

# POLITICS IN NEWARK IN THE 1790s

by  
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In the late 18th century Newark was a prosperous market town of some 6,500 people. Although visitors were usually impressed by the town's attractive appearance, Newark was the scene of bitter political conflict, particularly during the 1790s. The radical journalist, Joseph Gales, commented that 'in scarcely any other place is the electioneering spirit carried to a higher pitch than in the borough of Newark', while another observer noted in 1813 that Newark politics 'present some scenes of an *agreement to disagree*'. The Municipal Corporations Commissioners also reported in 1835 that 'the party spirit has in this borough assumed a character of more internal bitterness and rancour than might fairly be expected to arise from the ordinary collision of parties'.<sup>1</sup> With an electorate of nearly 1,000, Newark was the largest scot and lot borough in the English provinces. The town was divided politically between the dominant 'Red' party, a coalition of the electoral interests of the Dukes of Newcastle and Rutland, and the independent or 'Blue' party, which had been founded by the Rev. Bernard Wilson, vicar of Newark until his death in 1772. Newcastle, whose political influence arose from his 300 houses in Newark, and Rutland, whose influence consisted in his extensive land-holdings outside the town, together controlled Newark corporation—most of the Aldermen were Newcastle's tenants—and had divided the parliamentary representation between them ever since party conflict had commenced in Newark in the 1730s. By 1790, leadership of the Blues had passed to William Dickinson Rastall of Muskhams Grange, a small landowner, magistrate, antiquary, and legal writer, who adopted the surname Dickinson in 1795 (but who is here referred to by his latter name throughout). His electoral interest consisted principally in his 100 tenants in Newark and his partnership in the Blue bank of Pocklington, Dickinson, Handley and Co.<sup>2</sup> Although Dickinson had participated in the Nottinghamshire parliamentary reform movement of the early 1780s, the conflict between the leaderships of the Red and Blue parties was more a struggle between 'ins' and 'outs' than one between 'Tories' and 'Whigs' or between 'conservatives' and 'liberals'.<sup>3</sup> The guiding principle of Dickinson's political conduct was 'that if great Property united with great Rank, had a Claim to the Compliment of *one* Member for the Borough of Newark', it was the duty of every man of influence 'to prevent the further Incroachment on the Liberty of the Inhabitants', by opposing 'the Election of more than *one* Member connected with any of those great Families who have of late years represented the Town'.<sup>4</sup> Much of the Blue rank and file were considerably more advanced in their politics, and the Treasury Solicitor described Newark as a town 'where Borough Politicks are a good deal intermixed with more General Concerns the Blues (as they are called) being principally composed of Men of Democratical Principles and the Reds chiefly consisting of Constitutional Adherents'.<sup>5</sup> The radical Newark printer and publicist of the Blue cause, Daniel Holt, visualised the town's independent interest as 'struggling in the cause of local and general Freedom, and successfully exerting themselves to emancipate their fellow Townsmen from the trammels of aristocracy'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Dickinson himself was an adherent of the Duke of Portland—'In power, and out of power, my attachment to your grace has been always the same'<sup>7</sup>—and Newark politics in the 1790s were in essence characterised by the sustained attempt of Dickinson and his followers to break the electoral monopoly of Clumber and Belvoir on behalf of Welbeck.

Joseph Gales, who had served his printing apprenticeship in Newark, ascribed the intensity of the political conflict in the town to the two parties being evenly matched.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, although the Reds had beaten off the Blue challenges in previous contested elections, they were far from confident as the 1790 election approached. The strength of the Red party had been diminished by the sale of a considerable amount of urban property belonging to Newark's charity estates in order to finance the schemes authorised by the Improvement Act of 1773. These estates also financed the construction of the town's

workhouse in 1786. Dickinson himself paid tribute to the corporation which had thus experienced a loss of 'much local influence and political weight . . . for the honorable purpose of benefitting the community'.<sup>9</sup> Correspondingly, the Blues were assisted by developments within the dissenting interest, which comprised between a fifth and a quarter of Newark's population. Nationally, the nonconformists swung away from supporting Pitt's administration in the late 1780s in reaction to his opposition to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Newark was not exempt from this trend, for the two sitting Red M.P.s were closely identified with Pitt's government. Although local politics were never polarised on sectarian lines, for there were no church rates in Newark, the impost being defrayed by the town's charity estates, the bulk of the nonconformists were Blue supporters by 1790.<sup>10</sup> Hence, it may have been an awareness of the changing party balance that prompted Newcastle's angry reaction to the meeting in Newark between Dickinson and Portland's brother, Lord Edward Bentinck, M.P. for Nottinghamshire, to co-ordinate their strategy in the ensuing contest.<sup>11</sup>

Dickinson declined to stand as the Blue candidate on the ground of ill-health, and eventually Col. William Paxton, High Sheriff of Carmarthen, was chosen to stand under Portland's banner for the independents.<sup>12</sup> It was a sign of the Reds' lack of confidence that two months before the contest of June 1790 rumours were rife that in order to stave off possible defeat, the Reds were determined to amend Newark's franchise in such a way as to prevent the victory of Paxton for one of the seats. At its determination on 11th January 1699, the House of Commons had resolved that the right to vote in Newark lay with those 'who pay, or ought to pay, Scot and Lot'.<sup>13</sup> It was widely believed that the Mayor, the presiding officer, intended to restrict the electorate to those who actually paid the rates, excluding those who 'ought to pay'. To pre-empt this move and to safe-guard their votes, several hundred Blues appealed to the overseers against their omission from the rate assessment of April 1790; some even tendered their rate payments to secure inclusion, but they were refused.<sup>14</sup> Blue suspicions were confirmed at the election: the Mayor, Henry Milnes, interpreted the electoral qualifications in such a way as to reject the votes tendered by nearly all the unrated individuals. Although in consequence of his ruling, some 80 Red voters were rejected, the upshot of Milnes' action was that about 180 Blues, sufficient to have given Paxton a narrow victory for one of the two seats, were rejected on the ground of their ineligibility. The final result on 21st June was therefore a clear victory for the Red candidates, Col. William Crosbie and Col. John Manners Sutton, who polled 403 and 386 votes respectively, Paxton trailing with 291. The poll book showed that the Red candidates received overwhelming support from Newark's professional occupations, retailers, and the 'drink interest'. The clothiers backed the Reds by a narrower margin. Workers in the building trades were evenly divided between the two parties, while the leather workers and the metal trades voted marginally in favour of the Blues. The river trades decisively favoured Paxton, who received his strongest support from the labourers, the largest group in the electorate, who voted for him by a two to one majority, although nearly half the Blue labourers had their votes rejected.<sup>15</sup>

The Blues protested vigorously at this *coup* and dispersed a leaflet claiming that a quarter of Newark's electorate had been deprived of their vote.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Blue suspicions that the rates had been fraudulently compiled for political purposes appeared to receive confirmation when nearly all the persons who had appealed against their omission from the April rate were put onto the post-election August rate.<sup>17</sup> Seemingly cheated of victory, the independents appealed against the result, and on 1st December 1790 Paxton's petition was presented to the House of Commons, complaining of the Mayor's 'great Partiality and Injustice' in rejecting legal Paxton voters and in polling a number of unqualified Red supporters; Paxton also alleged that bribery and corruption had been used to secure the Reds' victory.

On 11th March 1791, a select committee of 15 M.P.s considered the case. Clearly, the issue turned upon the definition of the voters who 'ought to pay' scot and lot. In their submission, the Reds' counsel argued that this group was partly defined by the Windsor Act of 1744, which enacted that persons who moved into rated property subsequent to a rating ought to pay the rates in proportion to the time that they had occupied the premises. It was also argued that the category included those persons who were legally compellable to pay or who would pay in the course of collection, as well as those who had been wrongly omitted from the rates and who had not had time to secure inclusion. In contrast, the Blues' counsel contended for a looser definition, and argued that the occupation of rateable property—houses rented at 20/- *per annum*—constituted eligibility for the franchise, irrespective of whether such property was actually rated. By including the votes of those persons who had been wrongfully rejected because they were not rated, and by deleting the votes of persons who were unqualified to vote by virtue of their receipt of parish relief or whose votes had been procured by corruption, the Blues insisted that the true election result ought to have been Paxton 474, Crosbie 394, and Manners Sutton 369.

On 22nd March the select committee rejected the interpretations of both sides and in their place it determined that the right to vote in Newark was possessed only by those persons 'paying Scot and Lot', a stricter interpretation than even the Reds had dared to contend for. Paxton's petition was therefore rejected, and Crosbie and Manners Sutton were declared duly elected.<sup>18</sup> This was a major reverse for the Blues, and on 9th June they appealed to the Commons against the decision, but the business was lost until the next session with the prorogation of Parliament.<sup>19</sup> However, in April 1791 the Blues staged a convincing recovery in the annual election for Newark's churchwardens. Newark was an 'open' vestry and because there were no church rates, the qualification for voting in the vestry poll—confirmed by a legal decision of 1782—was the occupation of property rented at 20/- *per annum*, irrespective of whether such property was actually rated to the poor. This was, in other words, the franchise on which the Blues would have won the parliamentary election, but for the Mayor's restrictive interpretation. The Reds realised the danger and sought legal advice as to whether the parochial electorate could be confined to those who were assessed to the poor, but the opinion of the barrister, Henry Partridge, delivered on 16th April 1791, was unfavourable.<sup>20</sup> Much was at stake in the election, for the churchwardens were trustees for the management of Newark's extensive charity estates. The result broke the long Red ascendancy in the churchwardens' elections, for on 26th April the Blues' three candidates defeated the three Red incumbents by 559 votes to 491. The poll was conducted in the parish church amidst great disorder, and several leading Reds, including Milnes, the former Mayor, and Job Brough, the Town Clerk, were jostled and threatened by Blues. The Red candidates withdrew in disgust, and on the following day the victorious Blues occupied the church, paraded their banners up and down the nave, and danced and piped upon the altar in triumph.<sup>21</sup> The supplanted churchwardens refused to acknowledge their defeat and declined to deliver the parish books to their Blue successors. It was not until the independents made legal moves in the Court of King's Bench on 9th November that the defeated Reds agreed to surrender the books.<sup>22</sup>

The Reds, outraged by the disorders in the church, submitted details of the riot to counsel. On 8th June 1791, Partridge advised that prosecutions could be instituted against a number of the Blue rank and file, but that there was not enough evidence to proceed against the Reds' principal targets, the three Blue churchwardens and William Tomlinson, one of the Blue party's leaders.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, no legal action was actually taken in connection with the vestry poll; instead, the Reds decided to avenge themselves by prosecuting various Blues for bribery committed at the parliamentary election of June 1790. Indeed, the very day after the parliamentary contest, leading Reds held a meeting at the Saracen's Head chaired by Brough which resolved to institute such proceedings, and evidence of bribery had begun to be collected in December 1790. Certain of Newcastle's

tenants who had voted for Paxton were reprieved from eviction on condition that they gave evidence in the contemplated prosecutions.<sup>24</sup> The bribery actions, which were the particular initiative of the Newcastle, as opposed to the Rutland, wing of the Red party, were intended to deal a heavy blow to the Blues; as Brough wrote, 'I think we shall be even with them before *we have done with them*'.<sup>25</sup>

When the county assizes opened at Nottingham on 13th August 1791, the Reds had brought no less than 23 bribery actions, three against leading Blues, Dickinson, George Tomlinson, a Blue churchwarden, and William Handley, a wine merchant, for giving bribes, and actions against 20 others for receiving them. Although the nominal plaintiff was William Wilson, clerk to one of Newcastle's stewards, the real instigator of the actions was the Duke himself. As chief partner in Newark's bank, Handley was selected as the first defendant; the principal accusation was that he had conspired with Dickinson to distribute over £400 in bribes to the electors under cover of bank loans. The Reds' case collapsed when prosecution witnesses were compelled by the Blues' counsel, Erskine, to admit that the loans, for which promissory notes had been required, had been made without any inquiry being made into the political affiliation of the recipients, and that the recipients had included Red supporters as well as persons ineligible to vote. The prosecution was therefore non-suited, and the trials of Dickinson, Tomlinson, and the others were postponed.<sup>26</sup> However, the Reds refused to accept this setback, and on 10th November their counsel moved in the Court of King's Bench that the non-suit should be set aside and a new trial be held, on the ground that Dickinson's evidence for the defence during the trial was inadmissible. The Court unanimously rejected the motion. Dickinson and Tomlinson thereupon moved that their forthcoming trials on the same charge should be non-suited too: their motions were granted by the Court on 23rd January 1792. The Blues celebrated their successes by burning Newcastle and Brough in effigy in Newark market.<sup>27</sup>

At this point, the Blues received powerful reinforcement with the commencement on 5th October 1791 of the town's first newspaper, the *Newark Herald*, published each week by Daniel Holt, a printer and bookseller of Stodman Street. The paper was radical in its support of parliamentary reform; it championed the cause of the dissenters, urged the abolition of the slave trade, and welcomed the French Revolution. It took a strong line against the game laws, tithes, and enclosures, sensitive issues in the 'Dukeries', but the *Herald's* principal role was as the spokesman of the independent interest, particularly its more outspoken elements. Holt reprinted at length in the newspaper the speeches and evidence of the Blues' counsel to the select committee of the Commons, a reminder that the issue of Newark's parliamentary franchise was not closed.<sup>28</sup> This was signified when on 13th February 1792 the Blues again presented their petition to the Commons appealing against the select committee's ruling; the Reds replied a fortnight later with a counter-petition upholding the decision of March 1791. The Commons fixed a date for consideration of the matter, but after several postponements, the prorogation of the House again resulted in the loss of the business until the next session.<sup>29</sup>

Not only did the Reds present a counter-petition, but they brought new bribery actions against Dickinson and Tomlinson. The trials of the Blue leaders were held at Nottingham Assizes on 17th March, and in essence the charges were similar to those brought against Handley the previous August; William Wilson was once more the nominal plaintiff, with Newcastle as the real instigator of the actions. George Tomlinson was tried first, but so weak was the prosecution evidence that his counsel, Erskine, did not even bother to call any defence witnesses, contenting himself with a scathing attack on Newcastle. After a neutral summing up by the judge, Tomlinson was acquitted. The prosecution case against Dickinson rested on specific bribery by the Blue leader, and implied bribery *via* the agency of Handley. However, witnesses who were called to prove the first count denied ever having spoken to or received money from Dickinson, while letters from Dickinson to Handley, produced in support of the second accusation, were so unclear as to their actual

meaning or precise date that they made little impression. The judge summed up in Dickinson's favour and he was immediately acquitted. After this victory for the independents, Paxton and Dickinson were triumphantly drawn in their carriages into Newark by Blue supporters, and three whole sheep were roasted in the market. The church bells in Newark, Nottingham, Southwell, and 25 neighbouring villages pealed in celebration of the Blue successes.<sup>30</sup>

On Easter Tuesday, 10th April, the Blues triumphed once more when their three churchwardens were re-elected without opposition from the disconcerted Reds. In connection with this poll, Holt printed a pamphlet prefaced by a searing introduction which exposed the partial conduct of the Red churchwardens over the previous seven years. This showed that between 1784 and 1790, the Red churchwardens had expended £2,897 in orders to Red tradesmen in Newark, compared with a mere £78 on Blue ones. An additional £399 had been spent on 'striped' or neutral tradesmen.<sup>31</sup> On account of his outspoken role as publicist of the independent interest, Holt now replaced the Blue leader as the prime target of the Reds, and ironically it was in connection with Dickinson's acquittal that Holt came to grief. Initially, the Reds had refused to accept Dickinson's acquittal, for on 18th June, their counsel moved in the Court of King's Bench for a new trial. Their complaint consisted in the unlawful withholding during the trial of evidence in favour of the prosecution, namely, various letters in the possession of Handley which the presiding judge had refused to receive. The Court agreed and granted the motion for a new trial.<sup>32</sup> However, with the initiation of proceedings against Holt for his tendentious account of Dickinson's acquittal, the Reds abandoned all further proceedings against the Blue leader and focussed their energies on Holt.

In the course of his defence speech at Dickinson's trial, Erskine had depicted the plaintiff's counsel as acting various roles in a tragedy, 'The Murder of Reputation', and according to Holt's account, Erskine had described Brough as being 'only fit for one, that of a *mute*; for mutes are a necessary part of every exhibition where a Tyrant is to be exhibited committing murder, and an innocent victim portrayed bleeding at the altar of oppression'.<sup>33</sup> These strong words produced an immediate reaction: on 10th April Brough called on Holt with a note purporting to be from Erskine, contradicting the account which Holt had given of his speech in so far as it related to Brough. Holt refused to print the contradiction, asserting that it was a forgery, and insisted that his account was an accurate one. Immediately afterwards, a statement appeared in the *Nottingham Journal* reflecting on Holt's conduct and containing Erskine's avowal that Holt's account of his speech was '*wholly and absolutely without foundation*'. Holt's defiance cost him dear, for on 19th June the Court of King's Bench granted Brough leave for a criminal information to be filed against Holt for defamatory libel, which was made absolute on 27th November.<sup>34</sup>

Parallel to these moves, the Reds prepared an even more damaging blow at Holt. On 20th December 1792, they established the Newark Constitutional Association at a meeting held at the Town Hall, headed by a committee of over 60 persons, including the entire corporation and numerous clergymen; its secretary was an attorney, Edward Smith Godfrey, who was in partnership with Brough and who succeeded him as Town Clerk on the latter's death in 1795. The resolutions of the Association, pledging loyalty to the constitution, received over 1,500 signatures.<sup>35</sup> The Association's second resolution pledged its members 'to discover and bring to justice, the Authors, Publishers, and Distributors, of all seditious writings', and the committee selected Holt as its target. With a view to prosecution, the committee procured from Holt's shop copies of Thomas Paine's *Letter Addressed to the Addressers*, a pamphlet which ridiculed the hereditary principle in government and called for the election of a National Convention. It also procured copies of a leaflet entitled *Address, to the Tradesmen, Mechanics, Labourers, and other Inhabitants of the Town of Newark, on a Parliamentary Reform*, a strongly worded polemic originally written in 1782 by Major John Cartwright, which Holt had reprinted at the request of the

Nottingham radicals. Armed with these items, the committee informed the Attorney General, and early in 1793 two *ex officio* informations for seditious libel were filed against Holt in the Court of King's Bench for selling Paine's pamphlet and for printing the second leaflet. Holt insisted that 'it was not a love of public justice that actuated the Association in their proceedings against me, but a diabolical spirit of party revenge, and a desire to wound thro' me the *local* Liberty of the Press'.<sup>36</sup> The desire of the Reds to strike at Holt was reinforced by the renewal of uncertainty over the 1790 parliamentary election, for on 18th December 1792 the Blues again petitioned the Commons against the decision of its select committee in March 1791, while the Reds countered with their own petition on 13th February 1793. Once more, the business was lost with the prorogation of Parliament.<sup>37</sup>

First, Holt was tried for libelling Brough. Although he expressed confidence as to the outcome, when the case was tried at Nottingham Assizes on 16th March 1793 the jury regarded it as an open and shut case of defamation. After examining three barristers as to what Erskine had said during Dickinson's trial, the jury pronounced Holt guilty without even leaving the court to consider their verdict.<sup>38</sup> Holt wrote later that the account of Erskine's speech had been presented to him for insertion in his newspaper 'by a very learned Barrister, a very intimate friend of Mr. Erskine's, and a man of great character and strict integrity'. In the hurry of business, Holt had had to rely on the accuracy of the report when publishing it, which he did 'without the most distant intention of reflecting on the character or abilities of Mr. Brough'.<sup>39</sup> Holt was sentenced in the Court of King's Bench on 11th May 1793 to pay a £50 fine and to be imprisoned for six months in the King's Bench prison.<sup>40</sup>

Holt was next tried at the summer Assizes at Nottingham on 19th July on the two charges brought by the Attorney General at the instigation of the Newark Constitutional Association. Although it was proved during the trial for selling Paine's *Letter* that Holt had sold the pamphlet in the general line of business, without any attempt to promote it in particular, the jury declared him guilty of publishing a seditious libel. On the charge of printing the *Address, to the . . . Inhabitants*, Holt attempted to call Cartwright to testify that Holt was not the original publisher, but the court rejected his evidence. After 45 minutes' deliberation, the jury pronounced Holt guilty.<sup>41</sup> The verdicts aroused considerable hostility among the Newark independents, and on the night of Tuesday, 23rd July, the eve of market day, inflammatory slogans were daubed on walls and doors over a large part of Newark by outraged Blues. The slogans included, 'Peace or a speedy Revolution—Damn all Parsons, Placemen, Pensioners, and Associators, they take from us all Liberty—Englishmen rise and fight like Frenchmen'. Not only did the committee of the Constitutional Association offer a reward of £20 in a vain effort to discover the offenders, but the government offered £100 too.<sup>42</sup> On the expiry of his sentence for libelling Brough, Holt was brought back into the Court of King's Bench to receive sentence. Despite arguments by his counsel, Erskine, that Holt had been illegally convicted and was entitled to new trials, he was sentenced on 27th November 1793 to a total of four years' imprisonment in Newgate and a fine of £100.<sup>43</sup>

Early in his prison term, Holt wrote his *Vindication*, a strongly worded defence of his conduct in which he declared that his political creed (and by implication that of the more advanced Blues) included 'a peaceable, but RADICAL PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, . . . a more impartial taxation, and abolition of the Game Laws, Press Warrants, and Test Acts; and the reduction of useless places and enormous pensions'. He vigorously denounced the Newark Constitutional Association as being 'composed of interested men, and weak, ignorant, time-serving, dependent tradesmen'.<sup>44</sup> At such a distance from Newark, Holt found it increasingly difficult to conduct his business affairs, and in February 1795 he wrote to the Attorney General, Sir John Scott, requesting his transferral to Nottingham jail. In December 1795 he also wrote to the Home Secretary, Portland, seeking the royal clemency for printing the *Address, to the . . . Inhabitants*, but in both applications he was unsuccessful, and Holt was not released from prison until 25th November 1797.<sup>45</sup>

The imprisonment of their publicist throughout this period was a major blow to the Blues; although the independents managed to raise £50 to help pay his fines and legal expenses, Holt was ruined. On 22nd January 1794, publication of the *Briton* was discontinued after only 53 issues, but the chief casualty of Holt's incarceration was the *Newark Herald*. The paper had never had a circulation of more than a few hundred, but the absence of its conductor weakened it still further, and Holt vainly solicited advertisements for it from the radical London Society for Constitutional Information.<sup>46</sup> On 1st October 1794 he sold the *Herald*, which was renamed the *Midland Mercury*, although it continued to be published at Holt's shop. The new paper was evidently under the control of the more moderate wing of the Blue party, for it was markedly less outspoken than the *Herald* and it was an enthusiastic supporter of the Portland Whigs within Pitt's coalition government. However, the *Mercury* was not a success and early in January 1795 it was absorbed by the liberal *Leicester Herald*, depriving the Blues of their mouthpiece.<sup>47</sup> The deteriorating position of the independent party was confirmed when on the commencement of the new parliamentary session in January 1794, the Blues did not renew their petition to the Commons to overturn the select committee's determination of Newark's franchise, an admission of defeat which finally ended the uncertainty over the June 1790 election result.

Party hostilities were suspended in Newark during the grain scarcity of 1795: on 22nd July prominent Blues such as Dickinson and William Tomlinson met at the Town Hall with leading Reds to consider ways of alleviating the food shortage.<sup>48</sup> The Mayor and corporation reciprocated by declining to press the contemplated prosecution of a Blue churchwarden, William Unwin, for sedition.<sup>49</sup> However, with the approach of the 1796 election, both sides prepared to renew the electoral contest. Although the Blues were still unchallenged in the annual parochial elections, their strength in the parliamentary sphere was waning. As Oldfield had foreseen, the decision of the Commons' select committee in March 1791 to make Newark a straightforward scot and lot borough had placed considerable power in the hands of the overseers, who were 'the creatures of the corporation', to determine who would be rated and therefore who would be eligible to vote.<sup>50</sup> The large number of appeals made before the election by Blues against Red supporters being improperly rated indicates that the overseers used this power to consolidate the Red interest. It was another indication of the erosion of the Blues' position since 1790 that the canvassing records prior to the 1796 election indicated that the Reds would defeat the independents by a margin of three to two.<sup>51</sup> When Parliament was dissolved, Paxton was again invited to stand for the Blues in opposition to the new Red candidates, Thomas Manners Sutton, the Recorder of Newark, and Col. Mark Wood, formerly Engineer-in-Chief in Bengal. But after the first day's voting on 27th May, Paxton unexpectedly withdrew from the contest, having polled 381 votes to Manners Sutton's 443 and Wood's 439.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the debacle was such a severe blow to the Blues that open party conflict at the parliamentary level ceased for a generation. Although there was a passage of arms the following year, when the Blue and Red parties sponsored rival petitions, respectively for and against a speedy peace with France and the dismissal of Pitt's government,<sup>53</sup> the independents did not venture to contest a parliamentary election again until 1826, during which time the Reds' political monopoly was unchallenged.

It remains to be explained why this lengthy hiatus occurred in a town where party divisions ran so deep. Undoubtedly, the entry of Portland and his followers into Pitt's cabinet in July 1794 had created serious strains between the radical wing of the Blue party, symbolised by Holt, which demanded parliamentary reform and peace with France, and the more moderate section led by Dickinson, a Portland Whig, who did not associate himself with such policies. This may have been a factor which influenced Portland's decision not to pardon Holt. The independent interest was further weakened during this period by the deaths of many of its most prominent supporters: Holt in 1799, William Tomlinson in 1807, George Tomlinson in 1808, and Jacob Ordoyno in 1812. But the chief explanation of Blue dormancy after 1796 seems to lie in the conduct of Dickinson himself.

Personal misfortunes including the failure of his banking partnership were undoubtedly a cause of his quiescent leadership: in 1805 Dickinson published the first part of his *History and Antiquities of the Town of Newark*, but the second instalment was not published until 1819, and he explained the delay by stating that during the interval 'the Author was overwhelmed with calamities of unusual magnitude, which not only repressed the energies of his mind, but necessarily diverted the whole of his attention into other channels'.<sup>54</sup> However, there was also a political explanation. It was remarked by Laird in his account of Nottinghamshire, published in 1813, that Dickinson was a man 'whose liberal character and conduct . . . have prevented an overflow of party spirit on more occasions than one'.<sup>55</sup> The implication that Dickinson exerted a restraining hand on his followers is borne out by the fact that he had been prepared to come to an arrangement with the Red party in both the 1790 and 1796 elections, whereby one Blue and one Red candidate would have been returned unopposed for the borough.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, it may be more than a coincidence that the first general election after Dickinson's death in 1822 saw the first parliamentary contest in the town for 30 years. Nevertheless, the hiatus of 1796 to 1826 was but a prelude to a period of even more intense political activity than had occurred during the early 1790s, for during the six years, 1826 to 1832, the town witnessed six contested parliamentary elections, during which the Blue party finally realised its historic ambition of electing one of its number as Member of Parliament for Newark.

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>2</sup>*Trial of an Action for Bribery* [Newark, 1791], 27, 113; W. Dickinson, *The History and Antiquities of the Town of Newark* (1805), 175n. Cf. C. Brown, *A History of Newark-on-Trent* II (1904–7), 280–1 for biographical details.
- <sup>3</sup>T. Bailey, *Annals of Nottinghamshire* IV (1853–5), 87, 97, 108.
- <sup>4</sup>*A Complete Collection of the Papers which were published on occasion of the late Canvass and Election, for the Borough of Newark, in the months of May and June, 1790* (1791), 40–1.
- <sup>5</sup>Public Record Office TS 11/836/2820.
- <sup>6</sup>D. Holt, *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Printer of the Newark Herald* (1794), 89.
- <sup>7</sup>Dickinson to Portland, 18th May 1795, National University Manuscripts Department PwF 3348.
- <sup>8</sup>Sheffield Register, 26th August 1791.
- <sup>9</sup>Dickinson, *op. cit.*, 135, 210.
- <sup>10</sup>F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor* II (1797), 565. Gladstone, the Red candidate in 1832, observed that most of the Dissenters were Blues: British Library Add. MS. 44,777, fol. 9.
- <sup>11</sup>Bentinck to Newcastle, 13th, 17th December 1789; Newcastle to Bentinck (copy), 15th December 1789, N.U.M.D. NeC 2666; 2680; 2684.
- <sup>12</sup>Cf. W. R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the Principality of Wales* (1895), 48 for biographical details. Paxton's Court in Kirkgate is named after him.
- <sup>13</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, XIII, 111.
- <sup>14</sup>S. Fraser, *Reports of the Proceedings before Select Committees of the House of Commons in . . . cases of controverted Elections* I (1791–3) 286, 297.
- <sup>15</sup>Cf. the electoral analyses of Newark's political interests: M.D. Nottinghamshire Record Office QDE 2/1; QDE 2/3; N.U.M.D. NeC 4500.
- <sup>16</sup>*Complete Collection*, 85.
- <sup>17</sup>Fraser, *op. cit.*, I, 298.
- <sup>18</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, XLVI, 17–8, 51–2, 295, 334–5; Fraser, *op. cit.*, I, 264–315.
- <sup>19</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, XLVI, 705–6.
- <sup>20</sup>Case respecting the Election of Churchwardens at Newark (copy), N.U.M.D. NeC 4499; *Universal British Directory* IV (1791–7), 57.
- <sup>21</sup>*Easter Election, 1791* [Newark, 1791], *passim*; Sheffield Register, 6th May 1791. Cf. Derby Mercury, 5th May 1791 for the Reds' version of the riot, and Nottingham Journal, 7th May 1791 for the Blues' version.
- <sup>22</sup>Star, 10th November 1791; Newark Herald, 16th November 1791.
- <sup>23</sup>Case respecting the Riots at the late Election of Churchwardens at Newark, N.R.O. PR 170a.
- <sup>24</sup>*Trial of an Action for Bribery*, 130; Book of Evidence, N.U.M.D. NeC 4498; List of Tenants given notice to quit, NeC 4507.
- <sup>25</sup>Brough to Godfrey, 3rd February 1791, N.R.O., CP 5/2/43.
- <sup>26</sup>*Trial of an Action for Bribery*, *passim*; Nottingham Journal, 20th August 1791; Sheffield Register, 26th August 1791.
- <sup>27</sup>Diary, 11th November 1791; Newark Herald, 16th November 1791, 25th January, 1st February 1792.



- <sup>28</sup>The complete set of the *Newark Herald* is in Newark Museum and Art Gallery. On 23rd January 1793 Holt also commenced publication of the *Briton*, a weekly political periodical.
- <sup>29</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, XLVII, 133, 442–3, 503–4, 725–6.
- <sup>30</sup>*Newark Herald*, 21st March 1792; *Nottingham Journal*, 24th March 1792.
- <sup>31</sup>*An Account of the Money expended, by the Churchwardens, to the Tradesmen of Newark, in the years 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1789, and 1790* (1792), 10.
- <sup>32</sup>*Oracle*, 20th June 1792.
- <sup>33</sup>*Newark Herald*, 21st March 1792.
- <sup>34</sup>*Nottingham Journal*, 14th April 1792; *Newark Herald*, 18th April 1792; *Oracle*, 21st June 1792; *Times*, 28th November 1792.
- <sup>35</sup>Godfrey to Reeves, 2nd February 1793, B.L., Add. MS. 16,925, fol. 5., Cf. Add. MS. 16,931, fol. 110.
- <sup>36</sup>Holt, *op. cit.*, 3–7, 13–8, 74; P.R.O., TS 11/836/2820.
- <sup>37</sup>*Journals of the House of Commons*, XLVIII, 18–9, 97, 157, 193–4, 407.
- <sup>38</sup>Gibbs to Brough, 20th February 1793, N.R.O., M 23966; *Nottingham Journal*, 23rd March 1793; *Derby Mercury*, 28th March 1793.
- <sup>39</sup>Holt to Portland, 28th December 1795, N.U.M.D. PwF 9845.
- <sup>40</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 13th May 1793; *Oracle*, 13th May 1793.
- <sup>41</sup>*Newark Herald*, 24th July 1793; Holt, *op. cit.*, 20–33; F. D. Cartwright, *Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright I* (1826), 199–200; *Monthly Magazine*, XIX (1805), 34–5.
- <sup>42</sup>Brough to Kinderley (copy), 25th July 1793; Godfrey to Manners Sutton, 18th August 1793; Manners Sutton to White, 21st August 1793, P.R.O., HO 42/26; *London Gazette*, 27th August 1793.
- <sup>43</sup>*Newark Herald*, 4th December 1793; Holt, *op. cit.*, 33–69.
- <sup>44</sup>Holt, *op. cit.*, 11, 85.
- <sup>45</sup>Holt to Scott, n.d. [early February 1795]; Scott to Holt, 'Thursday' [5th February 1795]; Holt to Portland, 7th February 1795, P.R.O., HO 42/34; Holt to Portland, 28th December 1795, N.U.M.D. PwF 9845.
- <sup>46</sup>Holt to Adams, 29th March 1794, P.R.O., TS 11/960/3506(1).
- <sup>47</sup>*Midland Mercury*, 1st October 1794; *Leicester Herald*, 9th January 1795.
- <sup>48</sup>Handbill enclosed in Charlton Brough to Portland, 25th July 1795, P.R.O., HO 42/35; Dickinson to Portland, 11th November 1795, HO 42/36.
- <sup>49</sup>King to White (copy), 14th December 1795, 8th February 1796, P.R.O., HO 49/3.
- <sup>50</sup>T. H. B. Oldfield, *An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal, of the Boroughs of Great Britain II* (1792), 364.
- <sup>51</sup>Canvassing Records and Promises, MS. in Gilstrap Library, Newark.
- <sup>52</sup>1796 Poll Book; Dickinson, *op. cit.*, 132.
- <sup>53</sup>*Nottingham Journal*, 29th April, 10th June 1797.
- <sup>54</sup>Advertisement inserted in Dickinson, *op. cit.*
- <sup>55</sup>Laird, *op. cit.*, XII, 244.
- <sup>56</sup>*Complete Collection*, 19–21, 26–7; Dickinson to Portland, 18th May 1795, N.U.M.D. PwF 3348. On both occasions, the Reds had refused to divide the representation.

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