

Governing Winchester 1638–88: The Politics of a Seventeenth Century Corporation

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On 28 June 1684, the 46 members of Winchester's corporation voted unanimously in their general assembly to voluntarily surrender the city's charter.¹ Desperate to retain Charles II's favour they were even prepared to bear the cost of conveying the now defunct charter in a coach to the race meeting, which the king was attending on one of his regular visits to the city.² Their submission to the crown was in marked contrast to the careful campaign that the corporation had waged nearly a century earlier to obtain this charter. In 1582, they had approached Sir Francis Walsingham to become the city's first High Steward, for 'the better direction, defence and maintenance of this city and the rights, liberties and privileges of the same'.³ Their cultivation of an Elizabethan political insider was fully justified, when they did indeed receive a new charter from the Queen in 1588.⁴ For the next hundred years the charter stood as a written affirmation from the crown of the corporation's right to govern locally. The surrender of the charter in the later seventeenth century represented the changing relationship between the crown and the localities. Furthermore the apparent ease with which the Winchester corporation ceded their independence and acquiesced to the royal demands also illustrated how the position of the corporation had also changed over the century since they had been granted this charter.

1 Hampshire Record Office, Winchester [hereafter HRO], W/B1/7, f. 4.

2 C. Bailey (ed.), *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives of Winchester and other Documents elucidating the Government, Manners and Customs of the same City from the Thirteenth Century to the Present* (Winchester, 1856), p. 24.

3 HRO, W/B1/1, f. 221.

4 HRO, W/A1/25/1, Charter of Elizabeth I, 1588.

This article will focus on the reasons for this change in the relationship between the corporation and the crown during the century in which their government of the city was defined by the charter. It will also examine the extent to which the structure of local government and the composition of the local elite altered during this period and the impact that this had on the relationship between local and central government.

By the later seventeenth century the relationship that had underpinned the granting of the charter in 1588 had fundamentally altered, to the extent that central government had been obliged on several occasions to intervene and change the composition of Winchester's corporation. The Elizabethan charter had essentially confirmed the relationship between the crown and the city, whereby the corporation was granted privileges such as the ability to make by-laws and raise local taxes, whilst being expected to take on the responsibility of governing locally. Corporations were viewed by governments not as 'an independent being within the state; it was a crucial organ of the state, beholden to the King for its life and subservient to his needs'.⁵ In the absence of an organised bureaucracy and standing army, Whitehall was relying on the co-operation of local office holders to obtain consent for its actions.

This status quo had come under pressure when there were important changes of regime or government policy, which clashed with the vested interests and expectations of the local elite. There were three critical occasions when this relationship between Westminster and Winchester can be seen to be undergoing significant change. In the aftermath of the Civil War a strongly royalist Winchester refused to accept the outcome and in a series of sometimes minor acts of rebellion made clear where its sympathies lay. Even after the death of Charles I the only way central government could assert its authority over the city was by an Act of Parliament, which directly replaced the local rulers with loyal supporters of the current regime. Secondly after the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 and the Restoration of Charles II an almost reverse process occurred, where an effort was made to eject the new men of the Interregnum years, by in some cases restoring office holders who had previously been removed in 1649. This did not have the desired effect because those replaced in this process had by then established themselves as an integral part of the local ruling elite, and they soon found ways and means of returning to power.

5 Paul D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic. Partisan Politics in England's Towns 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 33.

The third crisis in relations developed during the five years before the Glorious Revolution. The ineffectiveness of the 1662 Corporation Act in trying to create amenable local elites, laid the foundations for the attack on city charters, which came about in the 1680s. After the Exclusion Crisis, the crown realised that it could only exercise the greater control over parliament, if those responsible for electing MPs could be managed. Since the freemen of corporations formed the bulk of these voters, the way to ensure that loyal supporters of the crown were in the majority was to replace the existing charters with new ones, spelling out who was entitled to sit on the corporation and giving the crown a permanent right to replace the nominated members. As Charles II was reluctant to call parliament during the 1680s, initially few charters were issued but the numbers increased following the accession of James II, including one for Winchester. These charters exposed the authoritarian intentions of the crown which were met with alarm and eventual opposition from the local elites.

The attempt to control the composition of local government was not the only factor responsible for this changing relationship between the crown and the corporation. During the early seventeenth century, old established towns like Winchester often struggled to recover their previous status and prosperity, when faced with a loss of patronage and declining industries.⁶ For some their fortunes only began to revive when they were able to find a new role as an urban centre, which was attractive to incomers. After 1660 'communities like Warwick, Winchester, Salisbury and Gloucester, which had suffered severely from the strain of poverty, industrial decline and warfare blossomed as social centres during what was to become the golden age of the county town'.⁷ Winchester was gradually transformed from a decaying medieval city to the magnet for Hampshire's upper-class society.⁸ The city's 'attractions were enhanced by the absence of any competing social centre in the area', since Portsmouth had a much narrower focus as a garrison town and Southampton's port was in continuous decline.⁹

These changes began to have an impact on urban politics as the corporation realised that the revival of their economic fortunes could lie through cultivating the spending power of the local gentry.

6 S.M. Jack, *Towns in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Basingstoke, 1996); P. Clark (ed.), *County Towns in Pre-Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981).

7 P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance* (Oxford, 2002), p. 29.

8 A.B. Rosen, 'Winchester in Transition, 1580-1700' in Clark (ed.), *County Towns*.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 177; A. Temple Patterson, *A History of Southampton 1700-1914* (Southampton, 1966), 39.

Through encouraging more of them to become freemen and hence the gentrification of the ruling class, a process which was already well under way by the 1630s. A temporary interruption in this development ensued during the Interregnum, but with the corporation pursuing a policy of regaining royal patronage in the 1680s, this process accelerated especially as it coincided with the crown's bid to obtain greater loyalty from the urban ruling classes. Furthermore the development of fashionable urban life after the Civil War with its 'antipathy to ideological and religious bigotry' may have contributed to a reduction in local political differences.¹⁰ Certainly by the 1720s Defoe felt that in Winchester's case an 'abundance of gentry being in the neighbourhood adds to the sociableness of the place'.¹¹

I The Structure of Government in Seventeenth Century Winchester

The 1588 charter broke little new ground in terms of Winchester's existing political arrangements, so that developments in the city over the next century were built on primarily conservative foundations. For example, membership of the ruling class of freemen was through admission to the Merchant Guild, normally limited to those who had successfully completed an apprenticeship in their chosen trade and paid the entry fee of one and a half marks (£1). The Merchant Guild afforded its members 'freedom in trade, security of property against exaction and protection against competition'.¹² This exclusive body therefore reinforced the emergence of a small political elite comprising the city's wealthiest citizens, who had both the time and means as well as the appetite to govern.¹³ Political power in the city was vested in three groups. Firstly, there was a small clique known as the Mayor's Brethren' surrounding the mayor, which included the recorder, ex-mayors and the six aldermen. Below them was a group of senior freemen, known as the Twenty Four. Finally the whole body of freemen met together from time to time in a general assembly or boroughmote, as the urban equivalent of a manorial court.

10 P. Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance* p. 318.

11 D. Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 1724–6 (London, 1962), p. 129.

12 HRO, 107 M88W/36, ix.

13 A.B. Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester 1520–1670', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1970), p. 103.

The balance of power between these groups altered during this period, as political authority increasingly came to rest in the hands of the Mayor's Brethren. Meeting weekly, their role was to assist and advise the mayor in fulfilling his executive duties. They were involved in the appointment of aldermen, interpreting the customs and ordinances of the city, as well as the setting of local taxes and licensing of trades. As the Twenty Four became increasingly marginalised, they complained in 1622 that 'we are of the council of the city, and are wronged if we are not called into the Counsel House and made acquainted with the affairs of the city'.¹⁴ In response the former mayor John Trussell advised them to be content with their place in the hierarchy, 'until the heavenly providence shall in due time promote you higher'.¹⁵ This comment was not without substance since mayoral candidates were still chosen every year from the ranks of the Twenty Four, even though the two nominations for office were in the hands of the Mayor's Brethren. One of these candidates was rejected by the current mayor and the survivor then stood against the previous year's defeated candidate in an election where all the freemen voted, including where necessary a mayoral casting vote.¹⁶ The recruitment of new members from within the ruling group led to the creation and maintenance of a true and self-perpetuating oligarchy. National governments eventually came to realise that if they wanted to achieve a change of direction in local administration, they could only do this by purging such closed bodies as the city corporations.

The charter enhanced the role of two other offices, which were to become increasingly important as local government became more professional. It established the recorder as the corporation's legal advisor within the hierarchy, on a distinct and separate basis from that of the aldermen. A qualified barrister, the recorder held the office for life and became increasingly influential with the development of the local courts, and as matters of legal interpretation became more important in the deliberations of the city's government.¹⁷ The other permanent official whose powers were extended at this time was the town clerk. In addition to important administrative duties, the charter designated him to act as the recorder's deputy in terms of the town

14 Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Hants., c.5, 90.

15 HRO, W/K1/13/2, Transcript of the Benefactors of Winchester by John Trussell, ff. 89-90.

16 T. Atkinson, *Elizabethan Winchester* (London, 1968), p. 58.

17 J.A. Spokes, 'Winchester City Recorders 1636-1790', unpublished MA dissertation, University of Winchester (2001), p. 61.

court and the selection of new aldermen.¹⁸ Both of these posts came to have particular significance in the disputes between the government and the corporation after the Civil War and the Restoration.

These arrangements did not, however, prevent mayors once elected from governing during their term of office in an autocratic manner bound only by local custom and usage. Mayor Harwood's term of office in 1653, for example, was particularly controversial and no meetings of the corporation took place in that year. As someone with a chequered past, Harwood used his position to remove unflattering remarks about himself from the official records, by cutting pages out and defacing others.¹⁹ He also imprisoned Christopher Hussey, one of the chamberlains, who as the local treasurer refused to hand money over to him. Hussey with a proper sense of the independence of his own office, pointed out that he was not accountable to the mayor, since 'as hee is chosen by the citizens, soe is hee accountable unto sworne Auditors elected by the sayd cittizens'.²⁰ Ultimately Harwood's refusal to proceed with his successor's election led to him being deposed by the assembly of freemen.²¹

Under the terms of the charter there were a wide variety of local office holders to carry out the day to day business of the corporation. Most important of these were the two bailiffs, who were elected alongside the mayor to act as magistrates and be responsible for the collecting of and accounting for the city revenues. Although many of those who held these positions did not progress any further, the records do show that this office could also be a stepping stone to the position of mayor. The main function of the two chamberlains, who acted as treasurers, was to collect rents arising from property leases granted by the corporation, and be responsible for the repair of city buildings. There were two constables to carry out policing duties and two coroners for the conduct of legal work.²²

During the seventeenth century these officials found that they had to deal with an ever increasing range of business on behalf of the corporation. Whilst the charter had established it as a private body, circumstances soon required it to perform an increasing number of functions on behalf of the city's inhabitants. Winchester's growing social and economic problems meant there was a public expectation

18 HRO, W/B1/1, f. 113.

19 HRO, W/B1/5, f. 32.

20 Bailey, *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives*, p. 60.

21 HRO, W/B1/5, f. 67v.

22 HRO, W/A1/25/1.

that the corporation would provide poor relief, stimulate and regulate the local economy, provide for the city's defence, carry out public works and apply justice. As will be seen shortly the political elite approached many of these admittedly difficult tasks with reluctance and ineffectiveness, preferring to spend money and effort on their own status and pleasures. Ideas about what was good for the benefit of all citizens took second place, when compared with promoting brewing monopolies and profitable leases to the personal advantage of the political elite.²³

The decisions of the Mayor's Brethren were recorded in the city's Proposal Books.²⁴ These were then put forward for enactment as ordinances or local acts of legislation by the general assemblies of all freemen. Their role was to act as a local legislative body, by not only putting into force the relevant acts and proclamations which emerged from national governments, but also passing those ordinances which recorded and reinforced the uses and customs through which the city's government was to be carried out. The records of the Ordinance Books further underline the concentration of power at the top, by showing that more often than not such meetings rubber-stamped the work of the corporation.²⁵ The assembly's other important function was to form the electorate when it came to choosing the city's two MPs.

II The Political Elite of Winchester

The city's records reveal that power was rarely in the hands of more than fifty to sixty freemen, who constituted only about 12 per cent of the adult male population of Winchester, a much lower proportion than was the case in other similar towns like Exeter and Coventry.²⁶ Evidence from the drawing up of wills and inventories during this period has shown that this legal process in itself emphasised 'the mutual affirmation of status and the close links amongst the ruling hierarchy'; an estimated 74 per cent of inventories in the period 1650–1730 involved members of the ruling oligarchy as beneficiaries or appraisers.²⁷ When

23 HRO, W/B1/5, ff. 106–107.

24 HRO, W/B2/4.

25 HRO, W/B1/4–7.

26 Rosen, 'Winchester in Transition', p. 147; P. Clark and P. Slack (ed.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700* (London, 1972), p. 58.

27 M.R. May, 'Winchester Houses and People 1650–c1730: A Study based on Probate Inventory Evidence', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Winchester Ph.D. (1998), p. 50.

it comes to the election of mayors for the period 1638–88, there was a small pool of candidates for this office. Only thirty individuals held this office during that time, and of these some seventeen enjoyed two or more terms. The 1649 regime change was particularly disruptive in terms of the accepted patterns of office holding within the political elite, since none of the pre 1649 royalist mayors ever held this office again. This was in marked contrast to the situation in 1662 following the implementation of the Corporation Act, where closeness within the political elite enabled four mayors from the 1650s to overcome their expulsion from the corporation, and be re-elected to this office in the period 1665–68.

There was some diversity in their background due to the city's position as a retail and professional services centre for Hampshire. There is evidence for the sons of successful craftsmen and retailers following in their father's footsteps, but many wills mention sons whose names never appear in the city's records.²⁸ Clearly there was no place for them in Winchester's narrow and somewhat closed oligarchy, and they had to seek their fortune elsewhere. Still there were some successful outsiders such as the woollen draper Ralph Riggs, the fourth son of a Fareham gentleman, whose family was the only one that came close to establishing a political dynasty.²⁹ He was mayor on three occasions, and both his son and son-in-law held the office twice. Other families failed to establish this type of continuity often because of a lack of direct surviving male heirs. Some office holders passed their involvement onto more distant relatives, whilst others like Christopher Hussey came to power by marrying rich widows from within the elite.³⁰

The pattern of change and survival in the political elite can be assessed from sampling the lists of freemen recorded in the Ordinance Book every five years.³¹ The small size and neighbourliness of the political elite was illustrated in two important characteristics of its composition during this period. Firstly there was a degree of toleration amongst the elite of those who held differing political views. Prominent members of the corporation like James Guy, Benjamin Clarke and John Munday withstood both the purge of 1649 and that which occurred in 1662 with the implementation of the Corporation Act. They all became mayors immediately after the Restoration, which would seem to indicate a wish by the corporation to opt for generally respected men

28 Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 116.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

31 HRO, W/B1/4–7.

of experience to lead them through a period of uncertainty.³² Secondly once men had enjoyed the benefits of power and status, which came from being members of the corporation, they were determined to maintain these advantages in spite of any local regime change. This applied to men like Nicholas Purdue, Richard Dennett, Edmund Fyfield and Thomas Muspratt, who all came to power in the 1650s.³³ They used their political acumen to recover from what turned out to be a temporary exclusion from the corporation, and went on to be re-elected as mayors in the 1660s. It appears that any initial conflict at the start of the Restoration period was not deep enough to prevent their return to the political fold within a short space of time. All the evidence points to the fact that pressure for purging political opponents from the corporation stemmed mostly from outside interventions such as the parliamentary acts in 1649 and 1661. However, such legislation was not in itself adequately framed to produce regimes which were necessarily more accommodating to Westminster, nor did it ensure that those expelled could not return to power at a later date.

There are few records which enable us to examine individual political careers in any detail but the example of Thomas Muspratt provides an illustration of one man's ability to survive the particular turmoil of the mid-seventeenth century. He first appears in 1631 as a tax-paying shoemaker but is absent for the period 1642 to 1645, resurfacing after the Civil War as a rent collector on the bishop's estates. He rose to prominence in 1649, when he was appointed a justice of the peace despite never having been a freeman. He acquired various other offices and served as mayor in 1650 and 1657. This brought him into verbal and even physical conflict with some of the more quarrelsome personalities who came to power during the 1650s. When Harwood refused to stand down at the end of his term of office, Muspratt was the safe pair of hands chosen to organise the election of his successor. However, as the political climate began to change with the approach of the Restoration, support for him fell away. He received a derisory number of votes when he stood in the 1660 Parliamentary election, with records showing previous mayoral colleagues hedging their political bets, by opting for the two royalists who had put themselves forward. His unpopularity was not only a reflection of the corporation infighting, but also to his direct involvement in a brewing monopoly in 1655, which did not endear him to amongst others the local victuallers,

³² HRO, W/B1/6, ff. 1–50.

³³ HRO, W/B1/5, ff. 36–128.

who petitioned against him after the Restoration. Local royalists were keen to remove him as soon as possible and he was excluded from the corporation two years before the main expulsions, which arose from the implementation of the Corporation Act. However, using what by now must have become the considerable political skills at his disposal, he was able to gain the support of Lord St John of Basing, Winchester's new lay patron. This led to his restoration to the corporation in 1665 and election as mayor for a third term of office in 1668.³⁴ He finally disappears from the records in 1681.

The composition of the ruling elite changed over this period as it became possible to be admitted as a freeman without having been a member of the Merchant Guild. Already in 1595 it had been agreed that 'it shalbe henceforth lawfull at the tyme of the eleccion of the Maior for the Maior and the more parte of the fower and twentie to call and admit into the fredome anie person inhabiting within the Cittie'.³⁵ The corporation's cultivation of the local gentry meant that during the 1630s they made up 40 per cent of the new freemen.³⁶ In 1663 a special oath was enacted for freemen who were 'noblemen and persons of quality' omitting all specific duties except loyalty to the king and preservation of the city's rights and privileges.³⁷ These changes had the effect of shifting the composition of the corporation away from urban craftsmen to local gentry, who often lived outside the city and were not members of the Merchant Guild. By 1688 over half the total of the eligible assembly were listed as coming from the ranks of the aristocracy or gentry.³⁸ The majority of these had only joined during the 1680s in a clear drive to increase the level of loyalist support within the corporation.³⁹ However, this growing gentrification of the assembly also led to a decline in its political influence, since many of these new freemen had other interests and chose not to become actively involved in the city's government. Perhaps inevitably as figures recorded in the Ordinance Books show, a clear gap now opened up between freemen

34 HRO, W/B1/4, f. 84, W/B1/5, ff. 17a, 137, W/A6/1, f. 112; Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 260; T. Atkinson, 'Typescript of the Commonwealth 1649–1660', p. 60; Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Seventh Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1879) Appendix part 1, p. 93.

35 HRO, W/B1/1, f. 284.

36 Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 231.

37 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 8v.

38 HRO, W/B1/7, f. 39.

39 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 156.

who were eligible to attend and those actually present at meetings of the general assembly.⁴⁰

II Pre-Civil War Winchester

During this period the nature of the relationship between the corporation and its traditional allies of Church and crown was perhaps surprisingly not without friction. Despite the social and economic benefits which a substantial clerical presence brought to the city, civic pride was constantly irritated by the corporation's lack of jurisdiction over the cathedral close. Since the dean, John Young, was determined to defend the Church's privileges and position in this area, a series of often petty disputes soured relations. These started in 1622 when it was found that the foundations for the new market house had trespassed onto cathedral property.⁴¹ In 1630 the dean rejected an approach from the corporation to finance setting the poor to work, on the charitable grounds that some funds 'must be kept to be distributed to the impotent poor'.⁴² Laud's vicar general was then snubbed by the mayor and aldermen in 1635, when they did not turn out to greet him on his official visit to the city.⁴³

It was the imposition of the ship money tax, which provided the ideal opportunity for the corporation to indulge in what one writer has termed 'an aggressive display of civic localism'.⁴⁴ In an attempt to assert their authority over the dean and chapter the city's rulers demanded that they pay their £20 ship money assessment direct to the corporation.⁴⁵ Since the dean and chapter had already paid this money to the sheriff, they refused to do so and appealed to the king's council for support.⁴⁶ With his civic authority at stake the mayor, Ralph Riggs, staged a theatrical protest at the Trinity Sunday service by entering the cathedral 'with his maces borne up and his hat on' and leaving in an equally ostentatious manner before the service had ended.⁴⁷ The

40 Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 233.

41 F.R. Goodman (ed.), *The Diary of John Young, S.T.P.: Dean of Winchester 1616 to the Commonwealth* (London, 1928), p. 68.

42 Ibid., p. 87.

43 Ibid., p. 105.

44 Carl B. Estabrook, 'Ritual, Space and Authority in Seventeenth Century English Cathedral Cities', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 32 (2002), 614.

45 Atkinson, *Elizabethan Winchester*, p. 66.

46 Goodman (ed.), *Diary of John Young*, p. 128.

47 Winchester Cathedral Library, Winchester, MS Chapter Book 1622–1645, 18 June 1637.

final judgement of the king's council confirmed that the cathedral and its grounds were exempt from the jurisdiction of the civic authorities and censured the mayor for his actions.⁴⁸ However, once Parliament assembled in 1640 the recorder, John Lisle, who had led the case for the corporation and was now an MP, took advantage of the crown's weakened position to overturn the original decision via a petition.⁴⁹ This type of dispute between civic and ecclesiastical authorities in the 1630s was not unique to Winchester, since cases occurred in other cathedral cities such as Canterbury, Wells and Chichester for similar reasons.⁵⁰ What is noticeable in Winchester's case is the considerable lengths to which the corporation was prepared to go in defying the king's authority and instructions, in order to assert what it considered to be its local rights.

During the 1630s there were other examples of the corporation's difficult relationship with the crown. It was always keen to present a picture of hardship when responding to the demands of central government, so that in 1638 it succeeded in reducing its own ship money assessment from £170 to £150.⁵¹ A year later it was found protesting against the deputy lieutenants' request to supply twenty six men for the admittedly unpopular Scottish Wars on account of 'the miserable estate of this poor city'.⁵² In the end no more than a few hundred pounds was raised for this venture throughout Hampshire, compared to the contribution of £2,500, which the authorities had agreed with the justices of the peace would be paid to the mayor of Winchester by May 1640.⁵³

The politics of pre-war Winchester show a city not entirely at ease with itself. True it was beginning to branch out in new directions by developing professional and retail services for the benefit of its hinterland, which included cultivating the local gentry and encouraging them to join the corporation. However, it struggled to accommodate those immigrants, who were not always as capable of making an economic contribution to the city. By contrast the political

48 Goodman (ed.), *Diary of John Young*, p. 137.

49 W.R.W. Stephens and F.T. Madge, *Documents relating to the History of the Cathedral Church of Winchester in the Seventeenth Century*, Hampshire Record Society (Winchester, 1897), p. 14.

50 Estabrook, 'Ritual Space and Authority', 593–620.

51 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series of the reign of Charles I*, edited by J. Bruce, 23 vols (London, 1858–97), X, p. 542.

52 British Library, London [hereafter BL], Add. MS 21, 922, f. 209.

53 BL, Add. MS 26, 731, f 78v–80v.

elite lived well, manipulating the system for their own benefit and spending corporation money on entertaining themselves with displays of civic dignity. They appeared to prefer standing up for their own rights and privileges, rather than attempting to resolve the real social and economic problems they faced.

III The Civil War and its Aftermath

When the general assembly came to elect its representatives for the Parliaments of 1641, the outcome represented a microcosm of the divided community that Hampshire was to become during the Civil War. The successful candidates could not have been more different. John Lisle, the city's recorder, had already played a prominent part in the ship money dispute. He went on to become a staunch supporter of the parliamentary cause and after the Civil War played a prominent role in reshaping Winchester's government. As a regicide he was finally tracked down in his Swiss exile after the Restoration and assassinated by royalist agents.⁵⁴ The other member was Sir William Ogle, who was not a local man, but had married the widow of a former Winchester MP and settled in the city, where he was appointed captain of the city's militia. He went on to become the commander of the royalist garrison in Winchester castle from 1643 until its surrender in 1645.⁵⁵

Unlike many of the surrounding local gentry who supported parliament, Winchester's ruling elite opted to side with the king at the outbreak of Civil War. This decision represented a re-assertion of the city's traditional and longstanding links with both the Church and the monarchy. Despite the recent disputes between city and cathedral, Winchester 'never became a bastion of radicalism, but instead had grown into a conforming Anglican locale'.⁵⁶ Laud's vicar general found a city with plenty of Catholics and very few Puritans on his 1635 visit.⁵⁷ Winchester was to pay a heavy price for its loyalty to the king, suffering both considerable physical damage and complete administrative disruption throughout the war. The corporation was unable to exercise

54 Timothy Venning, 'John Lisle', in H.C.G. Matthew, B. Harrison *et al* (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004–), XXXIII, pp. 967–68.

55 Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 237.

56 J. Clayton Owens, 'Between King and Conscience: Law, Politics and Community in Early Modern England's Diocese of Winchester 1520–1641', unpublished Ph. D thesis University of Vanderbilt (2005), p. 426.

57 *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud*, edited by J. Bliss and W. Scott, 7 vols (Oxford, 1847–1860), I, p. 363.

one its most basic functions, namely to keep its citizens secure. During the hostilities a pattern developed where both sides entered the city with impunity, causing widespread destruction especially to the property of known opponents, and then leaving after extracting whatever useful supplies they could lay their hands on. The mayors of the period appeared helpless when faced with the demands of both sides, and in the most extreme cases bought them off by raiding funds that would normally be used for charitable bequests. The absence of the corporation's records for these years show how the city's administration came to a virtual standstill.

For some in the city's small political community, equivocation was preferable to principled opposition in such disordered times. For instance in December 1643 the city's financial accounts show the ex-mayor, Ralph Riggs amongst others, signing off a loan of city plate worth £58 to the king for the Royalist war effort.⁵⁸ However, both his past and future conduct reveal him to be an unlikely supporter of the monarchy. As mayor in 1637 he had been the prime mover behind the legal turf war with the dean and chapter over the payment of ship money. 1643 had already been an eventful year for Riggs, since he had been taken hostage by royalist troops during one of their raids on the city before being rescued by parliamentary dragoons.⁵⁹ Finally when Parliament's victory led to him becoming mayor again after the Civil War, such was the tenderness of his conscience, that the corporation recorded its formal agreement to excuse him from the normal mayoral duty of attending the 1646 race meeting.⁶⁰ It is not clear why he remained in royalist Winchester during the Civil War. He had come to the city from Fareham to make his fortune, and his now wide ranging family and business interests probably meant he had simply invested too much in the place to leave despite the hostilities. He presumably felt that signing off on the loan was a sensible act of political discretion, especially since at the time Winchester was suffering the stresses and strains of playing host to the 5,000 royalist troops, which Lord Hopton had assembled for his 1644 push towards London. Winchester's Civil War only came to an end in 1645 when Oliver Cromwell arrived with siege artillery of sufficient power to successfully attack the castle's defences.

58 HRO, W/E6/2, Coffer Account Book, 30 December 1643.

59 Atkinson, 'Typescript of Stuart Winchester', p. 84.

60 Bailey (ed.), *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives* p. 78.

While Cromwell was able to achieve the military subjugation of the city, establishing co-operation between the corporation and central government was more difficult to achieve. There were divisions within the political elite between those who were reluctant to accept the status quo which they signalled with small acts of defiance and the Parliamentary supporters, including Ralph Riggs, who lacked the power base to control key appointments within the corporation. Legislation in 1649 gave the Parliamentary supporters control of the city but in the intervening four years, there were less drastic efforts made by the government to influence the composition of the corporation.

Initially Cromwell attempted to influence the municipal elections which had been delayed by the siege to November 1645 by packing the meeting. Some 13 new names appear on the freemen's roll, none of them admitted via the usual route of the Merchant Guild. They included Robert Wallop, MP for Andover and the new High Steward of Winchester, as well as number of army officers. Various men from the more parliamentary-inclined Southampton, including an MP and two aldermen, were also present. Indeed a number of those attending never re-appear at subsequent meetings. The result was that the politically experienced parliamentarian Ralph Riggs was elected for his third term of office as mayor.⁶¹

Further tension arose in 1647 over the appointment of a new clerk with the recommendation from the king that a certain Ferdinand Bye should be appointed. The general assembly was about to consent to this when the recorder, John Lisle, intervened.⁶² This appointment was a critical personal matter for him, since his national responsibilities would take him away from Winchester frequently, and he needed a reliable person to deputise for him in his absence. First he reminded the assembly that Bye had been a royalist supporter in the recent Civil War, and then proceeded to recommend Stephen Welstead, who also happened to be clerk to the local Committee for Sequestrations.⁶³

In spite of these efforts to secure parliamentary control over the city, Winchester continued to be seen as a centre of royalist support. In 1648, 300 soldiers were again quartered in the city for several months after reports of loyalist gatherings there.⁶⁴ The local county committee also felt obliged to issue a declaration for reading in every parish banning what it called tumultuous meetings and the gathering of signatures

61 Atkinson, *Elizabethan Winchester*, pp. 99–100.

62 Bailey (ed.), *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives* p. 188.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

64 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series of the reign of Charles I*, XXII, p. 57.

for petitions.⁶⁵ None of this was enough to stop the corporation from electing Joseph Butler, a royalist sympathiser, at that year's assembly's meeting.⁶⁶ In December 1648 Charles I passed through the city on his way from the Isle of Wight to London for his subsequent trial and execution. The mayor and alderman were determined to show their continuing support for the monarchy. They presented the king with a loyal address as well as the keys and the mace of the city according to ancient custom.⁶⁷ When the colonel of the guard intervened to point out that Parliament had already declared such behaviour treasonable, the corporation professed ignorance and asked his pardon.⁶⁸ It would have been very surprising if this public outburst of royalism did not reach the ears of Winchester's MPs, Nicholas Love and John Lisle. Following the king's trial and execution, they launched a concerted effort to create a government in the city, which would be supportive of the national regime.

In September 1649 an act of Parliament deliberately remodelled the corporation as a means of bypassing the obstructive general assembly. This appointed a new mayor, created three aldermen, seven new justices of the peace and ten new members of the Twenty Four.⁶⁹ Many of these were relative outsiders like the three new aldermen, who although freemen had never held any office. As long standing local supporters of the parliamentary cause, the Riggs family were the main beneficiaries of this regime change. The new mayor was Edmund Riggs, son of the now deceased Ralph, who was also joined on the corporation by his brother, Thomas and his brother-in-law, Anthony Yalden.⁷⁰ The main impact of these changes was to completely disrupt the long established arrangements, whereby a steady progression of freemen to municipal office maintained the self-perpetuating oligarchy. In contrast to the political upheaval of 1662, many of those excluded never held office again, even after they were reinstated under the Corporation Act.

These changes to Winchester's administration were more drastic than applied in other places such as Hull or Norwich, but they still contained no mechanism for giving central government greater

65 *A Declaration of the Committee for the Safety of the County of Southampton sitting at Winton, 9 June 1648*, (London, 1648).

66 HRO, W/B1/5, f. 22.

67 R. Baker, *Chronicles of the Kings of England* (London, 1674), p. 585.

68 HRO, W/B1/5, f. 24.

69 HRO, W/B1/5, f. 17a.

70 Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 258.

control over office holding in the city. What amounted to a final purge of the corporation occurred in September 1650, when the requirement to take an 'Engagement of Loyalty to the Commonwealth' saw the removal of a further eight members.⁷¹ By now only some 25 per cent of the corporation's freemen were survivors from 1648. Hence many office holders of the 1650s had achieved their position within the elite, through direct appointment to the corporation. Their subsequent political behaviour revealed both their insecurity at their sudden elevation and a determination to hold on to the power they had now achieved.

In terms of their relationship with Westminster the new men soon showed themselves to be no more amenable than their predecessors when it came to direction from the centre. Where instructions or policies from central government might conflict with local interest, responses ranged from prevarication to actual opposition. For example, it required repeated demands from the Council of State before demolition work on the castle was eventually undertaken by the corporation in 1651.⁷² They then successfully petitioned against a parliamentary committee's proposal in 1651 that the cathedral be demolished.⁷³ Indeed by 1654 in an attempt no doubt to find favour with the continuing Anglican presence in the city, a number of prominent parliamentary supporters were adding their names to a subscription list providing funds for its repair after the ravages of the civil war.⁷⁴ When Major-General Goffe came to Winchester for his period of direct rule in 1656, he was not welcomed and found much to discourage him. In a series of increasingly disheartened letters to Secretary of State Thurloe, he expressed alarm at the number of royalists still occupying positions of responsibility in the locality.⁷⁵ The only contribution he made to the city's godly reformation was to close a single ale-house.⁷⁶ His intervention in the parliamentary elections of 1656 was similarly ineffective, since Robert Wallop and Edward Hooper, both open critics of the current regime, were returned as MPs.⁷⁷ As Coleby has commented, those who held

71 HRO, W/B1/5, ff. 23, 28.

72 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series [of the Commonwealth]*, edited by M.A.E. Green, 13 vols (London, 1875–86), I, pp. 180, 197, 320.

73 R. Sawyer, *Civil War in Winchester* (Salisbury, 2002), p. 221.

74 Atkinson, *Elizabethan Winchester*, p. 2.

75 C. Durston, *Cromwell's Major-Generals: Godly Government during the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2001), p. 45.

76 HRO, Q3/1, 301.

77 Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MSS, A 40, f. 305.

office in Hampshire during the 1650s 'were not inherently more responsive to central governments by virtue of their inferior social rank' and 'whilst not militant localists, nor were they mere lackeys of central authority'.⁷⁸

When it came to local legislation, the ordinances of this period show a tinkering timidity compared to the reforming zeal apparent in cities like Bristol.⁷⁹ Their approach to poverty was no more ambitious than a repetition of pre-war measures, until the establishment of a brewing monopoly in 1655, which generated £20 to be spent on poor relief.⁸⁰ Since the monopolists happened to be prominent members of the corporation like Thomas Muspratt, there was little difference from the pre-Civil War situation, where the elite made sure they benefited personally from the distribution of profitable leases.⁸¹ When in an unusual burst of activity, the new mayor, Richard Dennett, introduced nineteen new ordinances in 1656, many of these were simply reiterations of old measures, and the only one with a nod towards Puritan sentiment was to propose fining the parents of children who played disorderly games on Sundays in the streets or churchyard.⁸²

There were other issues to distract the corporation from governing effectively. A number of corrupt and manipulative individuals were now in positions of authority. In 1652 one of the aldermen, John Woodman, physically assaulted the recorder, John Hooker. Both were later suspended from office by the corporation; Woodman for embezzlement and Hooker for his behaviour in causing 'discords and differences in this Corporation'.⁸³ Finally in 1656 to overcome such disorderly behaviour, there was a proposal to use a system of red and white bullets in a secret ballot, since 'public and open Votes at the assemblies for electing officers hath caused clamour and ill blood amongst divers of the Citizens of the city'.⁸⁴ Members were also required not to disclose matters discussed in council chambers to strangers, whilst another ordinance proposed to fine the mayor forty shillings if he failed to execute ordinances.⁸⁵ The emerging picture is of

78 A.M. Coleby, *Central Government and the Localities: Hampshire 1649–89* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 65.

79 David Harris Sacks, 'Bristol's Wars of Religion', in R.C. Richardson (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), p. 120.

80 HRO, W/F2/5, f. 73b.

81 Rosen, 'Economic and Social Aspects of the History of Winchester', p. 109.

82 HRO, W/B1/5, ff. 98–115.

83 Bailey (ed.), *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives* p. 61.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

85 HRO, W/B1/5, ff. 98–115.

an ineffective regime largely concerned with bolstering its legitimacy and trying to conduct itself constitutionally, in part to counter act the more extreme behaviour of some of its members.

The only area where radical plans were enacted, concerned a major re-organisation of the city's parishes. In 1652 the Commissioners for Plundered Ministers responded to a petition from the mayor and corporation about the decay of many churches in the city, by ordering that worship be concentrated in the churches of St Maurice and St Thomas and appointing two Presbyterian ministers to them.⁸⁶ However, traditional Anglicanism continued to survive with these officially appointed ministers complaining to Cromwell in 1655 about the prayer book services still being held in an abandoned church in the suburbs.⁸⁷ In reality this parochial re-organisation represented a sensible rationalisation to deal with the long-standing reduction in Winchester's population. However, the corporation was clearly not convinced that this measure would stand the test of time, since it carefully worded the leases of the redundant churches to restrict what these buildings could be used for.⁸⁸

IV The Restoration of Charles II and the implementation of the Corporation Act

Political difficulties and tensions in relations between central government and the corporation arose again as result of the Restoration and subsequently the 1662 Corporation Act. Initially the local elite had been reassured when Richard Cromwell had succeed his father as Lord Protector in 1658 because despite his increasing absences at Westminster, he was a typical Hampshire gentleman who had even gone so far as to help the corporation to buy a cup for horse racing in 1657.⁸⁹ However, once Richard Cromwell had resigned and the Convention Parliament had been called, the local political establishment began to fracture. The first evidence for this came with the parliamentary elections of April 1660. A number of prominent republicans like John Lisle were no longer present, and Thomas Muspratt, who under any other circumstances might have expected to be chosen, found himself in third place with only 6 votes compared to over 50 cast for the two

86 HRO, W/F2/5, f. 1.

87 BL, Add. MS 29319, ff. 65–67.

88 HRO, W/B1/5, ff. 58, 92.

89 HRO, W/E6/2, 3 April 1657.

royalist candidates.⁹⁰ Following the proclamation of Charles II at the city cross, his local supporters began petitioning the House of Lords to remove what they described as the 'new' corporation who had they claimed 'exercised very arbitrary and tyrannical power'.⁹¹ The Lords' response was to send the marquess of Winchester and earl of Southampton to mediate between the various groups within the city. Their failure to do so led to an order that 'for the better bringing of the Citty to a peace', immediately excluded three prominent members of the existing corporation including Thomas Muspratt.⁹²

There followed a period of uncertainty and inconsistency especially in relation to local office holding, not unlike the aftermath of the Civil War. For instance John Munday, the mayor chosen in 1660, was a survivor of the 1649 regime change, but the bailiffs elected with him were both new men of the 1650s, who were ejected from the corporation two years later. Their successors of 1662 were also men of the 1650s, but they managed to avoid exclusion.⁹³ In another example of growing royalist influence, Ferdinand Bye complained to the assembly about the appointment of Stephen Welstead as town clerk in 1649. He now had a letter of recommendation from Charles II and with no possibility of intimidation on this occasion, he was duly appointed. However, misconduct at corporation meetings was still continuing, as evidenced by the introduction of twenty shilling fines for disorderly behaviour.⁹⁴

Such political difficulties were not unique to Winchester, so Parliament now passed an act for the well-governing and regulating of corporations. Its main purpose was to ensure that men loyal to the crown would be responsible for local government, and that current charters would in effect be re-confirmed 'by re-establishing the legal corporate succession that had been broken by illegal removals'.⁹⁵ The act appointed commissioners to visit corporations and hear all their members swear oaths of allegiance. They also had the power to remove those who refused to do this, and restore any members of corporations, who had been removed by what were seen as illegal means under the previous regime. However the act had a fatal omission. The application of oaths for future office holders was left in the hands of the corporations

90 HRO, W/B1/5, f. 137.

91 House of Lords Records Office, London, HL/PO/JO/10/1/287 Main Papers, Petition of old corporation, 13 June 1660.

92 *Journal of the House of Lords*, 39 vols (London, 1767–1830), XI, p. 139.

93 HRO, W/F2/5, f. 120.

94 HRO, W1/B1/5, f. 162.

95 Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic*, p. 90.

themselves. Hence as happened at Winchester and elsewhere, those previously dismissed could return to political life, provided they were prepared to salve their consciences and conform to the oaths.

It was not until August 1662 that the commissioners began their work at the White Hart in Winchester. Many of those members under suspicion simply failed to turn up for the swearing of the oaths. In addition to the three already expelled in 1660, a further seventeen members of the corporation were now removed for what was termed 'their disloyalty to the King's majesty that now is and being nonconformists in church government'.⁹⁶ At 30 per cent of existing freemen, the level of expulsions was not as severe as places like Portsmouth and Gloucester where more than half were removed, but greater than Southampton where only nine were expelled.⁹⁷

The main difference in Winchester between the imposed local regime changes of 1649 and 1662 was the ability of surviving or even expelled parliamentary supporters within the corporation to return to office relatively quickly. Not only were four mayors from the 1650s again elected to that office in the 1660s, but Anthony Yalden, a prominent appointment under the 1649 Act also became mayor in 1674 and 1682. Corporate Winchester remained a small political community in the seventeenth century. The 'culture of reconciliation' in a number of cities meant that the friendships, family connections and business relationships built up over years of regular face to face contact, could effectively neutralise those pressures for political uniformity which came from the centre.⁹⁸

V The Crisis over the Charter

The ineffectiveness of the Corporation Act in securing consistently loyal and supportive local office holders led to a further political crisis in the 1680s, which tested relations between the corporation and the crown. After a period of limited and uncoordinated responses to this situation by successive governments, the catalyst for greater intervention finally came with the challenges to royal authority, which arose during the Exclusion Crisis of 1679 to 1681. Even in normally loyal Winchester both of the MPs elected in 1679 were in favour of excluding James from the succession.⁹⁹ If the crown was to build up support for its position in

96 HRO, W/F2/5, f. 141b.

97 Coleby, *Central Government and the Localities*, p. 94.

98 J. Miller, *Cities Divided*, p. 11.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Parliament, then it had to be able to influence the voting intentions of the small numbers of freemen responsible for electing MPs in towns and cities. Charles II had decided that the most effective means for achieving this situation was to obtain the surrender of old charters and then grant new ones, which would specifically define who were to be members of corporations.

Winchester had suffered considerably both financially and physically for its support of the monarchy during the Civil War, and since then had made only a very slow and modest recovery. The corporation felt that it should now be rewarded for past loyalty and sought to do so by currying favour with the king. In July 1682, they announced in the *London Gazette* that 'the inhabitants of this city being ambitious of the honour of his majesties presence' would establish a plate 'to be run for at such times as he should think he might most conveniently go thither'.¹⁰⁰ This astutely played to Charles's well known enthusiasm for horse racing and he did indeed attend the meeting on 30 August. Two days later he and his brother were made freemen of the city and elected to the corporation.¹⁰¹ By now aware of the king's interest in building a palace away from London, they rushed to offer him a suitable space in the form of the ruined castle. The corporation had previously spent £260 to acquire it in 1656. Now they allowed Charles to buy it for the bargain price of five shillings.¹⁰² At the time this must have seen like money well spent, when much of the estimated £40,000 spent on constructing the palace later found its way into the local economy.¹⁰³

To establish control over civic government, the king was prepared either to work with local loyalists in obtaining a voluntary surrender of old charters, or where there was opposition, to force the same outcome by applying legal means. Once again, as with previous periods of direct government intervention, there were divisions within Winchester's corporation. One group led by Bernard Howard and Thomas Coward were keen to retain royal favour by opting to campaign for the voluntary route. Bernard Howard was a younger brother of the duke of Norfolk and as a devout Roman Catholic and horse racing enthusiast, he found the city a very congenial place to settle during the 1670s. He soon assumed an unofficial role as intermediary between the corporation and the court. Howard's faction was opposed by one led by Anthony

100 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 138v; *London Gazette*, 31 July 1682.

101 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 140.

102 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 152.

103 S. Thurley, 'A Country Seat fit for a King: Charles II, Greenwich and Winchester' in Eveline Cruickshanks (ed.), *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud, 2000), p. 227.

Yalden and Thomas Wavell, who were equally determined to maintain the city's independence, in the face of what they saw as attempts by the crown to control its government.

Tensions arose over the newly elected Mayor Coward's attempt in 1682 to appoint Edward Harfell, a committed royalist supporter, to the corporation. After failing to secure the customary majority of aldermen in favour of such a move, the mayor encouraged Harfell to petition the king directly. This was carefully designed to appeal to Charles's current concerns, by promising to use his influence in choosing local MPs who would be loyal to the crown.¹⁰⁴ The king no doubt encouraged by this, issued a letter directing the corporation to admit Harfell as a freeman. In protest the aldermen then announced that they would make their own representations direct to the king. The mayor simply ignored this and proceeded with Harfell's admission. The very next day determined to press home his advantage, Coward suggested a voluntary surrender of the charter.¹⁰⁵ There was little enthusiasm for this at a poorly attended meeting and the matter lapsed. Shortly afterwards the king received the counter petition of the aldermen, complaining that what the mayor had done amounted to a 'subversion of the government'.¹⁰⁶ The king responded by making a pragmatic retreat by overturning his previous letter, stating that the city had 'full liberty to proceed in this matter according to the laws and customs of that, our Corporation and the laws of this, our Kingdom'.¹⁰⁷ Importantly for the fortunes of the city, this episode did not appear to do lasting damage to the king's relationship with the corporation, since he announced his intention of building the new palace shortly afterwards. However, the corporation was still not in the hands of the loyalists, for Anthony Yalden, one of Harfell's main opponents, became mayor at the next elections. The proceedings of the meeting admitting Harfell were then declared void, whilst the assembly recorded its displeasure with the now ex-mayor Coward by depriving him of his right to sit as a justice of the peace for a year.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless the corporation continued its campaign to gain the king's patronage. Newmarket was no longer his favourite place for horse racing, especially after the Rye House plot in 1683 designed to assassinate him whilst he was staying there. The corporation sent a

104 HRO, W/F2/5, f. 336b.

105 HRO, W/A6/1, f. 115.

106 Bailey (ed.), *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives*, p. 13.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

108 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 144a.

loyal address congratulating the king and his brother on surviving this attempt on their lives.¹⁰⁹ For his next visit in September 1683 they issued a number of ordinances to control prices and generally tidy up the city, all of which were designed to make his stay as comfortable as possible.¹¹⁰ By now the plans for his palace were taking shape and indicate that he was intent on creating nothing less than an English Versailles with a large hunting park and a broad mall connecting the palace to the cathedral. The extensive facilities for the king's council created the impression, that the king with his well known dislike of London following the Exclusion Crisis, was building a palace to rival Hampton Court and Whitehall as a seat of government.¹¹¹ A minor building boom was set off in the city, and there was a real prospect of Winchester once again becoming the nation's capital. It was only with Charles's death and his brother's lack of interest in the palace that the 'royal map of England was never redrawn'.¹¹²

Amidst all this building work it is not surprising that the mood in the corporation, now increasingly packed with local gentry, was becoming ever more supportive towards the king. One clear sign of this was the replacement of Anthony Yalden as mayor by Godson Penton, a long standing royalist, who had been reinstated to the corporation in 1662 for his loyalty to the crown. Finally on 28 June 1684, the 46 members of the corporation present voted unanimously to voluntarily surrender the city's charter.¹¹³ Not even Anthony Yalden and Thomas Wavell, both of whom were there and had previously strongly opposed this move, voted against it. Presumably this was another example of local political realism, since they were now well aware that there would be no support for their position in the assembly. Perhaps they hoped that the king would behave reasonably as he had done in the Harfell case and quickly grant a new charter. However, Charles had no need to issue such a document, since he had no intention of calling Parliament, and like a number of places Winchester was still without one at the time of his death in 1685.

Bernard Howard's high handed but growing influence on local politics continued when he, rather than the mayor and aldermen, set in motion the proclamation of James II's accession on 8 February

109 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 153b.

110 HRO, W/B1/6, f. 154–55.

111 Thurley, 'A Country Seat', p. 229.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

113 HRO, W/B1/7, f. 4.

1685.¹¹⁴ The corporation sent its customary congratulatory address and welcomed the king for a royal visit in September 1685, although two members of the corporation were personally required to stump up the cash for their present to him.¹¹⁵ The corporation was still keen to retain the king's favour, but recent royal patronage had clearly not yet allowed it to escape the financial doldrums. However, any relationship with the new king deteriorated. Over the next few years what began as gradual alienation proceeded by stages to a low point of outright resistance to the clumsy actions of central government. Bernard Howard deliberately manipulated the parliamentary elections of April 1685 to ensure that Winchester's previously Exclusionist MPs were replaced by more reliable candidates. The record of the election meeting showed that over half the electorate registered their disapproval of his actions by abstaining from the vote.¹¹⁶ The corporation followed this by refusing to send in loyal addresses as a response to the Declaration of Indulgence and the birth of the Prince of Wales, despite being put under considerable pressure to do this.¹¹⁷

In 1687 the government resurrected the charter campaign. Writs were issued in Hampshire requiring Lymington, Southampton and Winchester to surrender their charters.¹¹⁸ This move underlined the extent to which central government was out of touch with local political affairs. It was left to the newly elected mayor, Thomas Wavell, to point out that he could hardly comply with this writ, because the charter had already been surrendered in 1684.¹¹⁹ The corporation then decided to go on the offensive by contesting the case in the courts. The government's response through Bernard Howard, was to attempt to bully the city into submission, using the time honoured tactic of billeting soldiers on its inhabitants.¹²⁰ Despite this provocation the corporation continued its defiance, which finally pushed the government into replacing it with direct rule through royal commissioners. Local government now largely ceased to function with a clear gap in the city's records for the period January to September 1688.¹²¹

114 HRO, W/B1/7, f. 13a.

115 Bailey (ed.), *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives*, p. 153.

116 HRO, W/B1/7, f. 15.

117 B.D. Henning (ed.), *The House of Commons 1660–1690*, 3 vols (London, 1983), I, p. 260.

118 Coleby, *Central Government and the Localities*, p. 175.

119 HRO, W/B1/7, f. 32.

120 Coleby, *Central Government and the Localities*, p. 175.

121 R.H. George, 'The Charters granted to English Parliamentary Corporations in 1688', *English Historical Review* 55 (1940), 49.

Finally on 15 September the city received a new charter.¹²² All the local rights and privileges from previous charters were removed. The corporation itself was simply to be a creature of the king's making. Every member of the corporation was now named, with a requirement for officials to be chosen by central government. Only two members of the old corporation survived on the newly-constituted body; Bernard Howard, now appointed recorder and Roger L'Estrange, a government propagandist. However, the charter soon proved to be no more than a paper exercise, since James finally became aware of his national political isolation and began to make concessions to the localities. In October barely a month after Winchester's new charter had been imposed, all new charters and borough appointments were revoked. This was shortly followed by a further charter effectively restoring the status quo in Winchester.¹²³ The city's first independent political action after the issue of the new charter had been issued, clearly underlined its continuing alienation from James II. The corporation elected Thomas Wavell, a long standing opponent of royal absolutism, as mayor for an almost unprecedented fourth term of office. With the old political order reconstituted in Winchester and elsewhere, the corporation like others boroughs, 'stood aside while the nation, and an invader, expelled a King whose health they had drunk so loyally in 1685'.¹²⁴

VI Conclusion

Throughout this period Winchester's longstanding ties to the monarchy and the Church ensured that it remained a conservative city at heart. This was reflected in the nature of its political elite, the policies they pursued and ultimately in their relationship with national governments. The charter enabled the city to govern itself effectively by upholding the rights and privileges of the ruling class. As was the case with other cities, the conservatism of a non-partisan elite in Winchester in what was a small political community meant that 'the tight bonds of neighbourliness and kinship that bound together the local establishment counted for more than support for party politics'.¹²⁵ Members of the elite were often able to survive political upheavals for this reason. It was true that the 1649 regime change removed most of the clique who had governed pre-war Winchester. However, the

¹²² HRO, W/A1/28.

¹²³ HRO, W/A1/29.

¹²⁴ Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic*, p. 262.

¹²⁵ D.Underdown, *Pride's Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1971), p. 57.

new men were not so very different in both their background and attitudes to those they replaced. When faced with expulsion after the Restoration, the political experience they had acquired in a rather tumultuous decade stood them in good stead for making a bid to return to the corporation. Political controversy was certainly no barrier to maintaining one's standing within the local community. Both William Harwood and Thomas Coward survived their controversial periods as mayor to remain on the corporation, and even Bernard Howard, who had incurred such hostility through his actions in the 1680s, continued to live quietly in the city after the 1688 Revolution.¹²⁶

Winchester's conservative political outlook encouraged continuity, especially when it came to the policies which were pursued by its rulers. Once in power by whatever means, the city's various regimes often showed a remarkably similar approach, when addressing those issues of government which they faced. They saw the sustaining of the rights and privileges granted to the corporation under the charter as a primary function of the corporation, even if this brought them into conflict with such traditional institutions as the church and the monarchy. By comparison with cities like Bristol and Norwich there was little appetite for policies based on ideology or principle. Hence when it came to social and economic issues, there was no enthusiasm to pursue a radical agenda, but rather a preference to fall back on reactive policies of protectionism and repression. It was also true that once admitted to the political elite, members showed much more interest in enjoying the personal benefits which power brought them, as opposed to addressing matters of wider public concern. Much of this parochial conservatism was reinforced over the period as a whole, by the gradual move away from a corporation dominated by city tradesmen, to one in which the local gentry formed a majority of the freemen. The direct sponsorship of horse racing throughout the period signalled the city's belief that its future lay in providing facilities which would tap into the spending power of the upper classes.

When it came to its relationship with national governments, Winchester's conservatism cannot be automatically equated with loyal conformism to any policies which Westminster might formulate for the localities. The experience of self government gained through the application of the charter, gave the corporation the ability and confidence to respond to such outside interventions. Where they felt their own vested interests needed to be upheld in cases like

¹²⁶ Rosen, 'Winchester in Transition', p. 183.

the ship money dispute or preserving the castle and cathedral, they were prepared to argue their case. For much of the period national governments appeared to have a different perspective, which did not take much account of urban politics beyond requiring compliant regimes able to maintain local law and order. Gradually all national governments of the period came to discover how few levers of power they possessed for enforcing their political will on local communities. This realisation reached a climax with Charles II when there was a political imperative to control the urban elites through their charters, as a means of ensuring loyalist majorities in a parliament which was becoming increasingly powerful. The policy which he set in motion was designed 'to construct charter-sanctioned guarantees of unlimited and indefinite royal authority'.¹²⁷ In Hampshire five of the county's parliamentary boroughs including Winchester surrendered their charters in the period 1682–85. In Andover and Southampton this process became the opportunity for settling old political scores.¹²⁸ However, at Winchester the surrender of the charter coincided with the corporation's determination to reap the benefits which royal patronage had brought them with the building of the new palace. Despite Charles II's skill in manipulating this attempt to regain control of urban politics after some years of apparent indifference, this proved to be short lived. When James II embarked on a similar policy, his cruder and more obvious approach to royal absolutism managed to alienate most of the political nation including such conservative cities as Winchester.

The 1688 Revolution brought the return of the status quo and with it the continuing involvement of the upper classes in the city's politics. They had much less interest in the day to day matters of civic government, and this development laid the seeds for the corporation's loss of power and authority within the local community. By the eighteenth century Winchester's politics were dominated by the local aristocracy in the form of firstly the dukes of Bolton and then of Chandos. Freemen were now created simply for the purpose of retaining and protecting the interests of such political families.¹²⁹ When compared to the power and influence it had wielded in the previous century, the corporation's importance in the political life of the city was now largely limited to the right of its freemen to elect the city's MPs.

127 J.T. Evans, *Seventeenth Century Norwich: Politics, Religion and Government 1620–1690* (Oxford, 1979), p. 324.

128 Coleby, *Central Government and the Localities*, pp. 164–67.

129 P.E. Parkhurst, 'The Corporation and Citizens of Winchester 1789–1802', unpublished MA thesis, King Alfred's College Winchester (1999), p. 9.