was seen as gracious towards his supporters, but he also said he would petition Parliament over the result, since he had been told of many illegal voters. He commenced proceedings, alleging bribery by Trevelyan, but after five days of hearings the House of Commons committee declared Trevelyan elected (Knox 1986, 159). Several incorporated companies granted Bowes honorary freedom, and he

entertained 100 London burgesses at the Hole in the Wall. A Society of Newcastle Independents was founded, and offered him support in any future contest (Knox 1992, 3).

THE 1780 GENERAL ELECTION

The next General Election came in 1780, by which time several things had changed. Matters had deteriorated further in the American war, with the French and Spanish joining in on the rebels' side, and violence between press gangs and sailors on the Tyne. A petition calling for an end to the war, again signed by over 1000 Newcastle residents, was presented by Sir George Savile in March 1778 (*Chronicle*, 4 April 1778). Even Sir Matthew Ridley, 'a country gentleman, always with Administration, owned he began to fear the expense of war' (Walpole 1910, 487–88). Ridley had in fact begun voting against the Government on important questions, including Dunning's Motion on 6 April 1780, that 'the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished', although he then voted against the Bill the next week to bring reforms into effect (HoP, Sir M. W. Ridley).

These bills were the result of serious outside pressure for Government reform. Yorkshire gentleman Christopher Wyvill had started The Association, a petitioning and lobbying movement looking for Parliamentary and 'economical' reform, by which he meant getting rid of placemen and cleaning up Government (Dickinson 2004). The burgesses' group took this up, this time with sympathy from the elite. The general meeting called by the burgesses of February 1780 could thus be held in the Guildhall and chaired by the mayor Francis Forster. The petition that emerged from it had obtained nearly 1,500 signatures by March, and was once again presented by Sir George Savile (Knox 1992, 7).

However, there was also a *Protestant* Association, espoused by James Murray, hostile to the very moderate Catholic Relief Act that was passed in 1779. Murray's explanation in his new magazine, the *Protestant Packet* (1780) was that Catholicism was so closely linked to absolutism and tyranny that individual rights must be denied. Nationally, feelings ran high, and a demonstration by the Protestant Association ended in the Gordon Riots in June 1780, some of the worst ever seen in London. This unsettled the 'middling orders' and left the reformers fearing they would be blamed. Murray did his best to disown the rioters and assert that they were nothing to do with his Association (1780, 13). There were no more issues of the *Protestant Packet* until the following year, when he revived the journal to print full details of Lord George Gordon's trial. Meanwhile, the expected election was called for early September.

Bowes had already made it plain that he considered that he had been promised the burgesses' candidacy after the 1777 defeat, both at a meeting in London at the Hole in the Wall, and with advertisements in the local papers (*Chronicle* and *Courant*, 24 June 1780). Thomas Delaval also wanted to stand, as did Ridley on the other side. The natural next step would have been a Ridley-Trevelyan pairing against a Bowes-Delaval one. But then at the end of July Trevelyan, who had done very little in Parliament although voting with the Opposition when he did attend, told Ridley that he was not going to stand again in Newcastle, as he was going to be elected unopposed in Somerset. He was, he said, 'perfectly happy that I have nothing to do there' (HoP, Trevelyan). This time, even Ridley could not find a second candidate in time, since a freemen's meeting on 1 August at which the electors could hear speeches and question the candidates had already been arranged. This was a major concession to the burgesses by mayor Forster, largely meeting their demand that there should be no 'Closet Combinations' for the nomination.

THE FREEMEN'S MEETING OF 1 AUGUST

Both the *Chronicle* and the *Courant* of 5 August reported this meeting at length. Nearly 700 attended, and in his opening comments Forster said that:

Such a Meeting, in his opinion, was the constitutional way of obtaining the sense of constituents prior to an election, and ... prevent the mischiefs which attend contested elections: as in all propability [*sic*], the Candidate, who then did not meet with the approbation of the Burgesses, would withdraw his application for their suffrages' (*Courant*, 5 August 1780).

Bowes' speech, reported at much greater length than the other two, was aggressive and intemperate; one critic said that 'such a speech as he made ... would have disgraced a Candidate to be *Mayor of Garratt*' (*Chronicle*, 2 September 1780).

When it came to the show of hands, however, 'Sir M. W. Ridley was the first put up, but the shew of hands was, very unexpectedly, remarkably few'. Delaval got the greatest number, with Bowes not far behind. But, the *Chronicle* added, 'One circumstance seems to have been neglected at the conclusion ... that of the Chairman declaring to the meeting his opinion of the shew of hands in each Candidate's favour'. This omission allowed Ridley to live to fight another day.

The campaign was a nasty and bad-tempered one, but the issues were not the same as in 1777. Given that at least some of the elite were now supporting the calls for reform at a national level, the question of magistrates versus burgesses at local level took a back seat. Instead, two interrelated issues with national resonance came to the fore; was the local aristocracy, an elite group well above the level of Newcastle's bourgeois industrialists, interfering in the election, and was Bowes actually a 'ministerial' candidate, promised the votes of Government employees at the Custom House (SEP 1 and 2, throughout)? As early as 1 July, a notice reported in the *Chronicle* that 'TWO PEERS have combined to obtrude Members on this Town at the next General Election, and their Agents are already employed in this Business.'

At the nomination meeting on 1 August, Bowes tried to parry accusations that he had deserted the independent interest:

'Because I happen to have the support of the Duke of Northumberland (who I avow I consider as a rank ministerialist) shall I be suspected of harbouring the same court-serving principles ... his Grace's interest was not obtained under any such idea, but merely because I was supported by a nobleman of Lord Ravensworth's property and character.' (*Courant*, 5 August 1780).

The accusations did not go away, and a notice in the *Chronicle* of 12 August, signed by 'A HINT', suggested that:

The Duke of N——d ..., Lord R——th, and other Lords, have combined together, in direct violation of the determination of the House of Commons, to nominate and support Sir M.R and Mr B. Their agents are straining every nerve for those two Gentlemen JOINTLY. If they succeed, you may bid adieu to the *Freedom of Election in this Town*: No Gentleman will ever again stand in opposition to their *Nomination*, and NEWCASTLE will become the BOROUGH OF THOSE LORDS. The only way to avoid this, is not to be led into promises of single votes to any Candidate.

Whoever solicits you for a single vote, is AN ENEMY TO THE FREEDOM OF ELECTION.

One leading burgess activist, Jasper Harrison, was alleged to have said that Bowes had 'sold you all, and you only want to be delivered' (*Chronicle*, 2 September 1780). There was

considerable personal abuse of Bowes, but much less of the other two, and accusations that either Delaval or Bowes had made 'secret junctions' with Ridley (denied by all three). Ridley himself sought to give the appearance of impartiality as 'your independent candidate', but presumably he was hard at work behind the scenes.

When it came to the vote, Delaval and Bowes both signed the Test document, while Ridley did not (*Chronicle*, 16 September, 1780). But the poll result was anomalous, as immediately noticed in the newspapers. Ridley came top with 1408 votes, and Bowes just scraped past Delaval with 1135 votes to 1085. Plumping, using only one of your two votes and wasting the other, was not uncommon in three-cornered elections, but here, an:

extraordinary 38% of the electorate plumped and fully 45% of Bowes' poll appeared this form. (By contrast, only 16% of Ridley's vote and 12% of Delaval's plumped) 70% of Delaval's vote came in the form of pairing with Ridley' (Knox 1992, 12).

The key, Knox suggests, was that Bowes retained a core of long-standing opposition voters, plus others who had shifted to him in 1777, and could counter Delaval by plumping. 83% of the plumpers who had voted in 1777 supported Bowes, and nearly half of the plumpers who had voted in 1774. At the very least, a substantial minority appear to have been Bowesites

who denied their second vote to Delaval. Table 7 shows Knox's (1992) analysis of the voting patterns.

Table 7 Voting patterns in 1777 and 1780.

Vote in 1777	Vote in 1780	Total
Bowes	Bowes	309
Bowes	Delaval	66
Bowes	Ridley-Bowes	142
Bowes	Bowes-Delaval	130
Bowes	Bowes-Other	3
Trevelyan	Ridley	180
Trevelyan	Ridley-Delaval	440
Bowes	Ridley-Delaval	161
Trevelyan	Ridley-Bowes	194
Bowes	Ridley	15
Trevelyan	Bowes	64
Trevelyan	Delaval	18
Trevelyan	Bowes-Delaval	34

Source: Knox 1779b, footnote on p. 241.

disunited, and do not share each other's votes, the third candidate can pick up the second votes from each, especially with the help of some money and influence. If Delaval and Bowes had held together, they would have won handsomely over Ridley, as Table 8 shows.

Murray's view (1775, 29) was that it was exceptional to decide to waste the second vote. It would not be surprising if 100 or so voters among the old burgesses' group could not bear to vote for Bowes, given his avowed support from the ministerialist peers and the other allegations. However, the fact that 500 or so would, apparently, rather waste a vote than use it for Bowes' fellow signatory of the Test does require an explanation. Altogether 24% of the artisan voters plumped for Bowes, and 22% of the maritime ones, as against only 12% of the

Table 8 Effects of plumping on 1780 election.

	Ridley	Bowes	Delaval
Actual totals	1408	1135	1085
If Bowes' single votes shared with Delaval		511	511
If Delaval's single votes shared with Bowes		117	117
Totals	1408	1763	1713

elite. Within those categories, there are major differences; 42% of the erstwhile activist Bricklayers plumped for him, but only 24% of their colleagues in the Joiners. An analysis by abodes does not help much, with the odd exception such as the group of mariners from Whitby who plumped solidly for Bowes. Areas outside the immediate North East all had higher rates of plumping than Newcastle, Tyne and Wear, County Durham or Northumberland, but their numbers are of course much smaller, only 136 in total.

Knox (1979, 241) dismisses the role of 'interest', but does not mention the turnaround from the 1 August meeting, nor the allegations about interference by Lord Ravensworth and the Duke of Northumberland. However, given that Bowes admitted that he was being supported by the two peers, it is hard to escape the conclusion that their influence on behalf of the Government, whether monetary or by the use of their interest in the area, was behind his success. Ridley may also have benefited, or he may simply have been able to watch his opponents fall out while reaping the gains. The Government's chief agent John Robinson had written in his electoral survey of July 1780: 'It will be endeavoured by the Duke of Northumberland to bring Sir M. Ridley to an explanation as to his principles before fully supported.' However, in September, after Ridley had been re-elected, his brother Nicholas wrote that, 'Sir M. and Lady R. go today to Alnwick to pay their compliments to the Duke, to whom by the by he is very little obliged for assistance' (HoP, Sir Matthew White Ridley).

Without something like this in the background, the voting pattern is inexplicable. Whatever had occurred, the result was that the only one of the candidates who attracted no criticism on a personal level, Thomas Delaval, lost out. Was he, perhaps, too straightforward a candidate to win in the dirty world of eighteenth-century electioneering?

Delaval later accused Bowes of bribery, and a group of burgesses also accused Ridley, but both accusations were dropped just before they were due to go to a House of Commons hearing in 1782. Ridley's defence brief survives in his papers (Ridley 1782), and has been quoted above. It provides a wealth of information about the 'acceptable face' of election expenses, but given the reasons for its preparation, is unlikely to provide the whole truth.

THE 1784 GENERAL ELECTION

The final election in this group was in 1784, well before it would normally have been expected. In the intervening years, the Parliamentary situation had become so factional that it was difficult to form a stable government or a stable opposition. Cannon (1969) provides a readable study of this confused period. The Association reform movement had revived, and secured at least part of the economic reform it wanted, with legislation disfranchising government employees in Parliamentary elections, and reducing the Civil Establishment. Pitt had

introduced a bill for electoral reform in 1783, without success despite high hopes. North had resigned in February 1782 after a series of defeats on his American policy, but his successor as Prime Minister, Lord Rockingham, had then died in July. In a slow-motion constitutional crisis, there were several months without a proper government, during which time peace with the Americans and their allies was negotiated. Then in April 1783, Fox and North, a Whig and a Tory respectively who had abused each other through the course of many debates, formed a coalition. It was hated in the country, and even more by the King who blocked the normal channels of patronage, but it had a majority in the House of Commons. After eight months, in December 1783 the coalition was dismissed and Pitt became prime minister, aged 22. He was continually defeated in the Commons but carried on, and called a snap election when he thought he could win, in the spring of 1784.

In Newcastle, the tables were now turned. Ridley had voted consistently against North in spring 1782, while Bowes was either absent or supporting North (Christie 1958, 397). Foot (1812, 80), says that ‘he aimed at an Irish peerage, and finding the administration recoiled at it, he grew sulky and abusive’. He was listed by the Government’s manager Robinson as connected with the Duke of Northumberland (HoP, Andrew Robinson Stoney Bowes). He had to be pressured by a delegation of leading constituents to turn up in the Commons to vote on electoral reform (*Chronicle*, 3 May 1783), while Ridley had done so without fuss.

Once the election was called, Charles Brandling, a wealthy coal-owner and a convert from a recusant Catholic family, signified his wish to stand, especially since Bowes had declared ‘the County of Durham to be his future object’ (*Courant*, 13 March 1784). Although Brandling had supported Trevelyan in 1777, since then he had been involved in the campaigns for economical and electoral reform (SEP 1 and 2) while several of the earlier activists had disappeared from the scene. Greive had moved to America, and later went to revolutionary France (Knox 1979b). Murray had died in 1782, Maude at some point between the two elections. White had been disfranchised by the Common Council in 1780 because of his electioneering activities, and was now working in the Custom House at Blyth, which would anyway have made him ineligible to vote (Knox 1992, footnote to 16).

Nationally, the result of the 1784 election was heavily in favour of Pitt and against the Coalition, so a victory for Bowes would have been unlikely in any case. However, he evidently decided to fight a vigorous but dirty campaign. He was alleged to have delayed delivery of the election writ to the sheriff, resulting in Newcastle being one of the last places to be polled. At the Burgesses’ meeting in March 1784, Ridley gave a ‘short though sensible and nervous speech’, but Bowes’ was a rambling two hours of ‘a little too much warmth’. He was sorry to hear that the constituents disliked his voting with Mr Fox, he said, ‘but he must beg leave to tell them, that was *their* fault, not *his*’. He attacked Brandling’s conduct, saying that, ‘no man should persist with impunity to offer him a personal affront’ — a rather menacing statement, given that Bowes had killed at least one man in a duel (*Chronicle*, 3 and 17 April 1784). Brandling retaliated, and received a majority of the votes on the show of hands (SEP 2).⁴ In the usual handbill and newspaper war, Ridley barely figured, but the slanging match was once again personal and unpleasant. Bowes’ bad conduct to his wife and his indebtedness were by now well-known. Brandling’s former Catholicism, his conduct as a coal-owner, and the consistency or otherwise of his record of support for the cause of ‘independency’ were all factors (SEP 1 and 2).

Newcastle Antiquaries’ 1780 Poll Book (newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk) is annotated with Bowes’ canvass returns for this election. He or his agents made contact with just under 600 of

the voters in the 1780 election, and were given or found the names of several hundred potential new voters who might support him. Out of them all, he received around 700 positive responses, but there were ominous numbers of ‘not promising’ or ‘will be away’ or ‘turned for Brandling’. There is some indication that he was trying again to get plumpers; though the abbreviations in the poll book are often difficult to interpret, there are 164 people who may be saying they will plump. The allegation that he was going to withdraw in order to stand in Durham may have damaged him by providing an acceptable excuse for no longer supporting him. He denied any plans to withdraw, but then did so, at the hustings themselves on 27 April, with a gracious speech and effusive thanks in the newspapers, though the notice he published was far from gracious:

I found myself opposed by a combination of individuals, who have contributed to my opponent a species of support, which, being offered principally by some who had made *different engagements*, and by others, who are no part of your body, cannot be reckoned among those *legal and constitutional means*, by which he promised to seek the honour of representing you (*Courant*, 1 May 1784).

Those reform activists who were left must have been thoroughly disillusioned with electoral politics by this time. There were some later challenges, but none got as far as a contested election until 1820. Brandling’s son succeeded him in 1802, while the Riddleys carried on with the family monopoly of the other seat well into the nineteenth century.⁴ A HINT’s prediction (see above) had indeed come true.

CONCLUSION

The story of this group of elections shows in microcosm what formidable obstacles those challenging the elite groups who held power and influence, and looking for reform in the eighteenth century, had to contend with. It also demonstrates how far local issues and national ones were intertwined, in contradiction to Namier’s views in the *History of Parliament* (HoP, Newcastle-upon-Tyne). The Newcastle burgesses put up a good fight, but their efforts were defeated by ‘interest’ and the defects of the candidate they had adopted, in the absence of a better alternative, in the rushed election of 1777. Had they had time to find a better candidate, the outcome might have been different, but even so, given the forces ranged against them, Newcastle’s parliamentary seats might still have retained their ‘quasi-feudal’ character.

However, the burgesses did make gains; they firmly established their right to petition and to meet as a group. A more conciliatory mayoralty emerged, and some unity in the desire for political reform, a small measure of which was achieved at the national level in the 1780s through the efforts of the radicals in Newcastle and other places. The Parliamentary reform they were seeking, however, had to wait almost 50 years longer.

NOTES

¹ In 2013 the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne (SANT) digitised one of the items in its archives, the Poll Book for the 1780 parliamentary election, annotated for the 1784 election where at the last moment the third candidate withdrew, for use as an exhibit in its Bicentennial Exhibition. Visitors could turn the pages on the computer screen, and there was lively interest in the possibility of tracing one’s own family names from more than two centuries ago. Subsequently, SANT decided

to put the digitised version on their website (www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk), and volunteers transcribed each page so that the Poll Book is now fully searchable. In 2016 it transpired that Newcastle University's Humanities Research Institute had taken charge of a very large database of eighteenth-century London electors (www.leh.ncl.ac.uk), and was planning to expand it to other parts of the country. SANT's work, plus the substantial archives of printed material from the 1774–84 elections (see Bibliography), meant that Newcastle itself was a good place to commence a pilot project. The University therefore commissioned digitisation and transcribing of the other two extant Poll Books, for 1774 and 1777, and is in the process of creating a database incorporating not just the printed material, but 3-D images of artefacts, recordings of songs etc. For further information, contact Professor Matthew Grenby (Matthew.Grenby@newcastle.ac.uk). The author is grateful to Professor Grenby for allowing the use of the spreadsheets for this article, and to all the volunteers who worked on transcribing and checking.

² In general, the poll books give a single name as 'abode', such as 'Newcastle' or 'Chatham', with only occasional mentions of the county such as 'Richmond, Surry'. This analysis has therefore needed considerable research on place names, and inevitably much guesswork, both in translating eighteenth-century spelling into modern equivalents and in deciding on which counties to allocate each place. The main principle adopted has been, 'the closer the more likely', so that, for example, Bowdon has been taken as Boldon in South Tyneside, rather than a place with that spelling in Greater Manchester, and Oxford has been assumed to be the one in Northumberland rather than the southern one. In terms of geographical areas, London and environs is broadly modern London; Newcastle and environs is broadly Newcastle within its current boundaries; County Durham is historic County Durham outside Tyne and Wear, and Northumberland similarly; Northern England is the rest of England north of the Humber and Southern England is the rest of England south of the Humber.

³ For the rest, this might be because the first name or the guild had been recorded incorrectly, or the surname spelt differently, rather than because they did not in fact vote. Some differences in figures, here and elsewhere, may also have arisen because Knox used sampling in his articles (necessarily, given the limited computing power available to an academic in the 1980s) while the author has been able to use the whole database.

⁴ There had to be mediation afterwards with Brandling printing an oblique apology and a declaration by Bowes that he had not issued a challenge to him (*Chronicle*, 15 May 1784, as reported in Knox 1992, 13).

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archaeologia Aeliana</i>
SC	Newcastle University Library Special Collections
SEP	SANT election papers, held at Northumberland Archives
LS	Newcastle City Library Local Studies Section
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
TWAM	Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

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- SC 'Box of election bills, songs, etc.: for Newcastle 1777, 1830, 1847, Northumberland 1826, 1833, Gateshead 1852', shelfmark 942.8 NOR.
- SEP 1 SANT/ Gen/ Ele/ 1 / 2/ 2, Election material relating to Newcastle upon Tyne elections.
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