

The adoption of the Report was proposed by the President, Mr. Keyser, and seconded by Mr. W. Wing of Caversham, who suggested the Clergy should be asked to utilise their Parish Magazines for spreading the knowledge of the Scheme and interesting the villagers in the history and antiquities of their neighbourhoods. He also pointed out that Women's Institutes were specially interested in the subject, and appreciated very much lectures on history or antiquities.

## The Corporation Act Commissioners in Reading in 1662.

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**M**OST readers of this Journal will be aware of the immense value of the four volumes of Reading Records edited by the late Rev. J. M. Guilding; the last of which appeared in 1896, and carried the Diary of the Corporation down to December 1654. Like other records of their kind they form a rich store of material for historians of all types, whether national or local, political or constitutional, social or economic; and since their publication have been continually utilized and quoted in important works. The original plan was to continue the publication of the Diary, at least up to the accession of the House of Hanover in 1714<sup>1</sup>; but as we all know and regret, that aim has so far not been accomplished. Among Mr. Guilding's papers acquired after his death for the town reference library is a file containing part of the materials for a fifth volume, which would have carried the Diary up to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. This was reported upon by a sub-committee at the time of acquirement, as being apparently in a state ready for publication; but that is not quite the case, since there are some conspicuous gaps in the MS. (which in the meantime the present writer has been able to supply from the original), and since the whole material still awaits competent editing. There are also

<sup>1</sup> Guilding; *Records of Reading* (cited hereinafter as Guilding); vol. i, Preface, p. vi.

signs in later volumes of the original MS. Diary of the Corporation that they had at some time or other been deposited in the Bodleian Library for the purpose of transcription; but no evidence of the existence of further copies has been discovered.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the urgency that exists for the publication of a further instalment of these invaluable records. The material in the unpublished part, particularly from the Restoration of 1660 to the Revolution of 1688, is no whit less important than any which has already been issued; and throws a flood of light on a vast number of problems of national as well as local interest. Its full value can hardly be guessed from the somewhat scanty references in the Historical MSS. Commission Report on the Reading Corporation MSS., or the Victoria County History, and still less from the almost obsolete histories of Coates, Man, and Doran. As an illustration, the Editors of this Journal have enabled me to publish here, with a few comments, the account which the commissioners appointed to administer the Corporation Act of 1661, left in the borough records of their activities in the following May. Not only is this one of the most interesting of the unpublished parts of the Diary itself, but, so far as I can ascertain from a search through the Historical MSS. Commission Reports, and a number of town histories, I am inclined to think that scarcely anywhere else can there exist so full and precise a contemporary account of the administration of this particular Act of Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

A few introductory remarks on the Act in question are first required. The Corporation Act, or more correctly, the 'Act for the well-governing and regulating of Corporations' was one of the earliest measures passed by 'Cavalier' Parliament of 1661-79; and although it became, in practice, obsolete from the early years of George I, was not totally and finally repealed until 1828. It was the first of the so-called Clarendon Code; but even in the enthusiastically loyal House of Commons of 1661

<sup>2</sup> The cases of Plymouth and Pontefract may possibly be of similar value. Cf. *Hist. MSS. Com. Reports, passim*. I have been permitted to make the transcripts from the *Reading MSS.* by the courtesy of the Town Clerk, Mr. C. S. Johnson.

encountered a good deal of opposition. In the House of Lords a special committee which included (and was possibly presided over by) James Duke of York, proposed drastic amendments; which would have involved the surrender of all existing borough charters, and their renewal only upon conditions which would have secured to the Crown perpetually, the nomination of all town clerks and recorders, and a virtual veto upon the election of mayors. Most of the Lords' amendments were successfully resisted by the Commons; but the differences between the two houses were only settled after three joint conferences; and as a result of the Lords' intervention (which almost undoubtedly represented the view of the government), the general stringency of the measure seems to have been increased, and at least one vital change was made. In the bill as it first left the lower house the Commons had inserted the names of commissioners, selected by themselves, who were to put the Act into force in the various localities: but these were cancelled in the upper house, and the Commons at length had to agree that the function of nominating the commissioners should be left entirely to the Crown under the Great Seal.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the Act as finally agreed upon was thus stated in the preamble:—'And to the end that the succession in such corporations may be most profitably perpetuated in the hands of persons well affected to His Majesty and the established government.' It then enacted that commissioners were to be appointed under the Great Seal to visit cities, corporations, boroughs, etc., and to require the mayors, and all other officers and magistrates before the 25th March, 1663:—(a) to take the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy; (b) to take a special oath declaring 'That it is not lawful upon any pretence whatsoever to take arms against the King'; (c) to subscribe publicly a declaration against the Solemn League and Covenant. The offices of those refusing any of these were to be *ipso facto* vacated. Further, the commissioners were to have still wider powers by reason of two provisions, which are generally omitted from

<sup>3</sup> *Commons' Journals*, viii; and *Lords' Journals*, xi, *passim*.

the histories of the period<sup>4</sup>; but which I shall hope to show, in view of the immediate policy of the Crown, were possibly the most important of all. Any five of them were fully empowered, should they 'deem it expedient for the public 'safety' to remove any such officers from their respective places 'although such persons shall have taken and subscribed, or 'be willing to take and subscribe, the said oaths and declaration.' They were also empowered to fill up all vacancies thus created, from among those who were or previously had been inhabitants; and such appointments were to have full effect as though these new nominees had been 'duely elected and chosen according 'to the Charters and former usages of the said respective Cities 'Corporations . . .' etc.

Other clauses directed the commissioners to leave records of their proceedings in the local registers; exonerated them from actions at law by reason of their due execution of the Act; made provision for handing on the function of administering the oaths and declaration to local Justices of the Peace, after the termination of the commission on the 25th March, 1663; and from that date imposed a fresh proviso, that all newly elected municipal officers were to have taken the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England within one year previous to their appointment.<sup>5</sup>

It will be clear from this short summary that the commissioners, during the course of their commission, *i.e.* until the 25th March, 1663, were to be entrusted with practically unlimited powers to exclude, not merely the notoriously disaffected, but anyone whose fidelity to the new régime was in any way suspect, even though he might be anxious to make his peace. In the case of Lancashire for instance, the Earl of Derby actually

<sup>4</sup> *E.g.* no reference to either of them is to be found in the constitutional histories of Hallam, Maitland, or Medley; or in the political histories of this period by Lodge and Trevelyan. Even Robertson's *Select Statutes*, *etc.*, omits the latter of them. Mr. Keith Feiling, *History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714*, p. 111, mentions them, but he overlooks the changes that were actually made by the House of Lords. *Cf. Statutes of the Realm*, 13 Car. II, c. 1.

<sup>5</sup> It would have been impossible to enforce this immediately, since the Act of Uniformity was still to come.

proposed that the commissioners for that shire should make it a rule 'that all who had ever been against the King, or given 'no testimony of loyalty before the Restoration should be 'turned out, even though willing to take the oath.'<sup>6</sup> Although this particular proposal was rejected, as being too harsh and against the custom of other places, it shows how far certain enthusiastic royalists would like to have gone.

It is difficult to estimate at present, the precise extent to which these vast powers were actually put into force throughout the country; because, in spite of the injunction that the commissioners were to leave records of their proceedings in the local registers, a great many of these seem to have disappeared. In spite of a few very interesting cases, the total number of references in the reports of the Historical MSS. Commissions, the Calendars of State Papers, and such town histories as I have been able to consult, is disappointingly small. But yet enough records survive to suggest that drastic changes in the personnel of the corporations must have been frequent, probably much more so than we should gather from our ordinary histories; and especially, as one would expect, in those towns which had been of strategic importance during the civil war, or notably prominent supporters of the commonwealth régime. There had been thorough purgings of the corporations during the later civil war and the commonwealth; and opportunity was now taken to reverse matters; to dismiss the intruders of the commonwealth epoch; to restore previously ejected royalists wherever possible; and to fill any remaining vacancies with carefully selected nominees, who were not merely passively loyal, but were prepared actively to support the crown policy (including perhaps anticipated demands for money), and who could be relied upon when the next elections should take place, to choose trustworthy members of parliament. There is evidence scattered throughout the records and the calendars that the commissioners kept carefully in touch with the Privy Council (at least one of them in each case would normally be a Privy Councillor); and,

<sup>6</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series* (hereinafter cited as C.S.P.D.); Chas. II, 1661-2, p. 517.

in view of instructions from headquarters, and the known inclinations of the commissioners themselves (being of course all staunch royalists), we can scarcely doubt, particularly after an examination of the following excerpts from the Reading records, that ere the visitations took place, certain members of the existing corporations were already marked for dismissal, and some other individuals at least already destined to take their places.

In no county in England do the functions of the commissioners seem to have been more thoroughly performed than in Berkshire; and before concentrating our attention upon Reading we may note briefly what happened in other towns in this shire. In Abingdon, apparently the first Berkshire borough visited, one principal Burgess was discharged on May 26th, 1662; and, on the following January 23rd, eighteen other principal and secondary Burgesses were similarly ejected.<sup>7</sup> In Newbury, in June 1662, three Aldermen were discharged, their persons secured, and an order was issued by the Privy Council directing that they should be sent for to show reasons for their refusal to take the oath.<sup>8</sup> In Wallingford, on June 26th, 1662, the Mayor, five Aldermen, and nine Burgesses were discharged; and thereupon a former Mayor, and the other Aldermen and Burgesses who had been ejected under the commonwealth were restored.<sup>9</sup> In Windsor, on July 14th, 1662, four Aldermen were discharged; and not only were these vacancies filled up, but several other appointments were made by the commissioners.<sup>10</sup> In Maidenhead, on November 17th, 1662, the Warden and two Burgesses were discharged.<sup>11</sup>

Reading no whit less urgently than these other places required the attention of the Restoration government. The town before

<sup>7</sup> I owe this information to Mr. A. E. Preston, F.S.A., and his secretary, my former pupil, Miss A. Baker, B.A.

<sup>8</sup> C.S.P.D. Chas. II, 1661-2, p. 419.

<sup>9</sup> J. K. Hedges: *History of Wallingford*, ii, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> Tighe and Davis: *Annals of Windsor*, ii, pp. 302-3.

<sup>11</sup> J. W. Walker: *History of Maidenhead*, pp. 99-102. In all these cases the word Burgess is used in the restricted sense as a member of the governing Corporation. I am informed by Mr. Arthur T. Heelas that the records of Wokingham for this period have disappeared.

the outbreak of the civil war seems to have been a hot bed of Puritanism. Party feeling had run very high during the war and the siege; and upon the triumph of the parliamentary forces there had been drastic purgings of 'malignants' from corporation, church, and school.

Moreover, during the interregnum between the death of Cromwell in September 1658, and the restoration of Charles II in May 1660, violent partisan altercations had broken out within the Reading council chamber; which must probably be related to those breaches within the ranks of Puritanism which had weakened the Protectorate, and very largely accounted for the rapid dissolution of the Commonwealth after Cromwell's death. On December 17th, 1658, a majority of the Corporation had voted the existing mayor, Joel Stephens, out of office; but they ultimately failed to maintain their position, and in the course of 1659 had in their turn been one and all excluded from office by Joel Stephens and his supporters.<sup>12</sup> Further reference to this interesting episode must be postponed for the present, though it should be kept always in mind that just before the Restoration took place the personnel of the Puritan Corporation of Reading had already been extensively modified. And further, as we shall soon see, some of the remaining officers had lately fallen seriously into disfavour with the Restoration government.

On the 27th of May 1662, the day after their first visit to Abingdon, certain of the commissioners appointed to administer the Corporation Act in Berkshire appeared in Reading and held a special session in the Guild Hall; when the Mayor Samuel Jemmatt, seven Aldermen, and six Burgesses or Assistants, *i.e.* fourteen out of a total membership of twenty-five, and including all those still remaining who had been supporters of Joel Stephens in the altercation of December 1658, were dismissed from their offices; and their places filled by others on the sole authority and nomination of the commissioners. The record of these proceedings occupies no less than seven-and-a-half pages of the Corporation Diary, besides several other scattered

<sup>12</sup> *Hist. MSS. Comm., 11th Report App., Pt. vii* (cited hereinafter as H.M.C. 11, vii), p. 193.

references occasioned by change of offices and further oath takings. The concluding part of it is also more carefully copied out again into a separate volume, known as the Register, in which it was the custom to record the more important business of the Corporation.

First, in the handwriting of Edward Hutton, the clerk of the commissioners, comes the declaration required by the Act against the Solemn League and Covenant, in the following words :—

(Italics in the transcript indicate abbreviations in the MS.)

I [ten names with offices follow] doe according to an Act of Parliament entituled an Act for the well governing & regulateinge of Corporacions doe [*sic*] declare that there lyes noe obligacion vpon mee or any other person from the oath comonly called the solemne League & Covenant & that the same was in it selfe an vnlawfull oath & imposed vpon the subiectes of this Realme against the knowne Lawes & Libertyes of this Kingdom.

This is signed by five Aldermen and five Burgesses or Assistants from the existing members of the corporation, and witnessed and signed by four of the commissioners. Then in another hand follows a similar declaration made and signed by the newly appointed Mayor George Thorne, and eight other fresh nominees, and witnessed and signed by five commissioners.

Then in the handwriting of Edward Wilmer, the Reading Town Clerk, comes the following short account of the proceedings ; which appears to be incomplete as it breaks off in the middle of a sentence :—

(*Reading Corporation Diary*, 10, Folio 42b.)

Borough of Reading in Comitatu Berkes  
Tuesday 17<sup>o</sup> May 1662.

Commissioners This day the right Hoble John Lord Lovelace  
Sir Thomas Rich Baronett Sir Richard Braham  
Sir Richard Powle Knts & George Purefoy Esqr  
being Commissionated by his Majesty to put in  
execucion an Act of Parliament intituled an  
Act for the well governing and regulateing



of Corporacions Did by Order vnder their hands & seales<sup>13</sup> by virtue of the said Commission and in pursuance of the said Act Declare order and adiudge that Mr. George Thorne Maior Aldermen is Maior Alderman Justice of the Peace & Assistantes & Clarke of the Markett of the said Borough & that Mr. *William* Brackston senior is an Alderman of the said Borough & that Mr Thomas Kenton is an Alderman of the said Borough & that Mr. Thomas Seikes is an Alderman & a Justice of the peace of the said Borough And that Mr Richard Stephenson Mr Robert Creed sen Mr James Winch Mr Francis Phipps Mr Thomas Coates Mr Edward Johnson Mr William Brackston Jun Mr Robert Terrol & Mr Michael Reading & every of them are Aldermen of the said Borough And that Edward Dalby Esqr is one of the Burgesses & Assistants & Steward of the said Borough And that Mr Francis Lewendon Mr Thomas Tilleard Mr Richard Fellowe Mr Edward Kent Mr John Blake Mr Robert Staples Mr Richard Johnson Mr Giles Pocke Mr John Creed Mr Samuel Howse Mr Edward Langford & every of them are Burgesses & Assistantes of and within the said Borough Dated the twenty seaventh daie of Maye Anno Regni Caroli *secundi* nunc Regis *Angliae* etc decimoquarto

Mr Seikes.

This day Mr Thomas Seikes did take his oath to execute the Office of a Justice of the Peace of & in the said Borough

This day alsoe the said Mr George Thorne now Maior did take the oaths of Maior Alderman Justice of the Peace & Clarke of the Markett of & in this Borough.

Then also [the rest of the page is blank].

<sup>13</sup> The seals have unfortunately disappeared.

To the above, the clerk of the commissioners also added a marginal note as follows:—

‘ This alsoe to be omitted in the Register booke the same  
 ‘ being hereafter mencioned & inserted in this booke for yt  
 ‘ purpose.’

He is referring to the much fuller account of the whole proceedings, several pages later on towards the end of the Diary, in his own holograph, upon which I must ask the reader to concentrate his special attention. Apparently the commissioners were dissatisfied with the incomplete account which was being entered by the Town Clerk; and therefore directed their own clerk to make the following comprehensive record.

(*Reading Corporation Diary*, 10, Folio 46b.)

The Burrough of Reading in the County of Berkes	}	<i>Scilicet</i> At the sessions holden at the Guild Hall of the said Burrough the 27th of May 1662 Before the right honble John Lord Louelace Sir Thomas Rich Barrt Sir Richard Powle Knt of the Bath Sir Richard Braham Knt George Purefoy esqr & Edward Dalby Esqr Commissioners by Vertue of his Majesties Comission vnder the greate Seale of England beareing date the twentyeth day of February last past & in pursuance of an Act of this present Parliament intituled an Act for the well governing & regulateing of Corporacions :
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Imprimis the said Comission was read in Latin & English & the said Act of Parliament was read by Mr Wilmer Towne Clerke in the presence of Mr Samuell Jemmatt Mayor & his brethren present and then the Company were all comanded to withdraw for a tyme.

Item Mr Samuell Jemmatt after a Vote had passed on him by the said Commissioners that hee was Vnfitt to bee trusted with the government of the said Corporacion was by order vnder the handes and Seales of the said right honble John Lord Louelace Sir Thomas Rich Sir Richard Powle Sir Richard Braham & the said George Purefoy Esqr being fieve

of the *Commissioners* appoynted by the said *Comission* removed & displaced from his offices of Mayor Alderman Justice of Peace and Clerke of the markt within the said Burrough and was then alsoe ordered to Bring & deliver the Mace Seales & Keyes belonging to the said Burrough & all other things concerning his said offices (which doe of right belong vnto the said Burrough) vnto the said *Commissioners* at the Guild halle aforesaid *Immediatly* after the receipt of the said order to bee disposed of by the said *Commissioners* to the vse of the said Burrough.

(f.47a)

Item Mr Peter Thorne Mr Joel Stephens Mr William Castell & Mr Peter Horne thelder after the like votes had passed on every of them by the said *Commissioners* were every of them by the like orders removed and displaced from every of their offices of Aldermen *within* the said Burrough :

Item Mr Robert James for refusing to subscribe the declaracion mencioned in the said Act of *Parliament* was by the like order removed & displaced from his offices of Alderman & Justice of Peace *within* the said Burrough :

Item Mr William Knight & Mr William Wilder for refusing to subscribe the declaracion before mencioned were both of them by the like orders removed & displaced from their offices of Aldermen *within* the said Burrough.

Item Mr William Ambrose Mr John Maulthus & Mr William Belchamber after the like votes had passed on every of them by the said *Commissioners* were every of them by the like orders removed and displaced from every of their offices of Burgesses and assistantes *within* the said Burrough.

Item Mr Thomas Goade after the like vote had passed on him by the said *Commissioners* was by the like order removed & displaced from his offices of Burgesse & assistant & Chamberlaine *within* the said Burrough.

Item Mr Stephen Atwater for refusing to subscribe the Declaracion before mencioned was by the like order removed & displaced from his office of Burgesse & assistant *within* the said Burrough.

Item Mr John Kent for refusing to subscribe the declaracion aforesaid was by the like order removed and displaced from his offices of Burgesse & assistant & Chamberlaine within the said Burrough.

Item Mr William Brackston senr Mr Thomas Kenton Mr Thomas Seikes Mr Richard Stephenson & Mr James Winch Aldermen within the said Burrough and Mr Thomas Coates Mr William Brackston iur Mr Francis Lewindon Mr Robert Tirrell & Mr Thomas Tilleard Burgesses & assistantes within the said Burrough did every of them before the said Commissioners take the oathes of Allegiance & Supremacy & the other oath in the said Act of Parliament mencioned & every of them did subscribe the Declaracion before mencioned. [In the margin is here written—See the subscripcions 5 leaves backe in this booke]

Item Mr George Thorne by order under the handes and seale of the said fiue Commissioners was put & placed into the offices of Mayor Alderman Justice of the Peace & Clerke of the markt within the said Burrough in the place of Mr Samuel Jemmatt :

[Several words are struck out here.]

Item The said Mr Thomas Seikes by the like order was put & placed into the office of Justice of the Peace within the said Burrough in the place of Mr Robert James.

Item Mr Robert Creed senr Mr Francis Phipps the said Mr Thomas Coates Mr Edward Johnson the said Mr William Brackston iur the said Mr Robert Tirrell & Mr Michael Reading by the like orders were every of them put & placed into the offices of Aldermen within the said Burrough :

Item Mr Richard Fellow Mr Edward Kent Mr John Blake Mr Robert Staples Mr Richard Johnson Mr Gyles Pocke Mr John Creede Mr Samuell Howse & Mr Edward Langford by the like orders were every of them put and placed into the offices of Burgesses & assistantes within the said [Burgesses struck out] Burrough.

Item Before the said Commissioners the said Mr George Thorne did take the oathes of Allegiance & Supremacy & the other

oathe in the said Act of Parliament mencioned and did subscribe the declaracion before mencioned and did alsoe take the severall oathes for the execucion of his said severall offices & then the said Mace Seales & Keyes were delivered to him by the said Commissioners.

Item The said Mr Thomas Seikes did then take his oath for the due execucion of his said office of Justice of the Peace :

Item The said Mr James Winch did then take his oath for the execucion of his said office of Alderman hee haueing beene formerly elected into the said office by the late Mayor Aldermen & Burgesses of the said Burrough but was not sworne till now.<sup>14</sup>

Item The said Mr Robert Creede senr Mr Edward Johnson Mr Michaell Reading Mr Edward Kent Mr John Blake Mr Richard Johnson Mr Gyles Pockocke and Mr Edward Langford did then every of them take the oaths of Allegiance & Supremacy and the said other oath in the said Act of Parliament mencioned & did alsoe every of them subscribe the declaracion before mencioned.

[In the margin is here written—See the subscripciones 5 or 6 leaves backe in this booke.]

[f. 48a.]

Item. The said Mr Robert Creede Mr Thomas Coates Mr Edward Johnson Mr William Brackston iunr Mr Robert Tirrell & Mr Michaell Reading did then every of them respectiuey take their oathes for the due execucion of their said offices of Aldermen.

Item. The said Mr John Blake Mr Richard Johnson & Mr Gyles Pockocke did every of them respectiuey take their oathes for the execucion of their said offices of Burgesses & assistantes.

Item. The said Mr Edward Kent & Mr Edward Langford prayed further tyme to consider of the oath for executeing the said offices of Burgesses & assistantes & did not at present take the same.

<sup>14</sup> He had been elected to fill a vacancy caused by a recent death.

Item. The said Mr Francis Phipps Mr Richard Fellow Mr Robert Staples Mr John Creede & Mr Samuel Howse being all of them at this tyme out of Towne or otherwise absent from their Dwelling howses about their vrgent occasions Did not at this tyme attend the *Commissioners* to take the said oathes and subscribe the said Declaracion.

Item. By two seuerall orders vnder the handes & seales of the said fiue *Commissioners* Mr John Kent & Mr Thomas Goade late Chamberlaines of the said Burrough should forthwith yeild an account to the present Mayor Aldermen & Burgesses of the said Burrough for all moneys by them Receaued belonging to the said Corporacion and that they should forthwith pay all such money belonging to the said Corporacion as is now in their handes and deliver vp all the Rent Rolls *which* they haue belonging to the said Burrough or that concern the Landes thereof.

Item. The *Commissioners* by A Declaracion vnder their handes & Seales for setling the order of the Company within the said Burrough haue Declared That Mr George Thorne is Mayor Alderman Justice of Peace Clerke of the markett within the said Burrough & That Mr William Brackston senr & Mr Thomas Kenton are Aldermen within the said Burrough and that Mr Thomas Seikes is an Alderman & Justice of Peace within the said Burrough and that Mr Richard Stephenson Mr Robert Creede senr Mr James Winch Mr Francis Phipps Mr Thomas Coates Mr Edward [f. 48b] Johnson Mr William Brackston iunr Mr Robert Tirrell & Mr Michael Reading are Aldermen within the said Burrough And that Edward Dalby Esqr is a Burgesse & assistant & Steward within the said Burrough and that Mr Francis Lewindon Mr Thomas Tilleard Mr Richard Fellow Mr Edward Kent Mr John Blake Mr Robert Staples Mr Richard Johnson Mr Gyles Pococke Mr John Creede Mr Samuel Howse & Mr Edward Langford are Burgesses & assistants within the said Burrough.

Entred by Ed: Hutton Clerke  
to the said Comissioners

Close examination of this record reveals some interesting facts. In nominating commissioners for each separate county, the Privy Council generally selected leading resident royalist members of the nobility and gentry; and seem to have designedly included some who had direct acquaintance with the state of affairs of the towns within the shire, such as local members of parliament, landowners from neighbouring parishes, and even prominent borough officials; men that is to say who could vouch from personal knowledge concerning the reputation of existing members of the corporations, and concerning the claims and qualifications of those destined to fill up any vacancies created. A few words therefore about the commissioners for Reading will be appropriate.

At the head we find the name of John Lord Lovelace (1616-70), second baron of that name, of Lady Place, Hurley, Berks. He was a staunch royalist who had signed the declaration in favour of Charles I in June 1642, had joined the king in Oxford in August 1643, and on the triumph of the Parliament had been forced to compound for his estates with a fine, which although considerably reduced from the first assessment, was still enormous. At the Restoration he was made Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, and a Privy Councillor. He had been commissioned (with others) to tender the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy to members of the Corporation and the clergy of Reading in January 1661.<sup>15</sup> He was a member of the committee of the House of Lords which drafted the drastic amendments to the Corporation Act beforementioned<sup>16</sup>: he also acted as a commissioner under the Act not only in Reading but for all the other five Berkshire boroughs for which we have information; and appears to have been chief commissioner in all these except in the case of Windsor.<sup>17</sup> He was the father of the better known John Lord Lovelace (? 1638-93), the prominent Whig, eventually found among those who summoned over William of Orange from Holland in 1688.

<sup>15</sup> *Reading Corporation MSS. Diary* 10. f. 4b.

<sup>16</sup> *Lords' Journals*; xi, p. 313.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *D.N.B.* and works cited ante p.

Sir Thomas Rich, Bart. (1601-67), of Sonning, near Reading, was a native of Gloucester, educated in London, and became a wealthy merchant of the metropolis and a member of the Vintners' Company. He was elected an Alderman of Bridge Within Ward in September 1650 in place of a dissentient royalist; but refused to serve and was fined £500.<sup>18</sup> During the Commonwealth he was well known for his generous hospitality to ejected Anglican clergy and other sufferers from the Puritan régime, at his country seat at Sonning; but he seems at length to have acquiesced in the Cromwellian settlement, for he was High Sheriff of Berks in the year of the Protector's death.<sup>19</sup> He was elected one of the M.P.s for Reading in the Convention parliament of 1660-1,<sup>20</sup> and was made a freeman of the borough in April 1661. He was among those who advanced money for the entertainment of the king on his return to England in May 1660;<sup>21</sup> and soon afterwards (1661) was knighted and made a baronet. On May 5 1662, he was recommended by Charles II to the Lord Mayor and Commissioners for regulating the Corporation of London, in place of an ejected Alderman; the king personally testifying to 'his constant zeal to the service.' But he probably declined this honour again, since there is no record of his election.<sup>22</sup> He is among the well known benefactors of Reading, having left by his will £1,000 for the addition of six boys to the Reading Bluecoat School, three to be from Sonning. His grave and monument (*q.v.*) are in Sonning Church, and a portrait of him hangs in the Mayor's Parlour at Reading.

Sir Richard Powle of Shottesbrook, Berks (1630-78), was one of the M.P.s for this shire in the parliaments of 1660-1 (in which his younger brother Henry was Speaker), and 1661-79. He was knighted and made K.C.B. in 1661. He also acted as one of the commissioners for Maidenhead and Windsor.

<sup>18</sup> Beavan; *The Aldermen of the City of London*.

<sup>19</sup> *Reading Corporation MSS. Diary* 7, Sept. 6, 1658.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* *Diary* 9, April 10, 1660; and *H.M.C. Reports*.

<sup>21</sup> *C.S.P.D.*: Chas. II, 1659-60, p. 600.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1661-2, pp. 361-2; and Beavan; *Aldermen of London*.



Sir Richard Braham of New Windsor was in Oxford when it surrendered to Fairfax in June, 1646 ; and had to compound for his estates. He was M.P. for Windsor in the parliament of 1661-79, and was made a baronet in 1662. He was also one of the commissioners for Windsor. George Purefoy of Wadley, Berks (? 1629-70) was made a baronet in 1662. He also acted for Abingdon.

Edward Dalby, born about 1615-6, was the son of Thomas Dalby, a London merchant. A barrister of the Inner Temple, Dalby had been appointed Steward of Reading in May 1660, in place of the notorious parliamentarian and regicide Daniel Blagrove, who fled at the Restoration. As Steward, Dalby was a member of the corporation and Recorder of the borough court ; and therefore well qualified to speak as to the reputation of the officials affected by the new Act.

In the next place, in examining the fuller account of the proceedings it will be noticed that there is a discrimination between two sets of cases among those who were discharged. On the one hand are those removed merely after a vote passed on them by the commissioners ; as in the paragraph (p. 27) relating to the Mayor, and in the next paragraph dealing with four of the Aldermen. On the other hand are those removed ' for refusing ' to subscribe the declaracion mencioned in the said Act of ' Parliament.' The same discrimination is to be seen also when the Burgesses or Assistants are dealt with. There can be scarcely any doubt that in the former category, including nine in all, are those whose fate had been practically decided upon beforehand, and who were to be dismissed whether they were willing or not to take the oaths and subscribe the declaration : at any rate they were not given the option. This view receives some confirmation when we consider the cases of those now dismissed ; and especially of the ejected Mayor Samuel Jemmatt, and of Joel Stephens, already mentioned as the Mayor at the time of the disturbance of December 1658.

Concerning Samuel Jemmatt (or Jemmat) there can be no question as to his strong, not to say extreme, Puritanical convictions ; and as to his obnoxious reputation in the eyes of the

Restoration Government. He had been first elected to the Corporation in March 1645-6, with six others (including Joel Stephens), to take the places of some ejected royalists.<sup>23</sup> Now, as Mayor, he had already been adversely reported upon to the Privy Council in October 1661, for two delinquencies. Firstly, he had attempted to shield a notorious Anabaptist preacher, one William Stanley, a cordwainer of Reading, who was conducting unorthodox services (including the celebration of matrimony) at Shinfield parish church. Stanley maintained that he was authorized to do so by the suspended vicar of the parish; and aided by 'the factious parishioners who disclaimed the authority of Bishops'<sup>24</sup> and by 'sixty stout fellows from Reading and the neighbourhood'<sup>25</sup> was defying orders for his ejection issued by the diocesan, the Bishop of Salisbury. His arrest was then ordered by the Privy Council; but Jemmatt used his authority as Mayor of Reading to take him into custody himself, and refused to surrender him to the Council's messenger on the pretext that he himself had a claim upon Stanley for £6; which claim, says the messenger, was 'presumably procured to avoid his appearance before Council.'<sup>26</sup> Secondly, at the same time the Rev. Thomas Tuer, vicar of St. Laurence's (recently appointed in the place of the puritan Simon Ford), and rural dean, reported 'that the mayor (Jemmat) refused to order common prayers to be read at 6 o'clock every morning, according to Mr Kenrick's will, alleging that there would be alterations before Christmas.'<sup>27</sup>

It is also of some interest to note that the vicar of St. Giles, Reading, at this time was the well known puritan divine and writer the Rev. William Jemmat, a native of Reading, of whom Anthony Wood says that his father had been twice Mayor of the borough in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.<sup>28</sup> Wood is

<sup>23</sup> Guilding: iv, pp. 187-8.

<sup>24</sup> *C.S.P.D.*: Chas. II, 1661-2, p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116. My colleague, Mr. S. A. Peyton, Reading University Librarian, has also made a verbatim transcript of the whole of this incident from the State Papers, which he has kindly allowed me to see.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>28</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxon.*, and cf. *D.N.B.* under Jemmat.

undoubtedly mistaken here, because the name does not occur (nor any of its variants)<sup>29</sup>, in the list of the mayors before 1661, nor among the members of the corporation before 1645. But in October 1597, a Willelmus Gemett was nominated as one of the wardens of High Ward,<sup>30</sup> and in October 1607, Willyam Jemott (probably the same man) as a warden of London Ward,<sup>31</sup> and this is very likely the origin of Wood's slip. At any rate, the name Jemmat, though uncommon elsewhere, was that of a prominent and well-to-do Reading family; and taking all these facts together, we may not be far wrong in surmising that some close kinship, as well as religious and political sympathy, existed between these two Reading puritans. The Rev. William Jemmat however, when his turn came soon afterwards under the Act of Uniformity, apparently conformed, since he retained his cure until his death in 1678. But our record seems to show that Samuel Jemmatt, whatever he may have been prepared to do, was not even given the option of subscribing; and his questionable behaviour of the preceding October must assuredly have sufficed to cause his summary ejection.

Further, it may be important to note that Samuel Jemmatt had been one of the supporters of Joel Stephens, the mayor who had been attacked and voted out of office in the altercation already referred to, which took place in the council chamber on December 17th, 1658; and that Joel Stephens is also among those now ejected without being given the option of subscribing. That earlier quarrel had arisen out of a disputed election to the second Protectorate parliament, two and a half years ere that (July 21st, 1656); but its ultimate causes, as I have suggested, probably penetrated much deeper, and may have represented lines of cleavage on fundamental political and religious questions. This interesting subject would repay further investigation, which just now however would lead us too far from our immediate topic. But from what evidence is available I am inclined to think that Joel Stephens and his

<sup>29</sup> The original form of the name seems to have been Gemote.

<sup>30</sup> Guilding : i, p. 444.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 18.

supporters leaned towards that phase of extreme parliamentarism represented by the Rump; and were therefore likely to be specially obnoxious, both to Cromwellian and to royalist. At any rate they seem to have some common bond; and it can scarcely be mere coincidence when we find that not only Joel Stephens himself, but every one of his supporters (eight altogether) still remaining from that altercation of 1658, were ejected in 1662, five out of the eight not being given the option of subscribing.

Thus, after two successive purgings in less than two-and-a-half years, the Reading Corporation was composed of an almost entirely fresh personnel. Only one (Robert Creed) of Joel Stephens's late excluded opponents was now reappointed; and of the other members; either those who now took the test, or those newly appointed by the commissioners in place of such as did not, only two, *i.e.* the new Mayor George Thorne, and William Brackston senr., had had previous experience of corporate office before the disturbance of December 1658; and both of them had been ejected during the civil war or Commonwealth under circumstances as follows.

George Thorne had been turned out, with seven others, obviously for royalist sympathies, in February 1645-6, as a result of 'a Petition made by the Inhabitanes of the Towne 'to the Commons' Howse of Parliament.'<sup>32</sup> None of his seven companions on that occasion however was now reappointed; and, unless death had in the meantime accounted for all of them, which is not very probable, we may conclude that the place had become too hot for those with views such as theirs. There are in fact many signs about the same time of royalist sympathisers withdrawing from the town, temporarily or permanently.

William Brackston is concerned in some events of considerable local importance, and his name occurs very frequently in the Diary. He had been elected mayor in the critical autumn of 1643 (after a year of civil war, including the siege in April); apparently much against his will, since he was chosen in his absence, and was shortly afterwards fined 40/- for non-attend-

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, pp. 181, 185.

ance.<sup>33</sup> In the following June he was the victim of the well-known kidnapping incident, being seized one night in a sudden raid of cavalier horsemen, and carried off to Wallingford, where he was detained for about a fortnight as a pledge for further royalist demands upon the town.<sup>34</sup> From about 1649 we find him getting into trouble for arrears of rent owing to the Corporation. In December 1655, he was 'discharged of his offices' of alderman and justice of the peace in pursuance of the Lord 'Protector's Declaration for settling the peace of the common-wealth.'<sup>35</sup> Then, after Cromwell's death, we find that in February 1659, he was reinstated (together with another since deceased) 'upon writs';<sup>36</sup> and about the same time, William Brackston junr., presumably his son, was appointed an assistant. On the whole his sympathies seem to have been royalist; but he had suffered severely from both sides, and probably, like the mass of his fellow countrymen, detested the tyranny of a Stuart or a Cromwell equally, and welcomed the Restoration as promising an era of moderate constitutional government.

Concerning the other fresh nominees, there are some further interesting facts to notice. Let us remind ourselves that there were altogether fifteen vacancies to be filled: one of them due to a recent death; and the other fourteen as a result of the commissioners' dismissals. Of the fifteen new nominees, eight accepted all right. But of the other seven, practically a half, we find that two could not yet make up their minds, and the other five did not even turn up.<sup>36A</sup>

The former two were Edward Kent and Edward Langford. Although they take the necessary Corporation Act oaths and subscription; they, in the significant words of our record, 'prayed further time to consider of the oath for executing the said offices of Burgesses & assistantes & did not at present take the same.' Of these two men, Edward Kent had previously been nominated during the interregnum (in February 1659),

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, pp. 87, 89.

<sup>34</sup> *H.M.C.*, II, vii, p. 219. Guilding: iv, pp. vii, 114-5. Childs: *Story of the Town of Reading*; pp. 164-6.

<sup>35</sup> *H.M.C.*, II, vii, p. 191.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>36A</sup> Ante; pp. 30, 31.

to take the place of one of Joel Stephens's excluded opponents; but he had declined, and had thereupon been fined the usual penalty of £20. He seems eventually to have declined again on this occasion, since his name does not appear in the future lists of attendances. The other man, Edward Langford, was not yet even a freeman of the borough. He ultimately accepted, and, at the next quarter-day's meeting, on June 23rd, he was made a freeman, and thereupon took his oath as Assistant. The record adds 'paid but 3s 6d the residue remitted.' Obviously a considerable financial concession had to be made to induce him to accept.<sup>37</sup>

Then, concerning the remaining five, no less than a third of all the new nominees, this somewhat extraordinary account is to be noted—'being all of them at this tyme out of Towne 'or otherwise absent from their Dwelling howses about their 'vrgent occasions Did not at this tyme attend the Commissioners 'to take the said oathes and subscribe the said Declaracion.' In other words, in spite of this solemn and formal session, news of which we may assume must have been bruited abroad, presided over by the Lord Lieutenant of the county, armed with all the majesty of the king's commission and the authority of the Privy Council, we find that five out of the fifteen new people summoned cannot even be discovered in their homes. And among them also is still another, Samuel Howse, who was not yet a freeman; and moreover from the words in which he was admitted at a subsequent meeting, we gather that he was a youth only just out of his apprenticeship.<sup>38</sup> Later, in July 1670, this same Samuel Howse, was expelled for attempting (among other things) 'to hinder the suppression of conventicles', but restored again in April, 1674; and was elected mayor in the ensuing October.<sup>39</sup> He was again ejected by the order of James II in 1687, and yet again restored in October 1688, when the latter king reinstated the forfeited borough charters.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The customary fee on admission as freeman after serving 7 or 8 years' apprenticeship in the town was 3/4; but in other cases it was generally 20/-; and there are instances in this period of fees as high as £5.

<sup>38</sup> *Reading Corporation Diary*, 10, f. 45a.

<sup>39</sup> *H.M.C.*, 11, vii, pp. 196-7.

<sup>40</sup> *Reading MSS. Diaries*, 13, 14, 16 and 17, under dates mentioned.

Another of these five, Francis Phipps, had about June 1660, petitioned the Privy Council for confirmation of his 'place of postmaster of Reading, granted him 19th March last by the Council of State, but his enjoyment thereof is impeded by Thos Coates of Reading, who pleads right from the late authorities.'<sup>41</sup> We do not know the result of this last dispute, although perhaps the presumption is in favour of Coates; for whereas the latter was one of the new Aldermen who accepted, Phipps apparently refused the like dignity, since his name does not appear in the future lists of attendances. The remaining three of those 'absent from their Dwelling howses' all eventually accepted, and there is nothing of special interest to record about them. On the other hand Richard Stephenson, one of the Aldermen who took the test before the commissioners, seems to have quickly changed his mind. His attendances soon dropped off altogether, and, in June 1663, after about a year's complete absence, he 'being seuerall times summoned to attend at Councell meetings according to his oath & nowe in person refuseing to continue in that office is fined 20li to be leaved by distresse or otherwise as the Company shalbe advised.'<sup>42</sup>

From all these facts I think we may conclude that the commissioners experienced exceptional difficulty in finding completely satisfactory men to fill the vacancies in Reading; and in fact, for a considerable time after these events, the full complement of twenty-five members of the corporation was not filled up. This may be partly due to the well known reluctance in those stormy times to face the risks and shoulder the burdens of corporate office, of which we have several other instances. The corporation had been held responsible for crushing assessments imposed by both sides during the civil war; and we find cases of substantial men being reduced to beggary, of incessant and piteous appeals for the refunding of monies pledged, and of actions at law, sometimes lasting for years afterwards, arising out of the late troubles. But, in spite of all this, it had generally been possible, except in very abnormal circumstances, to find

<sup>41</sup> *C.S.P.D.*: Chas. II, 1660-1, p. 98.

<sup>42</sup> *Reading Corporation MSS. Diary* 11, under June 22nd, 1663.

a sufficient number of men of standing and substance willing to undertake these risks, for the sake of the honour and influence attaching to corporate office; and I think that we need some additional explanation to account for the more prolonged and almost obstinate reluctance that appears in the Restoration epoch in Reading. I suggest that the clue may be found in the exceptional strength and persistence of Puritanism in this town: for my own view, already suggested earlier in this essay, which I had arrived at by quite independent evidence, and which the present investigation appears to confirm, is that even among the towns where Puritanism was notoriously strong, Reading was one of the places where it had probably obtained its strongest hold.

And a final conclusion remains. The Corporation Act is nearly always represented as due to a spontaneous outburst of Anglican fanaticism on the part of the Cavalier Parliament. No doubt this was very largely its motive force, which the government utilized to the full for their own purpose. But both the drafting of the Act, and the action of the commissioners in the cases we have examined, would appear to point to a far more deliberately designed and secular policy on the part of the government and Privy Council than has hitherto been recognized. Historians, as before mentioned, have almost unanimously and universally ignored just those features in the Act which, with the example of Reading before us, we must regard as the most important of all; the powers granted to the commissioners, that is to say, firstly of discharging any members of the corporations, practically without cause shown, and without the need to offer any option of satisfying the tests prescribed elsewhere in the Act; and secondly of appointing almost whomsoever they pleased in their places, without being bound by any of the existing charters, or rules as regards qualifications or methods of election; powers which as we have seen in the case of Reading were ruthlessly utilized. We may, I think, assume as a result of the work of the various commissions throughout the country, a pretty general remoulding of the personnel of the corporations in royalist and not merely Anglican



interests. We may also judge from the later history of the reign, that there was a steady waning of the royalist fidelity of these remoulded corporations, as there was in the case of the Cavalier Parliament itself; so that, as the dissolution of 1679 revealed, they could not be relied upon to return supporters of the court to parliament. And therefore became necessary the later policy of the quo warranto writs of 1682 onwards, by which numerous borough charters (including that of Reading in 1685) were surrendered, and then remodelled in the interests of the Crown; a somewhat different expedient, but the main purpose of which was, I submit, almost exactly anticipated by the Corporation Act of 1661.