

‘Ye Subtlety of Electioneering’: Election Practices in Haslemere 1715–80*

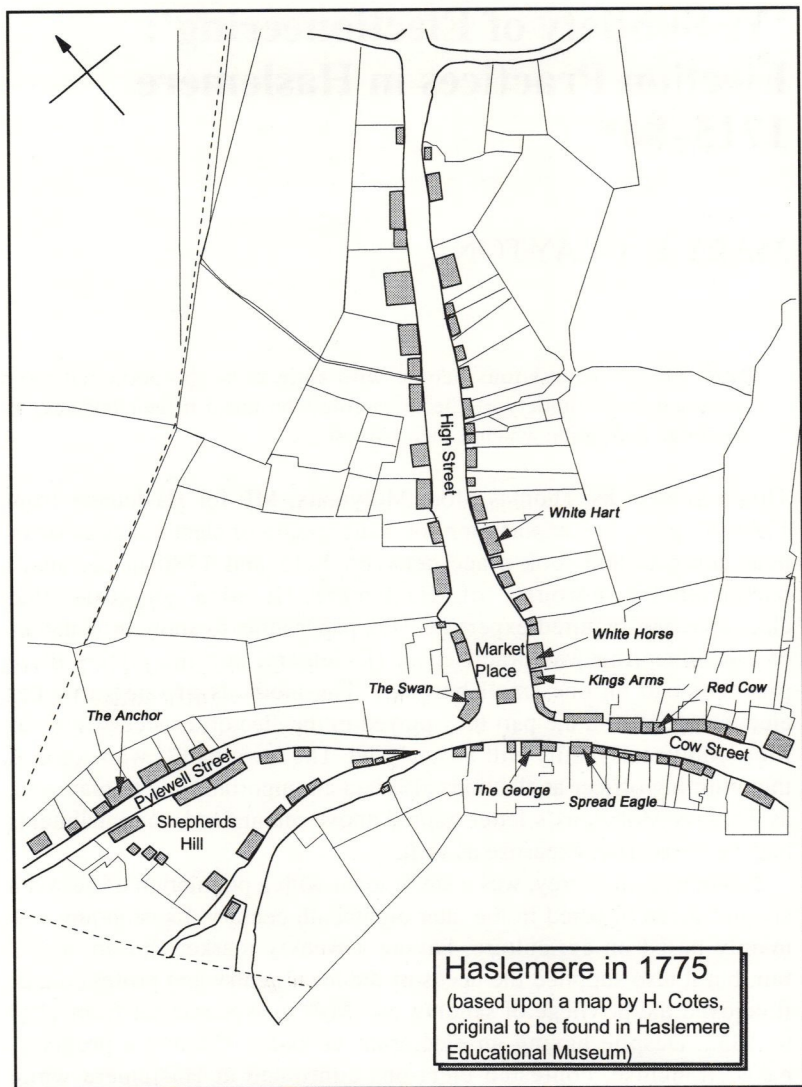
MARY E. CLAYTON

There are few necessitous people with little or no property but very conversant in ye subtlety of Electioneering who make it their business to look for an opposition which is their harvest.¹

This statement by Thomas More Molyneux, MP for Haslemere from 1759–76, gives one explanation for a succession of electoral contests or near contests that took place between 1715 and 1780 in the small parliamentary borough of Haslemere. It also suggests that electioneering required expertise. This paper aims to show how the art of electioneering was practised in Haslemere, and the effects these practices had on one small borough. The methods of one particular election agent, and the part they played in the electoral successes of the More Molyneux family will be analysed. The town bailiff who acted as the returning officer at elections also had an important role to play, and, as Thomas Molyneux’s letter quoted above maintained, the inhabitants had electioneering expertise as well.

Haslemere, in Surrey, was a small town with a population of between six and seven hundred in the later eighteenth century. Its economy was mainly based on agriculture, having a weekly market and an annual fair, but it also supplied the needs of the local gentry and professionals. It enjoyed the privilege of sending two MPs to Westminster from 1584 to 1832. Despite having an electorate of under 150 and a property-based franchise, contested elections continued at Haslemere while many such boroughs were losing their ability to participate in the electoral process. In the seventeenth century Haslemere had been a burgage borough and the votes attached to certain properties called burgages, but three ambiguous resolutions of the House of Commons eventually led to the acceptance of the wider franchise of inhabitant freeholder.² This change increased the opportunities for the election agents there to practise their art, and gave the inhabitants greater scope to profit from living in a parliamentary borough.

Election agents were employed in ever increasing numbers during



the eighteenth century. Many of them were attorneys and their legal training was invaluable, particularly for identifying individual voting rights. At first, the employment of professional agents was generally resisted by both candidates and electors. They could be expensive for the candidate, and the electors liked to be flattered by the attentions of the prospective member, not one of his servants.³ As a seat in Parliament became more desirable, however, and the costs of contests increased, an agent who could organise canvasses in a businesslike manner, and spend time on detailed planning, became good value for money. In addition to the canvass, the agent was responsible for getting the voters to the poll, and between elections he had to look after his employer's political interests. Some agents were so successful at courting the electorate that they usurped their employer's place and took control of the representation of the borough.⁴ By the eighteenth century getting a candidate into Parliament had become a serious, intricate and complex matter, and even small electorates needed careful attention.

Election agents were employed at every contested election in Haslemere between 1715 and 1780, and two attorneys handled the interests of Haslemere's long-serving MPs, Peter Burrell and James Edward Oglethorpe between the contests of 1722 and 1747.⁵ After 1750 the work expected of agents increased significantly. In 1751 James More Molyneux, the son of Sir More Molyneux, lord of the manor and borough of Haslemere who lived at Loseley, challenged the sitting members, Burrell and Oglethorpe, in conjunction with the lawyer Philip Carteret Webb of nearby Busbridge.⁶ Sir More's legal adviser Thomas Peace, an attorney from Petersfield, became his son's election agent.⁷ Thereafter a new, more businesslike attitude to elections and electioneering in the borough is discernable. Professor F. O'Gorman describes the aims of an election agent as being 'to protect an electoral interest and advance its fortunes by identifying and canvassing voters, organizing supporters, arranging inducements, and generally representing the interests of the candidate',⁸ to which Peace's actions conform. The methods he used to bring about the successful election of his employer's son in 1754 were far reaching and thorough. Apart from basic electioneering techniques such as organising canvasses, he paid particularly close attention to detail, especially where voting rights were concerned. The town bailiff was also integral to his plans. He acted as returning officer at elections and had the right to accept or reject votes. In addition, Peace was fully aware of the necessity of cultivating the inhabitants.

A wealth of documents survives from Peace's work as an election agent⁹ and it is therefore possible to discover the methods used to build

up an electoral interest in a borough where the right of voting was linked to the ownership of property. In burgage boroughs, and some freeholder and small scot and lot boroughs, agents commonly bought enough of the property conveying voting rights in the boroughs to eliminate contests. Burgage boroughs were particularly susceptible and over half of them remained uncontested after 1768.¹⁰ In Haslemere, however, no one proprietor was able to purchase a clear majority of the necessary properties until 1780, but before this freeholds had become concentrated into a few hands.¹¹ As the right of voting lay with the inhabitant freeholders, each voter had to satisfy the bailiff, acting as returning officer, that he lived in Haslemere and was in possession of a freehold property within the borough boundaries. Multiple ownership of freeholds would have been pointless without the development of a mechanism for transferring votes to residents who were not the real freeholders. These votes became known as 'occasional' or 'faggot' votes, and became possible through a legal device used in the transfer of real estate.¹²

The normal mode of conveyancing in the eighteenth century was by 'bargain and sale for a term [of years] coupled with a release'. The popularity of this method stemmed from the fact that it avoided the Statute of Enrolments (27 Hen. VIII, c.16, 1535), thereby making the transfer of land secret and the payment of feudal incidents more difficult to enforce. If a bargain and sale was for a term of years it constituted a lease and did not have to be enrolled in public registries. If the person granting the lease was a tenant in fee simple [i.e. a freeholder with the right to bequeath his estate], all he needed to do to make the lease into a conveyance and thereby transfer the property, was to execute a deed of release. This released his reversion, so that on the death of the lessee the property would not revert to the grantor of the lease. With the execution of a release, the lessee became the new tenant in fee simple. The release was usually signed a day or so after the lease, to separate the two transactions. The Statute of Enrolments did not affect the transfer of a lease into a freehold by the use of a release so this method of conveyancing made it possible for freeholds to be conveyed to trusted voters without having to enrol the sale. The voters were then supposed to reconvey the freeholds to the rightful owners after the election.¹³

Attempts had been made to introduce so-called 'faggot' votes at Haslemere in the seventeenth century. A candidate at the August 1679 election was severely criticised by Lord Chief Justice Pemberton at Surrey Assizes in July 1681 for executing fraudulent conveyances to transfer freeholds to residents who were not the lawful owners, so that they could vote. The defence argued that the practice was

constitutional, but the judges in 1681 pronounced that, 'the making of votes by such means was a very evil and unlawful thing, and tended to the destruction of the government and the debauching of Parliament'.¹⁴ Nevertheless, throughout the eighteenth century burgages and freeholds in many boroughs passed into the hands of a few leading figures, and battles for the control of these constituencies ensued. The development could not have taken place if the views expressed by Pemberton in 1681 had continued to prevail, but his dictum had been made before the Surrey Assizes and not in the Crown courts. It did not therefore deter later politicians from temporarily conveying their properties to voters at election times as a matter of course. Faggot voting was not even an issue in the petition against the result of the 1754 election at Haslemere, for by this time its usage was widespread.¹⁵

The More Molyneux challenge to the dominance of Burrell and Oglethorpe was built on the acceptance of faggot or occasional voting. In preparation for the attack on the sitting members, the agents for both James Molyneux and his co-candidate Philip Webb entered into a period of intensive purchasing. Even before this challenge, the number of independent freeholders in Haslemere had started to diminish. A 1735 map of the borough of Haslemere reveals only twelve people who owned more than one freehold in the town.¹⁶ Moreover no candidate for Parliament in Haslemere prior to 1735 is shown as freeholder on this map, but this was soon to change. The second Lord Egmont admitted to owning three freeholds in Haslemere, in his electoral survey. He presumably acquired these during his candidacy in 1740/1.¹⁷ By 1747 both Burrell and Oglethorpe had purchased several freeholds.¹⁸ The purchase of property, however, really began in earnest in 1753, after Molyneux had signed an electoral agreement with Webb.

Thomas Peace was the mastermind behind the Molyneux and Webb campaign. He realised that the key to electoral success lay in property ownership, and his legal training helped him to sort out the confusion in the titles of freeholds in the borough. He acknowledged the need to assess the strengths of all the candidates, a task he set about systematically. He compiled a book in October 1753, listing the freeholds with votes, according to their location in the three streets, the High Street (east side and west side), Pylewell Street, and Cow Street with the Market Place adding his 'observations on each vote' of the owners and occupiers, including previous owners, number of votes attached, and type of property. Votes were described as 'Good for', 'Bad for', 'Good against' and 'Bad against'. The words good and bad related to the legality of the vote, thus 'Bad for' referred to a property whose owner or occupier would vote for Peace's clients, but the freehold did not possess an unquestionably legal vote and might be

objected to on the grounds that it was, for example, split from another freehold or it was outside the parliamentary borough boundary.¹⁹

This canvass return clearly shows how successful Peace had been in purchasing the freeholds – over thirty since January 1753. He had approached the owners of the borough's freeholds regardless of their political views, including those whose allegiance to Burrell and Oglethorpe was well known, in the hope of persuading them to sell.²⁰ Peace also met those who owned property in Haslemere but lived elsewhere, travelling as far as Midhurst, Kingston-upon-Thames, and London to further his clients' interest.²¹ Absentee landlords were asked to use their influence with their tenants in favour of Molyneux and Webb, and an approach to Lord Egmont was suggested regarding his remaining interest.

The development and management of a body of reliable faggot voters was another important task, and to this end Peace instructed Molyneux on how to deal with them. Peace was a great believer in the direct approach. Each voter should be asked for support by the candidates and the answer noted. It would be harder for an elector then to vote against once he had personally promised his vote to a candidate. Peace declined asking the voters himself in 1754, saying that it was 'against the Rule of Politics so to do', suggesting that Molyneux could see them all in two nights. He could sit in 'Bob Ride's other Room' on one night and George Denyer's the next (the George and the Red Cow inns respectively), sending for the voters, and canvassing them. He should then enter their names in his book 'before their Faces' and be able to 'depend upon their undoubted performance'. In addition Peace advocated that the candidate pay the faggot voters personally, in order to use the opportunity to ask for their services at the next election.²³ The use of faggot votes seems to have been well established by 1722, with perhaps as many as half being such votes. Certainly, Egmont found that the freeholds in Haslemere had been 'so conveyed backward and forward to make occasional votes that upon close Inspection few could make out their Titles'.²⁴ In 1754 faggot votes constituted 86% of the total votes cast, increasing to an amazing 92% in the 1761 election.²⁵

The growing predominance of faggot votes in Haslemere elections led to an increase in the amount of legal work necessary for the system to function. Conveyances of lease and release had to be drawn up for each faggot voter at every election (unless they had not reconveyed the property back to the candidate after the previous election). Blank conveyances were also produced in case extra voters were unexpectedly required near the end of the poll, when their names could be hurriedly inserted.²⁶

As the right of voting in Haslemere was linked to freehold properties, the only way to inflate the electorate was to increase the number of freeholds. During the first half of the eighteenth century the population of the borough increased considerably, with several houses and tenements built on parcels of land sold off from larger estates 'for the Accommodation and Convenience of the Inhabitants'.²⁷ These dwellings, being freeholds, retained a vote each, and thus the size of the electorate legitimately increased. Genuine increases such as these would have been gradual, but the number of voters in Haslemere grew substantially between 1761 and 1768, from eighty-six to 120 in just seven years, whereas there had been an increase of only fifteen between 1722 and 1761.

This phenomenon is easily explained. Once most of the freeholds in the borough had been purchased by parliamentary candidates, the only way to gain extra votes was by avoiding or evading the Splitting Act of 1696.²⁸ This was just part of an act for regulating elections in general, but it declared that the division of freeholds made in order to create extra votes was illegal. Simeon, however, in his 1789 treatise on electoral law maintained that '*a bona fide* transaction at any time, however short, previous to the election, if *not intended* to multiply voices, cannot be within the meaning of the legislature, for that would lay a restriction upon advantageous alienation'.²⁹ It would therefore be very difficult to prove, except in the most blatant cases, that any freehold had been split for election purposes. In an attempt to get round the Act, Peace closely examined all title deeds of freeholds, to see if any small parcel of land or adjoining tenement had ever been sold separately from the main estate at any time. If so, it could be claimed that it possessed a genuine vote. He discovered an extra thirteen votes for Thomas Molyneux by so doing. Ironically, these 'new created votes which Mr Molyneux may make if ever drove to it' went unused in 1761, as he and Webb had enough tried and tested votes to win comfortably.³⁰

Another scheme thought up by Peace, to increase the number of freeholds, required the freeing of leasehold properties on Shepherd's Hill and the town's waste, by James Molyneux's father, the lord of the manor. Legal opinion was sought from George Perrot KC on the validity of these thirty-nine votes. He thought that if the lessees and their assignees of the leaseholds were willing to purchase ('for so they may be made to appear to the House with a little Ingenuity'), such purchases would render good votes. The House of Commons might object on the grounds that the lord was granting the fee of these properties to 'multiply voices', but Perrot thought that such an objection would not prevail and they would be allowed, as 'it is a very

reasonable Thing for a Lessee for years to purchase in the Fee'.³¹ These votes were never in fact put to the test.

Not all newly discovered votes were of a dubious validity, but they all involved considerable effort on the part of Molyneux's and Webb's attorneys. Peace concentrated his efforts in and around Haslemere. Although he did occasionally visit London, most of the regular legal searches there were conducted by Webb's attorneys, Edward Astley and James Dagge. They searched Doctor's Commons for wills, and the Augmentation Office for any document relating to Haslemere, as the borough had once belonged to 'the Church of Salisbury'. Legal opinion was also taken on questions relating to a widow's dower in property, and to an estate that had been shared out into undivided sixths in a will. To further this latter enquiry the Registrar's office was visited and the House of Commons Journals were examined. Five separate, legal votes were polled for this estate in 1754 and 1761, and four thereafter.³²

An election agent was also responsible for promoting his client's good name in the locality, and keeping the voters content between elections as well as immediately prior to a poll. Maintaining an electoral interest was expensive. For example, Peace added the round sum of £100 to a bill he submitted in 1761, for various unspecified journeys and visits since 1753, 'including all my Trouble and Attendances at my own House [at Rake near Petersfield in Hampshire] and what the people eat [sic] and drank there, year after year, to keep up the Interest, ever since I have been concerned in Haslemere Election Matters'. He also requested a gallon of both rum and brandy so that he could continue to entertain Molyneux's 'Haslemere Friends'.³³ In addition, when Peace was trying to persuade Haslemere residents to sell their freeholds, he bought them and their companions refreshments, or gave their children 6d. or 1s.³⁴ He was godfather to several Haslemere children, although at the Molyneux family's expense, and in 1756 he arranged for the town clock's repair and the glazing of the Market House windows to enhance James Molyneux's reputation in the borough.³⁵

Peace patronised Haslemere tradesmen, including purchasing poor paper from a local supplier; 'Thanks Sir to Haslemere for the blotting paper, being obliged to deal with Simonds who thinks proper to serve an Electioneer with this Sad Stuff'.³⁶ The Molyneux living at Loseley also had to play their part. A responsible man recommended by Peace as a reliable constable was advanced as a tenant for a vacant shop in the Market House, for the sale of leather goods and worsted cloth. Peace promised him that James Molyneux would buy shoes and that Loseley should take a lot of worsted.³⁷ The Molyneux brothers were occasionally asked to use their influence to secure places for Haslemere residents, and

the Rev. Thomas Sanderson, one ardent supporter recurrently requested franks to evade postage.³⁸ In addition, the three main interests in the borough occasionally supplied wheat to the poor to maximise political capital from the gesture, with loaves distributed to the poor in Molyneux's name in front of the George Inn, substituted for the baker's house, though. Peace complained that it had 'no great look' at the George, 'whereas at the Baker's it would have been pretty'.³⁹

Furthermore, Haslemere's MPs were major contributors to the cost of building a turnpike road directly from Godalming and Milford through Haslemere to the Portsmouth road at Liphook in Hampshire. The northern half of the road had been completed by 1769 when Thomas Molyneux and Peter Burrell were approached to help finance the southern part to Liphook. Between April 1769 and June 1771 they subscribed about £1000 towards the project, and they received a further demand for £200 in 1772. Burrell lent the money, despite intense anger, rather than risk fomenting an electoral opposition.⁴⁰

Although close attention to the development of an electoral interest was important, a candidate for Haslemere also needed the town bailiff's favour, as this manorial official acted as the returning officer. The nature of the franchise led to disputes over the legality of various votes at every contest, and it was the bailiff who decided the issue. After every contest in this period the defeated candidates complained of the partisan behaviour of the returning officer when they petitioned the House of Commons.

Before the 1754 election James Molyneux and Webb went to great lengths to ensure the election of a bailiff sympathetic to their cause. The bailiff was chosen at the annual Court Leet, presided over by the lord of the manor's steward. Sir More Molyneux's steward, Richard Billinghamurst, had acted as election agent for Burrell and Oglethorpe for some years, strongly objected to James Molyneux and Webb opposing the sitting Members, and was sacked. However, he kept various manorial papers including those describing Court Leet procedure.⁴¹ Thomas Peace replaced Billinghamurst as steward and held a Court Leet on 2 May 1753, where John Paine was elected bailiff.⁴² The same day Richard Billinghamurst 'being requested and authorized by the Bailiff Constable and a great majority of the Freeholders and Resiants [sic] of the borough, and on the instructions of the sitting members, protested against the 'pretended Court Leet and the Proceedings therein as illegal and void', as 'contrary to the usage and custom of this Borough'.⁴³ Although Peace was based at Petersfield, only thirteen miles away, he was ignorant of the local customs of Haslemere, and denied the manorial papers, he was unable to follow the ancient procedures. This confusion demonstrated the importance of local knowledge for an agent.

William Bristow, the outgoing bailiff, refused to hand over his staff of office and continued in the post. For Molyneux and Webb to succeed if an election were called in the year from May 1753, Bristow had to be removed and a 'friend' elected. Webb therefore decided to take the matter to the courts, and Bristow was consequently summoned by the Crown to appear at Kingston Quarter Sessions by a *Quo Warranto* writ, issued by the King's Bench calling on a person to show by what authority he held or exercised office.⁴⁴ In his defence Bristow gave a detailed account of the customs of the borough regarding the election of bailiffs, claiming that these had been followed in 1752 when he was elected, and also 'during all the time where the memory of man is not to the contrary', customs disregarded in 1753. After further enquiries, the Coroner ruled that Bristow should continue to 'enjoy the Office, Liberties, Privileges, and Franchises of Bailiff'.⁴⁵

Webb then decided to apply for a Writ of *Mandamus* under the provision of a 1716 Act of Parliament, which stated that if a Court Leet was not held, or if by some accident no scheduled election took place, the Court of King's Bench could award a *Mandamus* requiring the Lord or his steward to hold an extra-ordinary Court Leet to elect a bailiff.⁴⁶ Consequently an extra-ordinary Court Leet and View of Frankpledge was held in November 1753 before Thomas Peace, steward of the Court. The jury unanimously elected one of their number, Edward Upfold, a wool dealer, as bailiff and William Ride, blacksmith, as constable.⁴⁷

A 'poet' of Haslemere was inspired by these events to compose a short song which he sent to James Molyneux.⁴⁸ He praised Molyneux and Webb for saving them from 'the sharpeners who often have us solde', and then, showed how the two writs were viewed by supporters of Molyneux and Webb:

If *Quo Warrant*'s inslaved us
Mandamus sets us Free
 And now great Sir's we'll [sic.] let you know
 Sir More your Lord shall be
 And a Poleing we will go. . . .

The actions taken by Webb demonstrate how essential it was to have a supportive bailiff. Events at two previous elections held in Haslemere, in 1715 and 1722, may have influenced his opinion. In 1715 those who had not paid their burgage rent were excluded by the bailiff upon a scrutiny, thereby turning a clear Tory victory into a marginal Whig one. Thirty-five voters were disqualified by the bailiff, twenty-seven of them being Tory voters, crucial to the success of

Whigs Sir Nicholas Carew and Sir Montague Blundell.⁴⁹ The total number of accepted votes in 1715 was fifty-one, leaping to seventy just seven years later when Blundell stood again, this time with More Molyneux. They were opposed by James Oglethorpe and Peter Burrell. The returning officer for the 1722 election was one of the electors whose vote had been disallowed in 1715. He did not restrict the franchise after his predecessor and he allowed not only his own vote but those of twelve Tory voters also disqualified in 1715. Not surprisingly, these thirteen voters did not support Blundell, comprising a significant percentage of Burrell and Oglethorpe's majority of twenty-one.⁵⁰ As More Molyneux was the lord of the manor he should have arranged the election of a sympathetic resident as bailiff for 1722, but his negligence cost him the election.

At the 1754 election, with Molyneux and Webb's choice of bailiff presiding as returning officer, the number of votes cast again rose dramatically, to 121.⁵¹ However, even by their own admission, some of the Molyneux/Webb votes were of dubious validity. In the October 1753 canvass there were six properties described as 'Bad for', for which votes for Molyneux and Webb were accepted in 1754, and the Red Cow public house was put down for three votes and polled seven with two adjoining properties polling another four. Molyneux and Webb's carefully chosen bailiff allowed all of these votes, although the properties had been split for election purposes and were clearly illegal.⁵²

In 1761 none of the doubtful votes of 1754 were attempted by Molyneux and Webb, at election agent Thomas Peace's instigation. Only those freeholds with safe votes were offered.⁵³ Peace could then protest all the more vehemently at all the votes for split freeholds offered by the opposing candidates. And there were several. Burrell attempted to use the 'Red Cow method' with Half Moon farm and other freeholds in Haslemere, particularly some shops known as the Beehives, but Burrell failed because he did not have the bailiff's support.⁵⁴ In addition Burrell's petition to the House of Commons against the return of Molyneux and Webb, resulted in Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Hardwicke describing Burrell's tactics to the Duke of Newcastle, as 'the grossest Case of splitting of Votes, that I ever saw'.⁵⁵

The successful candidates in every election from 1715 to 1774 had the support of the bailiff acting as returning officer, but his favour alone was not enough. The circumstances in Haslemere gave the electorate an element of voting choice, and therefore their support had to be cultivated too.⁵⁶ The good management of the election campaign and the courting of every inhabitant, whether they voted or not, was considered crucial to success. The involvement of voters and non-voters in election

campaigns, and the use of specific rituals and ceremonies to heighten the atmosphere and importance of the electoral process, have been described by O'Gorman.⁵⁷ He sees the main rituals as being

the formal entry of the candidates into the constituency, the elaborate courtesies of the canvass, the ceremonial of the nomination, the carefully orchestrated 'treating' rituals, the daily speeches and processions at the close of the poll each evening (at least before 1832), the colourful and ornate chairing of the victorious (and sometimes also of the losing) candidates, and the formal, valedictory rituals sometimes performed at the end of the election campaign.⁵⁸

Haslemere campaigns support some of O'Gorman's findings. A candidate's first entry into the town was important. William Burrell, who stood on his brother Peter's interest in March 1768, made his formal public entrance in February 1768, as did another candidate, General James Oglethorpe.⁵⁹ Peter Burrell himself, however, had visited Haslemere formally the previous summer, making clear his personal commitment to, and expectations of, the borough.

Burrell started that day by visiting an influential and propertied lady, Miss Ann Shudd, who lived at the top of the High Street.⁶⁰ From there he went to his agent Billingham's house, in Cow Street. During the rest of the day Burrell walked between various public houses, in all parts of the town. Bowls of punch were ordered at the Swan, the White Horse, the George, the Eagle and the Anchor. Throughout his 'progress' he met or visited many residents, giving cash gifts to some, and conferred privately with several principal inhabitants. The bells were rung from Burrell's entry into the town, at 11 am, until 'after dinner' at about 3 pm. He left Haslemere for Godalming, where he was staying, at about 9 pm.⁶¹ The two other candidates for the 1768 election, Thomas Molyneux and John Johnstone, made their formal entrances in November 1767. Molyneux also walked the town, buying bowls of punch, and pressing a few shillings into the hands of various mothers, wives, children and servants of voters.⁶² This seems to have been the standard pattern, although evidence from Burrell and Molyneux's opponents is unavailable.⁶³

There is considerable evidence to show that 'treating' was an important part of the campaigns in Haslemere. Accounts were opened at specific inns in the borough, sometimes several months before an election. The account for the George, which faced onto the Market Place, was opened in May 1753, but it was not used every day. However, by February 1754 the account stood at £110 10s. 11d. The candidates used the inns for celebrating particular events, termed 'treats'. For example, on the day that Thomas Peace arrived in Haslemere to serve the precept for holding the *Mandamus* Court, £7 was spent at the George on beer,

gin, wine and punch, and a mere 7s. on food. The real celebrations at the George, however, took place after the *Mandamus* Court Leet and the election of Molyneux and Webb's choice of bailiff, Edward Upfold. Robert Ride, the innkeeper, laid on a special dinner; £9 15s. was spent on food and £25 10s. on wine, beer and punch.⁶⁴

It seems that prominent supporters of the rival sides had authority to set up treats if circumstances favoured such action. John Paine, the 'illegally' elected bailiff of 1753, authorised several at the George during the 1753/4 campaign. By 1761 he had changed sides, but still organised treats, this time for Burrell's supporters. On one occasion, when a Burrell nominee visited Haslemere in January 1761, supporters were entertained at the White Horse. A rival treat was consequently set up by the bailiff at the Swan on the opposite side of the High Street, for Molyneux and Webb supporters, who gave 'Hallo for Hallo' to those at the White Horse.⁶⁵ Such treating should not, however, be viewed as bribery. O'Gorman has described treating as a means of establishing and maintaining goodwill between the candidates and their agents, and the electors. A voter's participation did not mean that he was selling his vote 'in the sense that he was doing violence to his conscience'.⁶⁶ Treats were an expected perquisite of the privileged status of a voter, and an integral part of election ritual. The evidence from Haslemere supports this view.

About three weeks before the 1768 election a much larger event took place, a report of which was inserted in a London newspaper;

Extract of a letter from Haslemere, March 8.

Last week Sir Thomas Frederick Bart. in a coach and six, accompanied with forty gentlemen in green uniforms, on fine hunters, and about 200 substantial freeholders, proceeded by a band of music, entered the town, and voluntarily invited all that were in the interest of Col. Molyneux and Mr Burrell, to every sort of joyful festivity. He invited all fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, in that interest to a grand ball and supper in the town hall in the evening: in the morning the gentlemen hunters, with French Horns, savoyards, hautboys, and several other instruments, paraded around the town, and drew up before the windows of the ladies and principal inhabitants, and serenaded them with jovial and entertaining songs, accompanied by the music. In the middle of the day he entertained the populace with all sorts of rustic sports, male and female. Many hogsheads of strong beer were carried out and drunk in the streets. Notwithstanding the spectators were very numerous, everything was conducted with decency and decorum.

It was apparently three days before Frederick and his party left Haslemere, by which time every man was wearing a cockade of blue

and orange in his hat.⁶⁷ The report clearly demonstrates that non-voters as well as the enfranchised participated in election campaigns, and that the events were specifically designed to include all inhabitants. And here is another example, to add to those found by O'Gorman, of the good order found at the height of an election campaign despite the large crowds and the profusion of alcohol.⁶⁸

The poll itself brought very specific rituals. There were various traditional personnel employed in Haslemere, such as ringers, musicians, the cryer, doorkeepers, chair carriers, a sword bearer, and 'white boys' whose function is unclear, but they had special breeches made for them at a shilling each in 1768. Special clothes were provided for some of the other election participants, such as an 'election coat'. In 1768 Molyneux and Burrell provided several people with 'pomps' made by two local shoemakers, cotton stockings, waistcoats, hats, coats and breeches, and at least 1,000 yards of ribbon, mainly orange and blue.⁶⁹

A description of how the 1774 poll was conducted is given in a local history.⁷⁰ The bailiff, William Holt, commenced the proceedings at 9 am on Friday 7 October in the town hall.⁷¹ A poll was demanded and, after the candidates had been sworn in, voting began with voters polling in alternate pairs, that is two Burrell/Molyneux supporters voting followed by two Burke/Kelly supporters, and so on. The reason for this, according to O'Gorman, was to keep an equal number of voters for each side for as long as possible to prevent disruption or violence from the supporters of the losing candidates.⁷² The polling records show that it was customary to poll in this manner in Haslemere, though there is no evidence to support or counter O'Gorman's explanation. When polling closed at 10 pm, nineteen votes had been cast. Polling in alternate pairs continued until Monday morning. Burrell and Molyneux then took the lead. The poll was closed on Wednesday at 12.15 pm, and the bailiff declared the result: sixty-one votes for Burrell and Molyneux, and forty for Burke and Kelly. No victory speeches for Haslemere have come to light, nor has any account of the chairing of the successful candidates, although, as mentioned above, chair carriers were employed.

The importance of electioneering technique increased during the eighteenth century as the competition for seats intensified. Reputations, social standing, aspirations, not to mention considerable sums of money, were at stake, even in a small borough. To be assured of success in Haslemere three elements were needed: a compliant bailiff, the good favour of the voters and other inhabitants, and a majority of vote bearing freeholds. This situation was clearly understood by the More Molyneux family's election agent, who masterminded the

overthrow in 1754 of the two MPs who had represented the borough for thirty-two years. Thomas Peace was a man of vision. He saw the possibilities, and the methods needed to obtain his objective of electoral success for his employer's sons, and he succeeded. In so doing he fundamentally and irreversibly changed the methods of electoral management in the borough. Later agents continued to follow his system.

Peace's approach to electioneering was thorough and businesslike, with careful planning and great attention to detail. Electioneering developed from an exercise entered into approximately every seven years, into almost a continuous one, be it with a greater concentration of activity at election times. It became an unending legal exercise involved with the acquisition of property, the close scrutiny of deeds and the management of manorial courts. It also became, in part, a public relations exercise, with the aim of securing a large enough body of loyal voters for a candidate to be assured of electoral success. Despite all this ongoing activity the most important task of an election agent was the orchestration of the election campaign itself; choosing the best time to produce the candidates, finding out what the opposition were planning, making sure the conveyances were signed, timing the treats to obtain maximum effect with minimum cost, and defusing any potentially dangerous situations.

It may seem that Peace and his successors took an excessive amount of trouble over a few hundred people and even fewer voters.⁷³ But Haslemere had something fundamental in common with the most populous boroughs in the country: it sent two MPs to Westminster, and in that sense its politics were as important as any other constituency. To the candidates fighting for a seat, being returned was the issue, not the size of the electorate. Small borough politics are sometimes dismissed as of little interest, but that misses the key point that small boroughs constituted the greatest number of parliamentary seats, and the impact of their representatives within the political world was correspondingly extensive. In addition, many small boroughs were represented by politically significant figures, or at least conscientious back benchers, both types being returned for Haslemere. But importance is not a matter of mere size or even of the quality of personnel. The workings of local politics is fascinating and illuminating in its own right.

Moreover, Haslemere had one further claim to fame. Dr King of Oxford University credited Philip Webb with the idea for the 'Red Cow method' of multiplying votes which, King maintained, was used by the New Interest at Oxford in 1754 with great success. Not all election practices found in Haslemere were innovative, but clearly, the management of even small boroughs could be an intricate business, and

an operation that agents were not prepared to leave to chance or the vagaries of the electorate. The 'necessitous people' of Haslemere were not the only ones conversant in the subtleties of electioneering. The lawyers were proficient in the art, and their resourcefulness encouraged candidates to enter into contests. But all the inhabitants of Haslemere benefited from the string of contests held there after 1754, in terms of the town's internal economy, its communications with the outside world, the excitement of the hustings, as well as the more tangible benefit of treating. Seeing how the system worked in Haslemere throws significant light on the working of eighteenth-century electioneering.

* I am indebted to Professor Penelope Corfield, of Royal Holloway College, University of London, for her encouragement and advice during the preparation of this paper.

Notes

¹ G[uildford] M[uniment] R[oom] L[oseley] M[s] [hereafter G.M.R., L.M.] Corres. 1760-9, Thomas More Molyneux to Sir Thomas Frederick, 11 Oct. 1766.

² M.E. Clayton, 'Elections and Electioneering in Haslemere, 1715-80' (unpub. M.Phil. thesis, University of London, 1993), pp. 59-85; M.E. Clayton, 'Voter Choice in a Patronage Borough: Haslemere, 1754-80', *Parliamentary History*, forthcoming.

³ R. Robson, *The Attorney in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 96-100; E.A. Smith, 'The Election Agent in English Politics, 1734-1832', *English Historical Review*, lxxxiv (1969), pp. 12-13, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵ Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont: Diary of Viscount Perceval, afterwards First Earl of Egmont* (3 vols., 1920-3), iii. 5 Feb. 1741. Burrell was a well-known city merchant, and Oglethorpe is best remembered as the founder of the American colony of Georgia.

⁶ For more details on Webb see *Dictionary of National Biography*, xx. pp. 1018-19. L.B. Namier and J. Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754-90*, 3 vols. (1964), iii. pp. 615-7.

⁷ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752-9, T. Peace to Sir M. Molyneux, 11 Jan. 1750/1.

⁸ F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 79.

⁹ They form part of the extensive archive relating to electoral matters in Haslemere in the Loseley Mss.

¹⁰ O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*, pp. 33-4. For a detailed explanation of the different types of franchise see Namier and Brooke, *op. cit.*, i. pp. 10-35.

¹¹ In 1780 Sir James Lowther bought about three-quarters of all the freehold property in the borough: G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1779-85, W. Bray to Miss J.M. Molyneux, 15 Aug. 1780.

¹² The term faggot comes from a military source meaning dummy, 'a person temporarily hired to supply a deficiency at the muster': *Oxford English Dictionary*. Thus a faggot vote is a dummy vote.

¹³ W. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, 12 vols. (1925), vii. pp. 360-2. A.W. Simpson, *An Introduction to the History of the Land Law* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 177-9.

¹⁴ H.A. Mereweather and A.J. Stephens, *The History of the Boroughs and Municipal Corporations of the United Kingdom* (1835), pp. 1381-2.

- ¹⁵ For example, in the boroughs of Downton, Midhurst, and Cockermouth.
- ¹⁶ The map can be seen at Haslemere Educational Museum [hereafter H.E.M.]. Three people owned three freeholds each, nine owned two, and thirty-four owned one.
- ¹⁷ B[ritish] L[ibrary] Add[itional] M[anuscript] 47012 D. As Lord Perceval he had stood with Daniel Boone, but had withdrawn before a poll.
- ¹⁸ G.M.R., L.M. 763/219, p. 2; L.M. 739.
- ¹⁹ G.M.R., L.M. 739. See the map of Haslemere on p. 48, based on one drawn in 1775 by H. Cotes. Original in HEM.
- ²⁰ G.M.R., L.M. 763/215, p. 1; L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Noah Bromham to J.M. Molyneux(?), 14 Mar. 1753; L.M. 1087/27/150, p. 2: 12 June and 16 July, p. 4: 2 Oct. 1753.
- ²¹ G.M.R., L.M. 1087/27/150 *passim*.
- ²² G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Dr Cobden to Sir M. Molyneux, 25 Oct. 1753, and Peace to J.M. Molyneux, 2 Mar. 1753.
- ²³ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. Box VII, Peace to J.M. Molyneux, undated, but written shortly before the 1754 election. Faggot voters were paid a set fee for their trouble, one guinea in 1759, five guineas by 1774: G.M.R., L.M. 763/4/155.
- ²⁴ G.M.R., L.M. 763/64; H.E.M., Map of Haslemere 1735 by William Morley; BL. Add. MSS. 47012 D.
- ²⁵ H.E.M., Ms. 'Borough of Haslemere'. G.M.R., L.M. 761/9 and 763/65.
- ²⁶ G.M.R., L.M. 763/29, 31, 32, 34, 215.
- ²⁷ G.M.R., L.M. 763/219, p. 2.
- ²⁸ *Statutes of the Realm*, 7 & 8 Will. III (1695), c. 25 s. 7.
- ²⁹ J. Simeon, *A Treatise on the Law of Elections in all its Branches* (1789), pp. 54–5, 85. E. and A.G. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons: Parliamentary Representation before 1832*, 2 vols., (Cambridge 1903), i. pp. 186–7.
- ³⁰ G.M.R., L.M. 1327/53. James Molyneux died in 1759, and his brother Thomas, an army officer, was elected in his place. He continued to represent Haslemere until his death in 1776.
- ³¹ G.M.R., L.M. 763/126.
- ³² G.M.R., L.M. 1087/27/150, p. 5: 5 Nov. 1753; L.M. 1087/141, pp. 1–2; L.M. 741/2, pp. 1–2. H.E.M., Ms. 'The Borough of Haslemere', pp. 19–24.
- ³³ G.M.R., L.M. 1087/27/147; L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Peace to J.M. Molyneux, 26 Nov. 1758. Peace complained that he could not buy good liquor where he lived, claiming that 'it is such water'd Stuff that we buy here, that there's scarce any Using'.
- ³⁴ G.M.R., L.M. 1087/27/150, p. 4, for example.
- ³⁵ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–59, T. Peace to J.M. Molyneux, 24 Apr. 1755 and 2 May 1756. L.M. 1087/27/173. gives the cost as £5 8s. 6d.
- ³⁶ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Peace to J.M. Molyneux, 25 Aug. 1755.
- ³⁷ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Peace to J.M. Molyneux, 9 Feb. 1757. Once a resident had served as constable he was eligible to be elected bailiff. The importance of this latter position is discussed below.
- ³⁸ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, J. Evelyn to J.M. Molyneux, 22 Aug. 1756; L.M. Corres. 1760–6, Rev T. Sanderson to T.M. Molyneux, 4 Jan. and 19 June 1760, 18 Dec. 1761.
- ³⁹ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Peace to J.M. Molyneux, 9 Feb. 1757.
- ⁴⁰ G.M.R., L.M. 760/1–8; L.M. Corres. 1766–78, P. Burrell to T.M. Molyneux, 18 July, 17 Aug. 1772, and a memo from the Turnpike Trustees dated 30 June 1772.
- ⁴¹ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, Thomas Harris to Sir M. Molyneux, 4 Mar. 1753. P.R.O., K[ings] B[ench] 1/11, Sir M. Molyneux's affidavit.
- ⁴² G.M.R., L.M. 1186/1, p. 9.
- ⁴³ G.M.R., L.M. 296; P.R.O., K B. 1/11, W. Shotter's affidavit.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; G.M.R., L.M. 742 p. 6, n. #; L.M. 1186/1, pp. 1–2.

- ⁴⁵ G.M.R., L.M. 1186/1, pp. 2–5, 11–14.
- ⁴⁶ *Statutes of the Realm*, 2 Geo.I, s. 3. G.M.R., L.M. Corres. 1752–9, P.C. Webb to Sir M. Molyneux, 9 Sept. 1753.
- ⁴⁷ H.E.M., Haslemere Borough Court Book.
- ⁴⁸ G.M.R., L.M. 763/107.
- ⁴⁹ Clayton, 'Elections in Haslemere', pp. 98–9.
- ⁵⁰ G.M.R., L.M. 763/64, /79.
- ⁵¹ G.M.R., L.M. 761/9. There were four disqualifications.
- ⁵² G.M.R., L.M. 739, 761/9. Dr King of Oxford University published a ballad of forty-two verses entitled 'The Cow of Haslemere or the Conjuror's Scrutiny' describing how the Red Cow gave birth to eight calves, all holding freehold titles, their votes being accepted as each calf knew the bailiff. G.M.R., Acc. 1363 Box 31.
- ⁵³ G.M.R., L.M. 1327/53, p. 30.
- ⁵⁴ Seven votes were disallowed for Half Moon Farm and five for the Beehives: G.M.R., L.M. 763/65.
- ⁵⁵ BL. Add. MSS. 32931 f. 98; G.M.R., L.M. 763/219 p. 3; L.M. 1331/82/2.
- ⁵⁶ Clayton, 'Voter choice'.
- ⁵⁷ F. O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: the Social Meaning of Elections in England 1780–1860', *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), pp. 79–115.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ⁵⁹ G.M.R., L.M. 763/213, pp. 6–9, 15. This was the same Oglethorpe who was defeated in 1754.
- ⁶⁰ Shudd owned several freeholds in Haslemere, but the franchises attached to her freeholds were exercised by local men, including her brother-in-law, the Rev. Thomas Sanderson.
- ⁶¹ G.M.R., L.M. Corres. Rev. T. Sanderson to T.M. Molyneux, 27 June 1767.
- ⁶² G.M.R., L.M. 763/213, pp. 6–9.
- ⁶³ There was a re-alignment of interests for the 1768 and 1774 elections, and Burrell and Molyneux joined forces: see Clayton, 'Elections in Haslemere', pp. 128–30, 162–3.
- ⁶⁴ G.M.R., L.M. 763/128, 215, pp. 10–1.
- ⁶⁵ G.M.R., L.M. 763/119–20, L.M. Corres. 1760–6, Peace to T.M. Molyneux, 19 Jan. and reply, 21 Jan. 1761. Paine changed sides when Molyneux refused to buy some of Paine's property at an inflated price because the votes attached were of doubtful legality. The White Horse was, in fact owned by Molyneux although the publican was a Burrell supporter: see G.M.R., L.M. 742, p. 7.
- ⁶⁶ O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*, pp. 151–2, 161. See also Clayton, 'Elections in Haslemere', pp. 209–22.
- ⁶⁷ *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, no. 12175, 11 Mar. 1768.
- ⁶⁸ O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies', pp. 92–3.
- ⁶⁹ G.M.R., L.M. 763/78A, 129–35, 137–44.
- ⁷⁰ E.W. Swanton and P. Woods, *Bygone Haslemere: A Short History of the Ancient Borough and its Immediate Neighbourhood from Earliest Times* (1914), pp. 203–4. The source is not supplied.
- ⁷¹ G.M.R., L.M. 763/49, /157, p. 1.
- ⁷² O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*, pp. 136–7.
- ⁷³ In 1715 one attorney was employed by Blundell and Carew jointly, for six weeks, whereas in 1768 Burrell and Molyneux had three attorneys and an estate steward working on their re-election for six months. G.M.R., L.M. Corres. Box V, Lord Blundell to Sir M. Molyneux, 15 Apr. 1727; L.M. 1087/3/6; L.M. 763/31, 32, 34. Peace died in 1764.