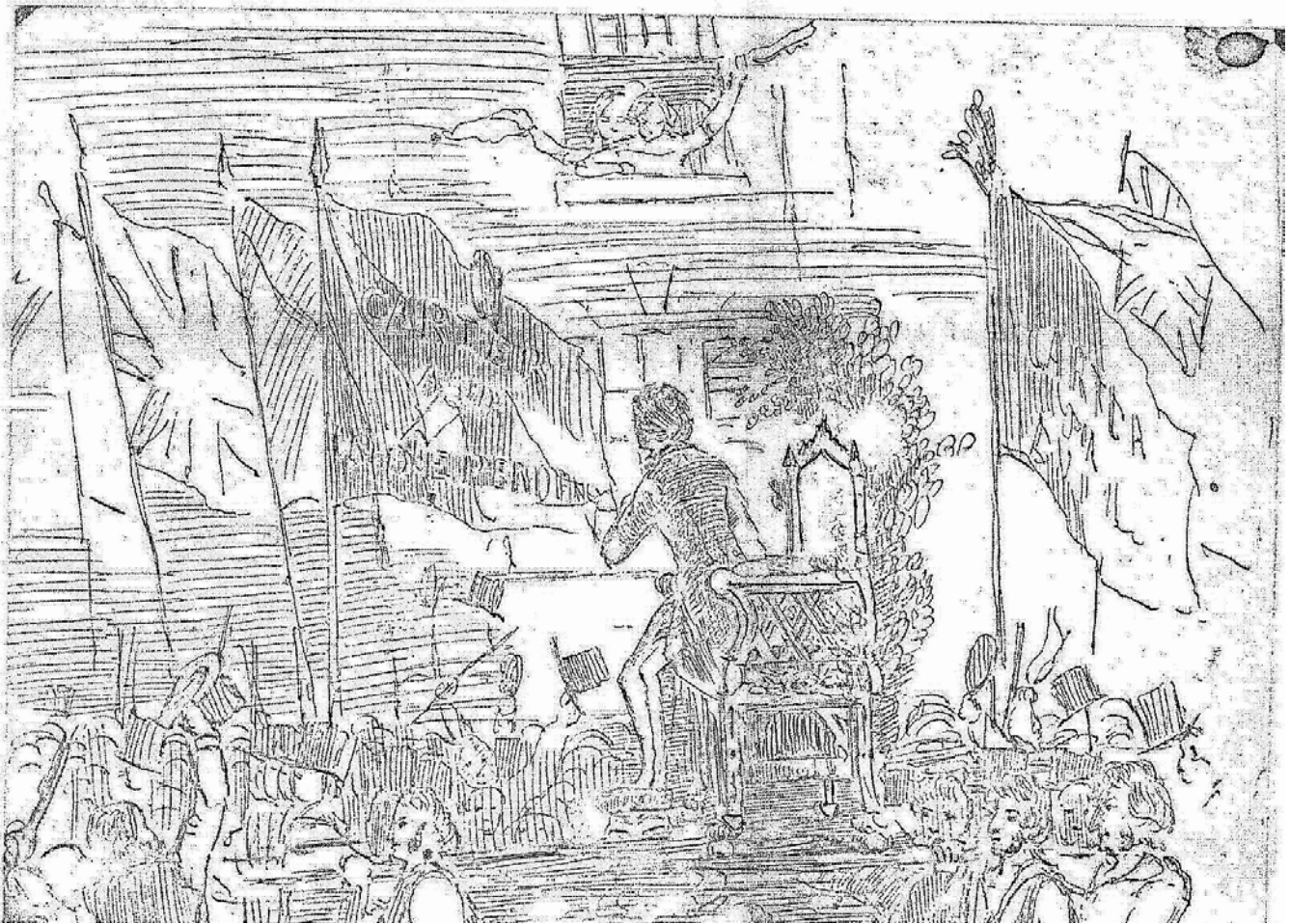


# DISHING THE WHIG



Successive reforms of the franchise throughout the nineteenth century changed voting patterns and led to switches in the political allegiance of many constituencies.

Although it might have been thought that the Liberals, as the main proponents of voting reform, would be the beneficiaries, this was not necessarily the case; Lord

Derby's comment that the Tories had, in passing the Second Reform Act, 'dished the Whigs', referred not only to Disraeli's Parliamentary sleight of hand, but to the growing realisation

of the electoral benefit promised for the Conservatives. **Robert Cook** looks at the impact of electoral reform on the outcome of elections in Winchester.

# AS IN WINCHESTER

**S**IR ROBERT Peel, speaking of his opposition to the Reform Bill of 1832, said 'I was unwilling to open a door which I saw no prospect of being closed.'<sup>1</sup> His belief that any reform of Parliament must eventually lead to further reform was vindicated by the passage of the Representation of the People Act 1867, which established virtually universal male household suffrage in boroughs (although not yet in rural areas).

The death of Lord Palmerston in 1865 had changed the balance of power in the Liberal government; the ascendancy passed to a more radical section of the party under Lord John Russell. The government proposed a bill for moderate extension of the franchise in 1866, but this was too strong for the Conservatives and for those Liberals, the 'Adullamites', who combined with them to defeat the bill, and bring down the government, which was replaced by a minority Conservative administration.

Benjamin Disraeli, as leader of the new government in the Commons, proposed what was intended to appear a more attractive measure of reform, but one which was hedged about by many safeguards and 'fancy franchises'. Radical Liberals then proposed sweeping amendments and roused popular opinion in favour of them.

Eventually the government was converted. A new bill in 1867 took Tories, Radicals, Whigs and Adullamites by surprise. Disraeli had outmanoeuvred the Liberals, and secured a majority for a far more radical measure of reform than the one Parliament had rejected from Russell and Gladstone the previous year. As Lord Derby said, the Conservatives had 'dished the Whigs'. He referred primarily to the Parliamentary sleight of hand, but some also thought that it presaged a growing realisation of some electoral benefit promised for the Conservatives by the new franchise.

Winchester can be considered a good example of this. Until 1832 the cathedral city and county town of Hampshire had been a corporation borough, with its two members of parliament elected by the hundred or so members and freemen of the municipal corporation. At the time of reform the city was half as large as Southampton, and retained its two members, with a reformed electorate of 537. But it was a city to some extent in a state of torpor, for its silk and woollen industries had largely failed, and its mainly traditional industries such as brickmaking, printing and brewing, had been bypassed by the Industrial Revolution. It was an Anglican stronghold, with relatively few nonconformists, but a small, long-established community of recusant Roman Catholics.

The chief interests in the corporation were those of Richard Grenville (1776–1839), 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, of Avington House, and of Sir Henry St John Mildmay (1787–1848), of Farley Chamberlayne.<sup>2</sup>

The Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, the model for Trollope's Duke of Omnium, was a Tory and protectionist. So was his heir, the Marquis of Chandos, who was also known as the 'Farmers' Friend,' for having introduced the so-called Chandos clause into the 1832 Reform Bill, giving the vote to £50 tenant farmers in the counties. Most of the Grenville family were Tories, but not all; the Duke's younger brother, Lord Nugent (1788–1850) was a radical Liberal who unsuccessfully contested Southampton in 1842. But by the time the Marquis of Chandos had succeeded as 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke in 1839, the estates were in serious financial difficulties, and he was later forced to flee his creditors, and to sell Avington House in 1848. Prior to reform, the Duke's nominee as MP for Winchester was Sir Edward East followed, in 1831, by the latter's son, James Buller East.

Mildmay, on the other hand, was a Whig and reformer, whose younger brother Paulet St John Mildmay (1791–1845) sat as the other MP for Winchester in the unreformed House of Commons. The family was not, however, politically united, and the dowager Lady Mildmay was a Tory,

**The Chairing of the Member – from an undated pen-and-ink drawing showing Bonham Carter being chaired through the streets of Winchester following election, in the first volume of W. H. Jacob's *Winchester Scrap Books* (Winchester City Library).**

## DISHING THE WHIGS IN WINCHESTER

Election results in Winchester, 1832–85		
12 December 1832	<b>Paulet St John Mildmay (L)</b>	351
	<b>William Bingham Baring (L)</b>	263
	James Buller East (C)	151
10 January 1835	<b>James Buller East (C)</b>	254
	<b>William Bingham Baring (L)</b>	176
	Paulet St John Mildmay (L)	123
26 July 1837	<b>James Buller East (C)</b>	258
	<b>Paulet St John Mildmay (L)</b>	242
	Bickham Sweet Escott (C)	216
29 June 1841	<b>James Buller East (C)</b>	320
	<b>Bickham Sweet Escott (C)</b>	292
	Richard B Crowder (L)	191
	Francis Piggot (L)	166
3 August 1847	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	336
	<b>Sir James Buller East (LC)</b>	315
	Bickham Sweet Escott (L)	234
9 July 1852	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	376
	<b>Sir James Buller East (C)</b>	369
	Whittear Bulpett (L)	288
28 March 1857	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	397
	<b>Sir James Buller East (C)</b>	385
	Wyndham Spencer Portal (LC)	252
30 April 1859	<b>Sir James Buller East (C)</b>	403
	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	348
	Thomas Willis Fleming (C)	342
	George John Shaw-Lefevre (L)	230
By-election vice East resigned		
10 February 1864	<b>Thomas Willis Fleming (C)</b>	
12 July 1865	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	459
	<b>William Barrow Simonds (C)</b>	366
	Thomas Willis Fleming (C)	336
By-election vice Carter appointed a Lord of the Treasury		
4 June 1866	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	361
	C Lempriere (C)	46
17 November 1868	<b>William Barrow Simonds (C)</b>	840
	<b>John Bonham Carter (L)</b>	727
	Arthur Jervoise Scott (L)	548
3 February 1874	<b>William Barrow Simonds (C)</b>	949
	<b>Maj Arthur Robert Naghten (C)</b>	763
	John Bonham Carter (L)	649
31 March 1880	<b>Francis George Baring, Viscount Baring (L)</b>	979
	<b>Richard Moss (C)</b>	808
	William Barrow Simonds (C)	773
25 November 1885	<b>Arthur Loftus Tottenham (C)</b>	1,153
	Francis George Baring, Viscount Baring (L)	982

as was Mildmay's other brother Humphrey St John Mildmay, who was elected as Conservative MP for Southampton in 1842.

The city had a small but influential group of political leaders, many of whom, like the Grenvilles and the Mildmays, had previously been involved in the corporation. They included, on the Tory side, Dr David Williams, headmaster of Winchester College,<sup>3</sup> and in the Whig interest, Charles Shaw-Lefevre, MP for the county, and Reverend Thomas Garnier, a friend of Palmerston, who was nominated Dean of Winchester in 1840, and held office until 1872; most of the cathedral clergy, however, were reckoned to be Tory. In addition, new Whig landowners were growing in influence in Winchester, particularly with the decline of the Chandos estates. These included the banking family of Baring, based at Stratton Park, East Stratton, and at Northington Grange, Alresford, and the Bonham Carters at Adhurst St Mary.<sup>4</sup>

In this atmosphere politics were conducted at a high level, with public issues foremost, and hardly a suspicion of electoral corruption,<sup>5</sup> although aristocratic patronage may have been a subtler surrogate. The high standing and influence of local leaders was reflected in the character of the candidates. They were overwhelmingly men of higher social status than were normally to be found contesting borough seats, and bore more similarity to the usual aspirants in a county division. Almost all of them, successful and unsuccessful, were members of Hampshire landed families, and it was unusual for one who was not to poll well.

Local ties and family prestige had a stronger pull than party loyalties, because of the absence of any formal party organisation. Extremism was not favoured, and frequently a bipartisan approach was adopted. For example, Sir James East (1789–1878), who was Conservative

member for twenty-nine years, usually gave general support to Liberal governments when Palmerston was Prime Minister.<sup>6</sup> The effect of these influences was that the representation was generally shared between the parties. Only in the post-reform landslide of 1832 were the seats monopolised by the Liberals, and in the Tory recovery of 1841 by the Conservatives. This was by no means the result of an arrangement, however, since every general election was contested. It arose because there were few four-cornered contests, much cross-voting, and for long periods no formal coalition between candidates of the same party. To some extent this can be seen as the survival of the electoral influence of the great landed families,<sup>7</sup> and of church and college, all of whom were major patrons of the tradesmen and professional classes who made up much of the new electorate.

The reforming Whigs elected in 1832 were Paulet St John Mildmay, one of the retiring members, and William Bingham Baring. They had substantial majorities, but even so nearly ninety voters split their votes between Mildmay and East for the Tories. When the same candidates were nominated again in 1835, Mildmay publicly declared that he would use his second vote for the other Whig candidate, Baring, which led to his downfall. It suggested a rejection of all non-party ties, and as a result about sixty Tories who would have been happy to split their votes between East and Mildmay plumped for East alone and withheld their second vote from any candidate, so that Mildmay trailed in third place.<sup>8</sup>

Mildmay took up the Whig cause again in 1837, against East and a second Tory candidate, Bickham Escott, an outsider from Somerset. Once again there was a conflict between party and local ties. The Tories were numerically strong, but thirty or forty of them could

not be relied on to vote the Tory ticket, out of respect for the long connection with the city of the Mildmay family, some of whom were themselves Tories.<sup>9</sup> Escott made an appeal to them, saying that some people had difficulty in acting on their principles because of the claims of friendship, but that they should not make a bargain between friendship and patriotism.<sup>10</sup> This was of no avail, and the poll returned East and Mildmay.

The election of 1841 was the only one under the first Reform Act in which the Tories monopolised the seats. This was due partly to the general political reaction, and the well-organised exertions of the Tories in the registration of their electors in 1840.<sup>11</sup> But it also resulted from a split among the Whigs. Mildmay, a moderate Whig, had annoyed a section of his supporters by not going the whole way in support of repeal of the Corn Laws. The free-trade wing of the Liberals demanded his withdrawal, which he conceded, leaving them with the problem of finding a replacement. Unable to find candidates locally, they turned to James Coppock, national election agent of the Reform Club,<sup>12</sup> who sent down two young and unknown nominees of party headquarters, to whom many Liberals were indifferent. In these circumstances there was a fierce contest. For the first time there were rumours of bribery,<sup>13</sup> and on polling day a powerful team of canvassers was brought in, including Francis Baring, MP for Portsmouth and Chancellor of the Exchequer. But this was not effective, and East and Escott were elected with large majorities.

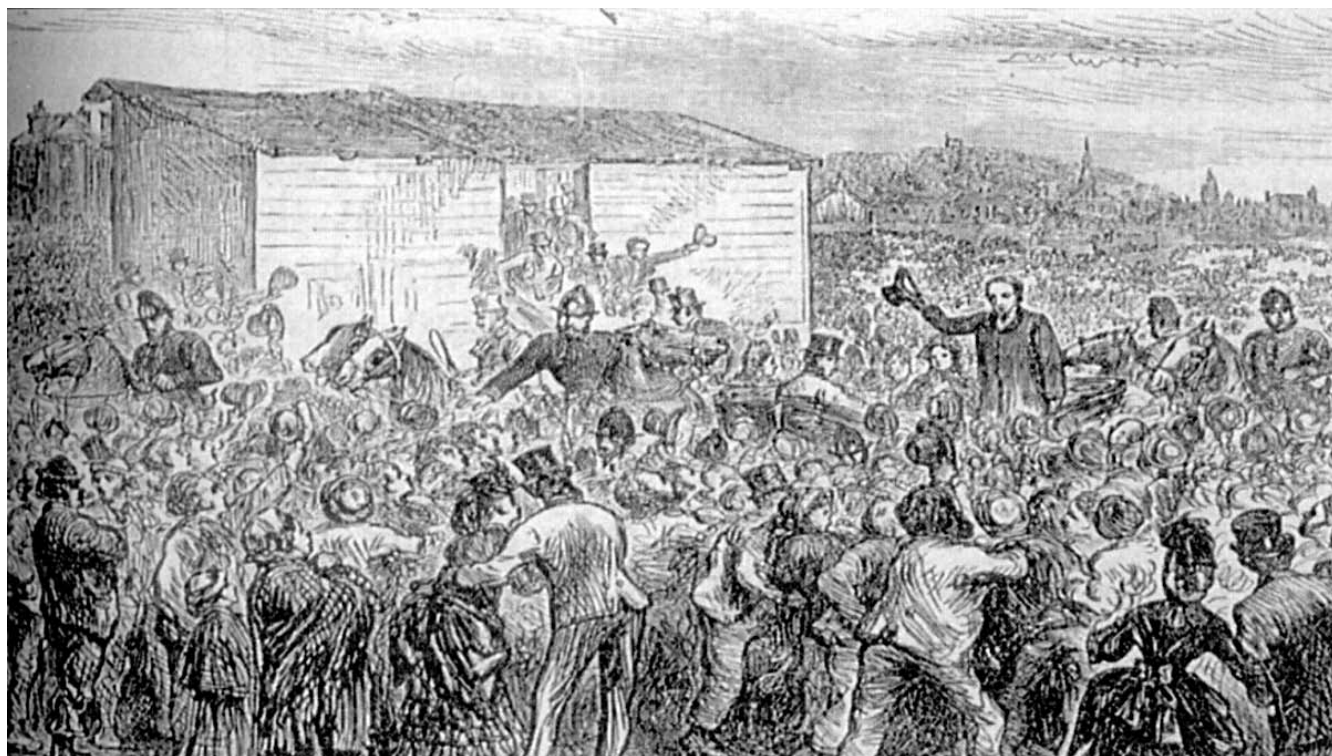
They came forward again in 1847, when politics had been transformed nationally by the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, which had split the Peelite leadership from the rest of the Conservative Party. East had at first voted against repeal of the Corn Laws, but later identified himself with the Peelites. Escott, on

the other hand, had undergone an even greater transformation, and had voted with the radicals for complete and immediate repeal.<sup>14</sup> They faced a single Whig candidate, though Escott reaped the unpopularity of a turncoat, and could count on the support only of the most radical Liberals. Many of East's supporters gave their second votes to the Whig, and the representation again reverted to one of each party.<sup>15</sup>

The new Whig member was John Bonham Carter (1817–84), of Adhurst St Mary near Petersfield. He was the son of John Bonham Carter senior (1788–1838), the veteran Whig MP for Portsmouth between 1818 and 1838. The latter's protégé as junior member for Portsmouth since 1826 was Sir Francis Baring (1796–1866), of Stratton Park. It was he who gave a classic definition of Whiggery in the 1830s: 'A body of men connected with high rank and property, bound together by hereditary feelings, party ties, as well as higher motives, who in bad times keep alive the sacred flame of freedom, and when the people are roused stand between the constitution and revolution and go with the people, but not to extremities.'<sup>16</sup> He held high office as Chancellor of the Exchequer (1839–41) and First Lord of the Admiralty (1849–52), and retired from the House of Commons in 1865, to be created first Lord Northbrook. There was also eventually a family link, as in 1864 John Bonham Carter junior married, as his second wife, Northbrook's daughter, Mary Baring.

The effects of the 1847 election left their mark for many years. The prestige built up by East and Bonham Carter made their position secure. In subsequent elections they received an almost bipartisan vote, regardless of what other candidates there were.<sup>17</sup> The polls indicate that there were between 250 and 350 electors for each party who would vote the full party ticket or plump for a single candidate

**Local ties and family prestige had a stronger pull than party loyalties, because of the absence of any formal party organisation. Extremism was not favoured, and frequently a bipartisan approach was adopted.**



**Nineteenth-century election hustings**

if there were only one, and between 60 and 150 more who would split their votes between East and Bonham Carter.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in 1852 Whittear Bulpett, a Winchester banker, came forward as a 'no-party man on the Liberal interest,'<sup>19</sup> implying almost an independent challenge to the bipartisan establishment, regardless of party labels. Much the same went for Wyndham Spencer Portal, of Laverstoke, who came forward in 1857 as a Peelite, with a progressive policy of extension of the franchise, the ballot, relief from church rates, and state education.<sup>20</sup>

Not until 1859 was there an election in which the local parties stirred themselves from this bipartisan attitude and nominated two candidates each. Although the contest was more partisan and the number of electors who split their votes was reduced, there were still seventy-seven who split between East and Bonham Carter, while sixteen others, mostly clergy, plumped for East and withheld a vote from the second Conservative, so that the established members were once again returned.<sup>21</sup>

When East resigned in 1864, the Liberals were not disposed

to use the by-election to contest the vacancy in the city's single Conservative seat, and the new Conservative candidate was elected unopposed. But in 1865 the Conservatives nominated two candidates, although there was a split among Conservative electors, who each tended to vote for their own man alone; one of them, William Simonds, also gained some radical votes, and was elected along with Bonham Carter.<sup>22</sup>

In 1866 Bonham Carter was also faced with a by-election on his appointment as a government whip. As in 1864, the local leaders of the opposing party were not disposed to seek a monopoly in the representation by taking advantage of the by-election. But a small group of Conservatives persuaded the Carlton Club to send down a candidate;<sup>23</sup> he polled only a fraction of the usual Conservative strength, which mainly preferred not to upset the city's tradition of prestigious bipartisanship.

Under the second Reform Act, no borough with a population less than 10,000 retained a second member. With a population of 14,776 in 1861, Winchester's representation remained

unchanged. Under the new franchise, its 1865 electorate of 963 underwent an increase to 1,557, fairly modest by comparison with the four- and fivefold increases in some large industrial towns. The Liberals had hopes of capturing both seats, and nominated a second candidate. However, the sitting members triumphed again, showing that the tradition of bipartisanship had survived reform. There appear to have been about 180 voters who split their votes between the successful candidates, and while this bipartisan vote had not increased proportionately with the electorate as a whole, it was enough to ensure the survival of the sitting members.

In 1874 it was the Conservatives who were on the attack; they adopted a second candidate, while the Liberals nominated only Bonham Carter. The bipartisan vote was about the same size as in 1868, but with the increased party vote in the new electorate, and a general swing to the Conservatives, it was no longer sufficient to preserve Bonham Carter. Despite his high reputation, and his position as Deputy Speaker, which

he had held since 1872, he was unceremoniously defeated, and retired, disillusioned, from politics<sup>24</sup> – a plain example of ‘dishing the Whigs’.

So Winchester was not a clear-cut example of the survival of patronage under reformed elections. Major patrons certainly continued to exercise influence, but they were not always politically united. On the principal political issue of the later 1830s and 1840s, that of agricultural protection, while strong views were held, they were not always cohesively expressed, and in the aftermath of the repeal of the Corn Laws, the 1847 election was characterised by major changes of opinion and some degree of political confusion. The bipartisan tradition which had preceded reform was able to survive in a double-member constituency, but it was weakened by these political divisions, and also by the collapse of the Buckingham and Chandos interest. It would be tempting to think that the enlarged electorate might have been more independent from influences which had shored up the sharing of the seats, but there is no strong evidence for this.

On the other hand, it is well established that growing electorates required increasingly well-organised political parties, both centrally and locally, to manage them,<sup>25</sup> and this may have increased the party-politisation of elections. Until the 1860s, candidates in Winchester seemed to come forward entirely on their own initiative, even if ostensibly of the same party. Not until 1865 do we find evidence of John Bonham Carter presiding over a meeting of Liberal leaders with a view to securing two Liberal members.<sup>26</sup> It is perhaps a surprise that bipartisanism survived so long. While it approached 20 per cent of those voting on occasions in 1832, 1847 and 1857, it could still account for nearly 13 per cent of voters in

1868 and 1874, although a mere 2 per cent in 1880.

This was not quite the end of the story, for the Whigs had one final success in 1880. The Conservatives defended both seats, while the single Liberal candidate was Viscount Baring, the grandson of Lord Northbrook, the former MP for Portsmouth, and Bonham Carter’s nephew by marriage. The bipartisan vote which had subsisted for more than thirty years was considerably eroded; Baring headed the poll, but mainly because of plumped votes and the general swing to the Liberals.

Under the further electoral reform of 1884, Winchester lost one of its Parliamentary seats, and barely survived losing both; as it was, it was among the ten smallest boroughs in England to survive with separate representation. Viscount Baring contested the new constituency in 1885, but it proved safely Conservative, and remained so until it lost its parliamentary borough status in 1918, and became simply a county division of Hampshire. Indeed, Baring himself became a Unionist in 1886, with the Liberal split over Irish home rule. The Winchester division remained safe Conservative territory, apart from going Labour in the landslide of 1945. It was not until 1997 that a Liberal Democrat was to recapture Winchester.

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- 1 Quoted in Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (London: Longmans 1953), p. 7.
- 2 Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–90* (HMSO, 1964).
- 3 *The Times* 8 January 1835.
- 4 This latter family had been Whig leaders in Portsmouth since the eighteenth century, and remained prominent in Liberal politics until the present, with Mark Bonham Carter, MP for Torrington 1958–59, and later, as Lord Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, Liberal Democrat

spokesman on Foreign Affairs in the House of Lords, and his daughter Jane, Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, currently Liberal Democrat spokesperson on broadcasting in the Lords, while his sister, Laura Bonham Carter, married Jo Grimond, Liberal leader 1956–67.

- 4 Reform League Papers (1867) in the George Howell Collection, Bishopsgate Institute.
- 5 *The Times* 28 March 1857.
- 6 Roy and John Lewis, *Politics and Printing in Winchester 1830–1880* (Richmond: The Keepsake Press, 1980), pp 37–47.
- 7 *The Times* 10 January 1835.
- 8 *The Times* 17 July 1837.
- 9 *The Times* 7 July 1837.
- 10 *The Times* 22 June 1841.
- 11 *The Times* 21 June 1841.
- 12 *The Times* 22 June 1841.
- 13 *The Times* 2 March and 5 March 1846.
- 14 *The Times* 31 July 1847.
- 15 Quoted in Donald Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs 1832–86* (London: Macmillan 1965), p. 21.
- 16 *Hampshire Advertiser* 19 June 1852, 10 July 1852.
- 17 *Hampshire Advertiser* 9 April 1859; for the method of calculating cross-voting, see W. A. Speck, *Tory & Whig – The Struggle in the Constituencies 1701–1715* (London: Macmillan 1970), p. 125.
- 18 *The Times* 8 July 1852.
- 19 *The Times* 28 March 1857.
- 20 *Hampshire Advertiser* 7 May 1859, and the *Winchester Poll Book 30 April 1859* (Hampshire County Record Office W1/122).
- 21 *Hampshire Advertiser* 15 July 1865 and supplement.
- 22 W. H. Jacob, *Winchester Scrap Book* vol. 1 p. 93 (Winchester City Library). Jacob was a part-proprietor of the *Hampshire Chronicle*.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management – Politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (London: Longmans 1959) pp. 125, 233, 347 ff.
- 25 *The Times* 2 September 1865.

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