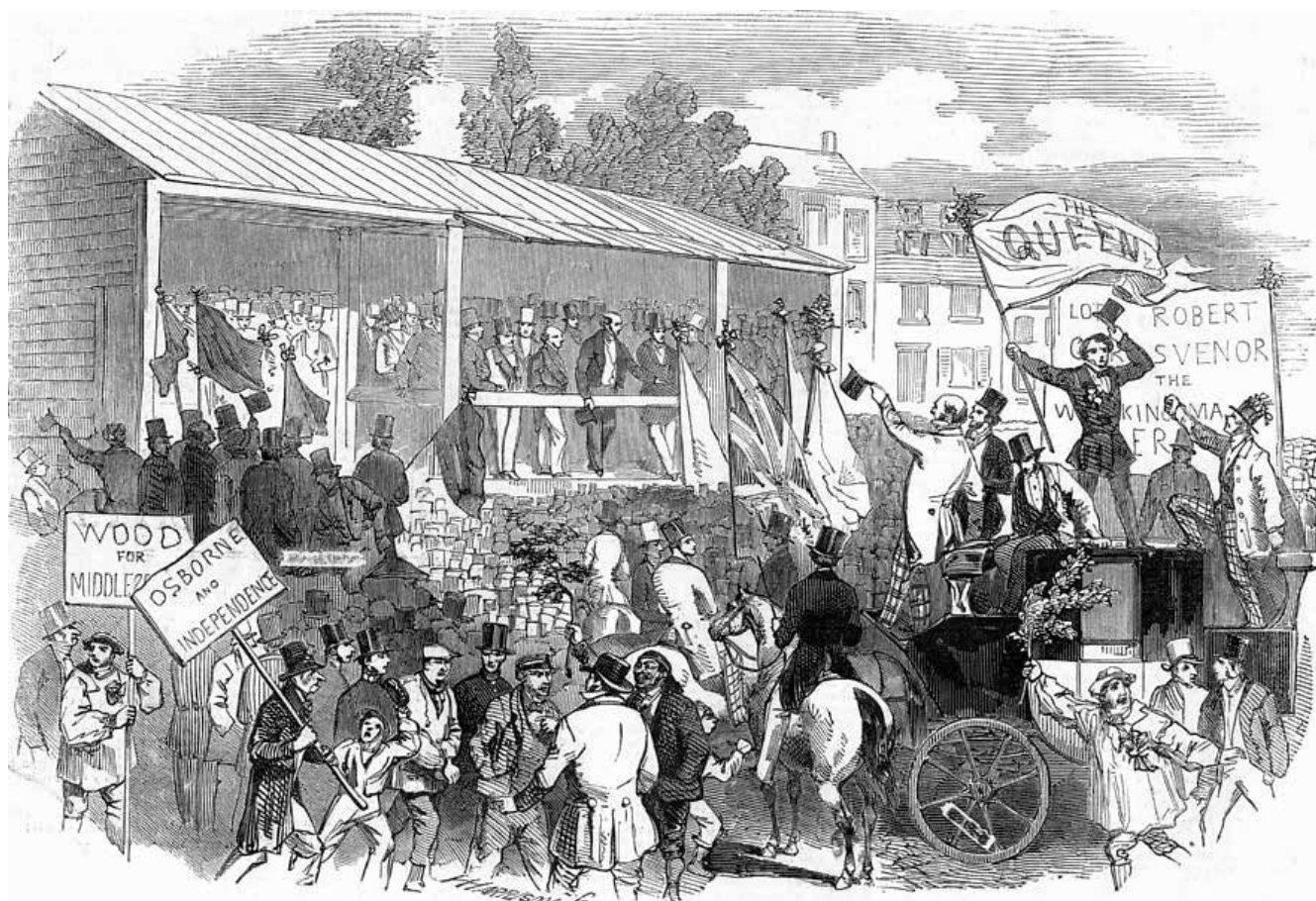


# THE LIBERAL ELITE IN THE POST-RE



Following the Great Reform Bill's enactment in 1832, Radicals and Whigs had little time to rejoice. With the first election of a 'reformed' parliament scheduled for December, there was a tremendous need to register all existing and new enfranchised electors according to the new criteria set forth by the bill. In addition

to abolishing rotten and pocket boroughs and redistributing parliamentary seats, the Reform Act had created a new, standardised system to replace the disparate collection of freehold, household, and potwalloper<sup>1</sup> qualifications for voting. **Nancy LoPatin-Lummi**s analyses the activities of the Liberal electoral agents in this new era.

# ELECTORAL AGENT REFORM-ACT ERA

**W**HILE THE historic forty-shilling freeholders in the counties did not lose their electoral rights, the old practice of being eligible to vote as a county elector, even if the property lay within a borough boundary, unless the elector otherwise qualified for the borough franchise, was to come under scrutiny with the new electoral system.

The new registration standards and their impact on the old 'open voting system' – according to custom and dependent upon residence – were to become among the chief causes of litigation arising from the registration of newly enfranchised electors following the 1832 Reform Act. The requirement for proof of borough residence, in order to determine whether or not individuals were casting ballots incorrectly in boroughs (which had the much higher £10 franchise rate), rather than in counties, created the opportunity to contest elections and their results on the part of candidates and electors alike. Likewise, many freehold boroughs – those whose freemen had ancient rights to vote that were not to be taken away – required proof of pre-1832 electoral status in order to be 'grandfathered' into the new system. This, too, raised the possibility of contesting the outcome of elections. Failure to comply with the new requirements of the Reform Act could easily mean that long-standing electors would lose their vote, but continue to cast it at elections, unaware, or in defiance, of the new requirements.

Election hustings at Brentford, Middlesex, 1840 (*Illustrated London News*).

Registration of existing and newly enfranchised borough and county electors was therefore serious business if the election results were to be valid. Registration was to be central in securing the return of candidates from any particular party, and all party leaders and their election managers knew that meeting the new criteria and following procedures would be the main means of contesting election results on the grounds of legality and credibility. Indeed, scholars such as Philip Salmon, Miles Taylor and John Phillips have shown just how important electoral registration and voting procedure was in the development of nineteenth-century party politics.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most significant political roles that emerged from the reformation of registration procedures was that of the electoral agent. The traditional role of the agent – of acting on behalf of and doing the local campaign work for a parliamentary candidate – changed significantly with the new rules of 1832.<sup>3</sup> The agent's role broadened to include registration of electors and the funding of those efforts, contesting the results of an election if grounds could be found on which to challenge an undesirable outcome, and securing the number of voters for any particular party based upon rate-paying and residency maintenance. Agents worked with lawyers and emerging national political organisations to secure electoral victories in the sometimes dirty business of cleaning up the corrupt politics of the pre-Reform Bill era. In trying to standardise the rights of

the approximately 360,000 electors that existed in England prior to 1832 with those who qualified to vote under the newly expanded franchise, electoral agents also created the sometimes even dirtier business of partisan politics and electioneering in the post-Reform Act era.

This paper examines the work of Joseph Parkes and James Coppock, electoral agents for Whig and Radical candidates in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>4</sup> Appearing as solicitors both defending and objecting to electoral registrations and votes in dozens of contested elections between 1835 and 1841, both men helped deliver the electors, parliamentary numbers and parliamentary votes that shaped the formation of the nineteenth-century Liberal Party. Their careers demonstrate the expanding importance of the electoral agent in parliamentary politics and the development of national political parties in the Victorian age. This article examines these electoral agents' post-1832 work in three ways: first, the electoral agent's increasingly critical function in the registration process; second, their role as legal agent in contested elections – as election solicitor on behalf of both petitioners and seated members of parliament; and third, somewhat by extension, the role of election agent as catalyst for political public relations and character attacks on political opponents. This placed the electoral agent in the role of creating some very anti-democratic tones to the new electoral registration criteria and procedures during a critical transition period in British political democratisation.

To make sense of it all, it is first necessary to understand exactly what the Great Reform Act did to change the electoral registration criteria and process. The new requirements for county and borough registration were exacting: voters needed to make certain that their names appeared on the list of ratepayers (or, more often, individuals or parties who had an interest in voter registration made certain) or, if possessors of freeman voting status prior to reform, they had to make sure that their name appeared on the borough's list of freemen. Proof of poor relief payments would also be required by the newly established deadline of 20 July of each year, so that electoral lists would be complete in early August.<sup>5</sup> All new electors were to pay a shilling registration fee.<sup>6</sup>

The means by which electoral registration would play a critical role in controlling parliament was immediately apparently to those who had already established careers in electoral management. Joseph Parkes (1796–1863) was a Birmingham solicitor and committed Radical with an already established law practice in contested political elections. Parkes contested his first elections in 1826, filing suit in Camelford, Cornwall and the Corporation of Warwick, his birthplace. Demonstrating corruption and bribery, his victory in setting aside the election of Warwick's mayor on corruption charges, earned him a reputation.<sup>7</sup> This success, as well as his political links to London's Benthamite Radicals, brought him to the attention of Whig leaders. He was a pragmatic reformer in Birmingham at the time when Thomas Attwood was organising the Birmingham Political Union in 1830 and he launched a new extra-parliamentary reform campaign that gained popular support and a following throughout the Reform Bill debates. During the most heated days of the agitation for the bill's passage, in May 1832, Parkes played a critical role in liaising between the Whig government and the BPU to maintain peace and cooperation between parliament and the political unions so as to ease fears of revolution and secure the continued support of the king in pressuring the House of Lords to support the bill. His articles in *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle*,

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as well as private correspondence between Lord Melbourne<sup>8</sup> and himself, demonstrated how determined he was to aid the government's efforts to reform parliament by easing tensions between Grey and the BPU's leadership, which was talking about preparing an armed insurrection, while simultaneously fomenting public support for a bill which did not go nearly as far as the many joining political unions had hoped. He appeased all and thus, made himself a dependable ally and aid to the Whigs. They rewarded him for his work in securing the bill and reigning in the BPU by putting him in the role of primary Whig electoral agent for the general election of December 1832, the first election under the new criteria of the Reform Act.

Parkes well understood that the new requirements for electoral registration adopted in 1832 would produce many opportunities to get reformers elected – and potentially as many opportunities for voters to be disenfranchised, not by the law, but by the contesting of election results based on accusations of non-compliance with the new law. Both Parkes and his Tory counterparts were ready to use the new laws to their own partisan advantage. To this end, he convinced fellow liberal-minded Whigs, Lord Durham and Edward Ellice, Sr, to help him establish and fund the Reform Association in 1834. The association's leaders would hire agents to register new electors according to the law. It would also retain solicitors to contest registrations from Tory electors if, after research, there proved to any violation of new procedures, including discrepancies of residency requirements, delinquent rate-paying or missed registration deadlines. The association would also, through its membership funds, pay for legal representation for Whig and Radical registrants who faced similar court objections by Tory opponents.

The Reform Association office opened in Cleveland Row in 1834. Hired to manage the association, 'fixed at the top of the House' with a £300 pound a year salary, was a Radical solicitor, James Coppock (1798–1857). A partner in the firm Blunt, Coppock, Barnes & Ellis, he soon joined Parkes and others in the fairly limited field of election law.<sup>9</sup> His chief responsibility

for the Reform Association was, 'to see that the Reformers not only register but defend their own registration and watch the enemy.'<sup>10</sup> As most estimates of the numbers voting in the elections after the bill indicate that approximately 650,000 votes were cast, the race to registration was critical for party control.<sup>11</sup> Finding grounds to throw out newly registered electors would be important in calculating electoral advantages and parliamentary wins. Little would be overlooked as a legal opportunity to throw out votes and contest elections. By late summer of 1835, Coppock had moved on to an examination of arrears in rate-paying both to defend Whig registrations and contest those among Tory supporters. One of the requirements of the new registrations process was that all rates be paid by 20 July. If there was a balance on these taxes still due by then, the elector would not be included in the lists that were drawn up the first week of August and which were at the polls by the next election as the official record of legal electors. He detailed progress to Parkes, who reported it to Lord Brougham, Radical leader and member of the Whig government. 'If we once allow arrears we shall fall behind your expectations, in electoral registration advantage.'<sup>12</sup> Coppock was diligent in his duties, as were his deputies. While there is mention of additional staff, particularly in reference to going out to electoral boroughs for registration and canvassing, in the correspondence between the men, there is no specific evidence indicating how many men were employed by the Reform Association, or even how many the membership dues could likely have supported. Parkes himself overlooked the accounting and found that 'all outstanding arrears be paid and pro rata payments made.'<sup>13</sup> Registration numbers vary from study to study, but Salmon has calculated that electoral registrations between 1832 and 1835 increased by between 10–20 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to criteria for electoral registration, the Reform Act also created a number of new, standardised mechanisms for challenging registrations. Election procedure could be deemed violated for failing to change the address of an elector from one rental to the next, or if there was a failure to pay the

entirety of rates owed, by the prescribed date. Furthermore, the new law required that all claims would be found in favour of the accuser, and therefore disqualify electors, whether or not the grounds were legitimate, if the registrant did not appear in person to defend his registration.<sup>15</sup> The government established revision courts and each defending registrant would now be required to prove his qualifications before a revising barrister in a court session held in September–October. The objector could either appear in person or have an agent appear on his behalf, and was not required to prove disqualification. This meant, in practice, that the law intended to disqualify voters rather than risk greater inclusion among potential electors. There was also the financial burden of retaining agents and solicitors to go to court to defend one's qualification to vote against an objection, whether merited or frivolous.

As a result, the contested election became a growing phenomenon over the 'decade of reform' – and at the centre of the emerging legal battlefield of electoral registration and revising courts was James Coppock. As he testified before the parliamentary Select Committee on Controverted Elections on 7 May 1838, his own career in election work involved his role as an electoral agent and a solicitor contesting elections before the court on the grounds of opponents violating the new (post-1832) registration requirements. He worked with Joseph Parkes on contesting election results immediately after the December 1832 general election.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, between 1832 and 1837, Coppock was an agent, either by himself or working alongside Parkes, for more than twenty-one challenges to election results. In some cases where he was the petitioner's agent, he sought to present evidence not just that those registered were not entitled to the vote, but that votes had been bought either through bribery or illegal treating.

The first of these cases took place in Stamford where the Whig candidate, Captain Gregory, was seeking, based upon incorrect registration procedure, to throw out votes so as to overturn his electoral loss to the Tory candidates Lt Col. Chaplin and George Finch. Coppock

had been brought into the case on behalf of Parkes. Parkes had served the previous Stamford MP, Charles Tennyson D'Enycourt as an agent since 1830. Gregory had worked for Tennyson D'Enycourt and been handpicked to succeed him at Stamford when the latter moved on to a seat in Lambeth.<sup>17</sup> While Gregory attempted to prove a number of registrations invalid, thereby nullifying several votes, the court deemed there to be no viable proof. The court dismissed oral testimony on the basis that revenge and personal animus might have tainted the testimony. Gregory lost his court complaint.

The most notorious contested election of 1833, however, took place in Warwick. Parkes successfully exposed the malfeasance of the Earl of Warwick in the election of his brother, Sir Charles Greville and another Tory candidate, Edward Bolton King in the December 1832 general election. Parkes petitioned on behalf of William Collins, Whig candidate, exposing bribery, treating, illegal payment of rates and lack of residency as reasons to throw out the election results in favour of Collins.<sup>18</sup> The evidence was compelling. Several men testified to outright bribes, exchange of property for votes and threats that were made on behalf of Warwick by his steward and others, threatening tenants and Corporation of Warwick members if they did not vote as he desired. The court case received attention in the *Morning Chronicle* and *The Times*, no doubt arranged by Parkes himself. *The Times* notice would draw the attention of a large Tory readership to the corruption openly practised among Tory corporations, undermining opposition to the mounting body of evidence in support of a municipal reform measure, being drafted by Parkes, to dismantle corruption and abuse of electoral authority; while the *Morning Chronicle's* Whig and Radical-leaning readers were given more ammunition in favour of municipal reform.

A parliamentary committee agreed, 'the earl of Warwick did unconstitutionally apply ... by his agent and steward ... £3000 and upwards towards the election expenditure, and promotion of the political interest of the candidate ...'.<sup>19</sup> The election was nullified and two Whigs were returned in an 1833

by-election. Parkes not only secured a new election for his Warwickshire petitioner clients, however, but also shaped the Warwick Borough Bill. Modelled, in part, after the East Retford Bill, this measure expanded the borough's boundaries. Warwick was to be extended to include the £10 householders of Leamington Spa, a point specifically referred to in the parliamentary debate against it.<sup>20</sup>

Coppock himself would describe that particular case, and many others, in his sworn testimony before the Select Committee hearings in 1837. Warwick was an example of how access to money corrupted both the election and the access to justice. Contesting elections were expensive, he argued. It 'generally employ[ed] two counsels, frequently three [for the defence], ... and have retained four on the side of the petitioners ...'.<sup>21</sup> Electoral agents rarely had the luxury of such cash reserves to hire the legal team necessary to contest an election, even with just cause. What he did not report, but was indeed happening, was that the Reform Club was also raising money from members to cover the legal costs of contested elections as well as the costs of registering electors.<sup>22</sup>

A scandal that required even the legal opinion of Chancellor Lord Brougham to resolve, the Warwick case did two things. First, it persuaded the Whigs to secure the appointment of Joseph Parkes as the secretary for the new Parliamentary Commission on Municipal Reform. Secondly, it prompted them to organise their efforts to contest elections even more carefully. To that end, Coppock moved into position of the lead solicitor for the newly created Reform Club, which replaced the old Reform Association. Parkes relied on the political influence and economic contributions of the recently returned Edward Ellice and E. J. Stanley, and the Reform Club, built in Pall Mall, was formed.<sup>23</sup> An early club registry reported one thousand regular members and 250 MPs.<sup>24</sup> The Whig aristocrat Lord Durham, a former member of the government's Committee of Four who drafted the 1832 Reform Bill, was the most vocal supporter of radical parliamentary reform, and claimed much of the credit for the success of the club. '... [Y]ou will remember

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this time last year,' he wrote to Parkes, 'how I pressed the vital necessity of it, and of a Registration Committee. How well the latter worked is proved by the Municipal Elections, and I am confident that out of the club will arise, at least if it is well managed, such organisation and concentration as will set all Tory measures at defiance.'<sup>25</sup> The new club became the social and negotiating site for Whigs and Radicals. The dues were used, in part, to pay the salaries of Coppock and others, as well as registration, election and court costs for contesting elections. With Parkes working on new reform legislation, Coppock took the lead role in contesting numerous electoral cases – the second critical outcome of the Warwick case.

After the general election of 1835, Coppock assisted Parkes in petitioning on behalf of Frederick Villiers against sitting member Stephen Rumbold Lushington in Canterbury. Deputies for Villiers contended that sheriff deputies had interfered with access to the polls for legally registered electors.<sup>26</sup> While the case was originally delayed in order to accumulate evidence, it was eventually resolved that any electors turned away from the polls had legally been rejected as having received parochial relief or recently changing their residencies, and Lushington won with a nineteen to nine vote.<sup>27</sup> Coppock's own publication on electors' rights clearly stipulated that occupiers of £10 residencies needed to reside in their borough or within seven miles of it for 'six months previous to 31st July in each year' and that all electors 'rated to the poor for twelve months previous to the 31 July in each year.'<sup>28</sup>

In the Bedford borough election, Coppock and Parkes represented a petition from the electors on behalf of Whig candidates Samuel Crawley and W. H. Whitbread, who had come in second and third in the election, with the Tory candidate, Captain Frederick Pohill, defeating them both, 490 votes to 408 and 383, respectively. The petition alleged that many of the voters were neither freemen nor residents of Bedford. The revising barristers, finding evidence to corroborate this, and in the absence of many of those accused of malfeasance, disqualified these voters. While this negated many of the

votes cast, it did not seem to change the outcome, with Pohill and Crawley returned. It does, however, indicate how much was at stake, with the total number of registered electors in Bedford being 857 and the votes counted listed at 834.<sup>29</sup> Challenging registrations and qualifications through the legal system could negate enough votes to change the outcome of a closely fought election. As a result, the solicitors withdrew cases, failing to provide the numbers to change the outcome, though not before Parkes and Coppock raised significant doubts in court before the reforming barristers and prompted further scrutiny of the local registration agents and the complicity of the candidates involved.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1837 and 1839 general elections, Coppock spent more time defending sitting members against petitioners than in representing petitioners or defeated candidates. This represented a change in how the contested election was being used. Having made significant headway in ending some of the abuses at the local level through the payment of rates on behalf of potential voters and qualifying non-residents to vote (thanks to Parkes's work on the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act), agents like Coppock found that defending clients against accusations of bribery 'having been conducted by local subscriptions, or by the large contributions of three or four active leading individuals of the local parties, was common.'<sup>31</sup> This was true whether the accusers won or lost the election.

If the defeated candidate present a petition against the return of his successful opponent, and simply pray that the Election may be adjudged to be a void Election on the ground of Bribery and Corruption, but do not ask for the seat, he many unseat his opponent, and render him incapable of being again returned; but as he himself does not pray for the seat, it has in some instances been determined that a case of retaliation cannot be entered into as respects the Petitioner by the sitting Member. Thus the Petitioner, though equally guilty, may again propose himself and be returned in consequence of the very Bribery practiced at the preceding Election, and

into which no inquiry was permitted.<sup>32</sup>

As a result, contesting elections became more partisan, heated, and frequent. In 1837, Parkes participated in contesting the election in Petersfield (disqualifying an elector who did not meet residency requirements) which resulted in a victory for his client, the petitioner. Here, Cornthwaite, the petitioner, contested the vote of Richard Legg who had been declared eligible to vote by virtue of 'a barn, stable, outhouses and twenty acres of land', although sworn testimony by a witness, Thomas Tigg, argued that he was not a resident of that or any land. The testimony negated the revising barrister's determination and the contested vote was enough to allow the Whig candidate, John Hector, to be returned to parliament.<sup>33</sup> He also defended Joseph Brotherton, the sitting member for Salford, against an elector who mistakenly was recorded in the poll books.<sup>34</sup> A supporter of Tory candidate William Garnett claimed that unqualified electors had voted and that Brotherton had engaged in bribery and treating.<sup>35</sup> Brotherton counter-claimed that several voters for Garnett were wrongly on the register. As the vote was 890 to 888, any success in throwing out votes would be critical. The court determined that charges against Brotherton were unfounded and the election results confirmed.

It was not, however, always good news for Parkes. He lost a petition brought in Woodstock on behalf of Whig candidate, Lord Charles S. Churchill, objecting to the residency of a number of electors and the insufficient value of a number of properties belonging to electors who had polled for the Tory candidate, Henry Peyton. The latter had been elected with 126 votes to Churchill's 117 – a total of 233 votes out of 330 registered electors.<sup>36</sup> Peyton was confirmed, however, only to vacate the seat in January 1838 for the Tory Marquess of Blandford.<sup>37</sup>

Coppock served as agent for a petitioner against sitting MP John Minet Fector in Maidstone and assisted Parkes with a victory in Walsall, reversing the election on the basis of failed residency requirements and a lack of witnesses to defend votes for the Tory candidate.

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He also assisted Parkes with a contest, albeit a losing one, in Devizes, alleging that bribes were paid – in the form of payment of rates – on behalf of the sitting member, Captain James Whitley Deans Dundas.<sup>38</sup> In Evesham, where a petition against George Pushout Bowles and P. Borthwick alleged bribery and treating – specifically that Borthwick gave a voter named Ebenezer Pearce, a silver snuffbox worth £7.5s. 6d., and paid the rent arrears for one Joseph Clement, amounting to £36. 6s. – bribery charges were dismissed against Borthwick, but maintained against Bowles. Hill, the Tory candidate, was returned with Borthwick.<sup>39</sup>

Coppock also did some work for Sir John Hobhouse concerning the election of Liberal parliamentary candidates in the next election. Clearly, this was through the Reform Club and concerned Coppock's knowledge of the questionable political influences of the bishopric on county residents throughout Lincoln.<sup>40</sup> In most of these cases, minimal court evidence was presented and there is little to indicate how the decisions by the registration courts were reached, though they were apparently accepted by all parties involved.

While individually, these contests might appear insignificant, in that the litigation was not always effective in changing the outcomes of the elections or forcing local electoral registrants and revising barristers to take greater care in following the letter of the law and so securing clean elections, they did take their toll. As both sides experienced the expense of defending corrupt practices and pursuing allegations that were sometimes accurate and sometimes fraudulent, the numbers of contested elections increased by 20–30 per cent (depending upon location) in the 1830s, with a spike at the time of and immediately following the passage of the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. Large and small boroughs alike, whether with high electoral turnout or low, saw challenges to the returned candidates, spurred by principle, law, or political necessity. It was the role of the electoral agent, however good or bad the case, to pursue challenges in order to secure greater numbers in the House of Commons.

There is little evidence as to how Coppock went about interviewing

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witnesses, collecting evidence and filing legal papers. What is clear, though, is that the costs of carrying out such tasks were paid for from the Reform Club treasury – the coffers filled by club subscriptions, patron donations or supporters' 'fundraising' efforts. Coppock wrote to Lord Broughton in September 1837, concerning the sums necessary for registration expenses in Ipswich and urging an infusion of money before accounts ran dry.<sup>41</sup> He reminded him that all Whig and Radical leaders needed to donate funds to handle the costs not just of registrations but also of legal proceedings when elections were contested. The Reform Club was the social and political tool for raising support, both financial and electoral, for the Whigs and Liberals. While its role would gradually shift to that of a social and dining club exclusively, it did so only as the mechanics of national party organisation took shape.<sup>42</sup> During the 1830s, the political necessities of registering electors, paying for candidates to stand and then the costs of litigation, made the financial donations of liberal-minded politicians a critical tool in achieving electoral majorities at the national and municipal levels.

Money was certainly a consideration in one of the most complex and interesting cases in which Coppock acted. This took place during the 1839 general election and resulted in his testimony before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Bribery and Corruption on 6 July 1842. During the general election of 1839, Captain James Hanway Plumridge was returned as MP for Penryn and Falmouth. A petition was brought against his election. In this case, a single elector charged Plumridge and Captain Vivian, the other Whig candidate, with bribery and a lack of qualification. Coppock had not been involved in the election and was only retained after the petition was presented. Rather than face the expense of defending his seat before the court, Plumridge offered to relinquish the seat to another Whig/Radical candidate. In the testimony Plumridge gave to the Select Committee, Coppock rejected the offer, saying 'that is out of the question [as] yours in a good seat ...'.<sup>43</sup> But Coppock also could not defend the seat without money and Plumridge declared he would

not pay a thing. With such financial constraints, Coppock negotiated a deal with local political leaders and electors that if they defended Vivian against any charges, or convinced the petitioner to drop them, he would have Plumridge resign from the seat in Penryn in favour of a safer seat in another borough that would be easier to defend against any future contests. The Reform Club would handle costs to pursue the new seat, to be determined during the next general election and when an accounting of safe open seats took place. When Coppock informed Plumridge of the arrangement approved by national leaders in the Reform Club, the candidate was both surprised and unhappy. He felt that his political opportunities were lost and he would be 'left out in the lurch'.<sup>44</sup>

Coppock argued that his investigation revealed another story. He testified before the Committee that Plumridge only stood for Penryn at the request of voters and that, upon his agreement to stand, the candidate had told all present in the committee room that he 'would not pay a single sixpence' to do so.<sup>45</sup> Coppock determined that he had been challenged because the petitioners believed that he would not defend his seat because of the costs involved. Coppock estimated that £4000 had already been spent by Liberals on the election, a good many financial promises made for votes, but none by Plumridge himself.<sup>46</sup>

Coppock and Compton Reade (who, though not a parliamentary agent, represented John White Dixon, the petitioner, in the legal negotiations) ultimately achieved a resolution. The petition would be withdrawn against Plumridge if he agreed to retire on 1 July 1842 and not stand again or oppose anyone brought in to stand for the seat – presumably Reade's real client, Mr Gwyn. (Gwyn had sought the seat from the beginning; he had hired Reade and paid the costs involved for John White Dixon to file his petition against Plumridge in the first place.) Then, Plumridge would be proposed for appointment as Crown Steward and Bailiff of the Chiltern Hundreds, a government post that would save face for the Whigs and be, comparatively speaking, a less expensive resolution to the problem. This was agreed upon

and Plumridge was duly elected for Penryn without the expense of the court proceedings.

However, when the resignation was due to happen, Plumridge evidently decided he must not go through with it, though there is no explanation as to why not. Plumridge told Coppock in no uncertain terms that whatever deal had been struck was, it was non-binding, because of its corrupt nature and 'slapdash way of getting rid of a Member of Parliament'.<sup>47</sup> Reade testified to the committee that, while he had negotiated a deal, he believed that he had proved his case of bribery, though he refused to state before the committee with what evidence he had done so. While treating undoubtedly took place, no personal actions by Plumridge or his agents constituted a bribe offered. Plumridge kept his seat and Coppock's reputation was called into question, as was the work of the Reform Club. The new age of the election solicitor was investigated more thoroughly than ever before.

The upshot of this incident and the Select Parliamentary Commission's inquiry was a change in activity for both Coppock and Parkes. Although neither gave up the work entirely, the frequency of their court appearances declined. Coppock continued on as secretary for the Reform Club and still handled legal work, but increasingly in civil law, rather than electoral law. In 1840, he gave testimony to guide parliament in drafting the bill for the Trial of Controvert Elections. His concerns about 'frivolous affidavits and recognizances,' along with counter-affidavits without review, were clearly presented. He testified that, for corrupt practices to be halted, 'MPs would find accusations against sitting Members more credible ... if petitions withstood examination and were not thrown out as frivolous and vexatious.'<sup>48</sup> However, he strongly objected to petitioners bearing the financial burden of contesting elections, however egregious the violation of the law. The bill's proposal that petitioners be required to deposit £1,000 in the Bank of England to secure the costs of hiring solicitors and paying the court costs for contesting an election was wholly rejected by him on the grounds that 'you would take away

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from the poor man the possibility of petitioning.<sup>49</sup> Long after, however, Coppock still dabbled in the business of electoral agency, and John Bright discussed with Parkes, as late as 1857, Coppock's defence of a Rochdale MP's contested election.<sup>50</sup>

Parkes and Coppock's career in the increasingly partisan world of contested electoral practices and party politics following the Reform Act of 1832 is a telling piece of evidence as the age of local politics gave way to national organisation. New electoral registration requirements made things uniform, but also provided the means of a different kind of partisan 'influence'. Placing the burden of defence on the candidate or elector accused, perhaps quite falsely, of non-compliance with the new rules, certainly did not further the advancement of political democracy in British parliamentary politics. New criteria for electoral qualification and registration opened the door for votes and election outcomes being contested on the basis of both corruption and an ignorance of the rules. Non-compliance, whether malicious or not, could, however, be significant in the successful return of a candidate. The successful return of Whig and Liberal electors meant having watchful eyes and full coffers to take matters to court, whether as the plaintiff or the defendant. The electoral agent was turning into more than a campaign manager and public relations agent. They were turning into litigators, sensing where courts could be utilised to overturn an unsuccessful electoral outcome, publically embarrass a candidate, reveal corruption and bribery amongst a witting electorate, and move, when necessary, weaker candidates into safer seats or appointments, looking to secure future elections with other Whigs and Liberals. While the Reform Act of 1832 sought to clean up politics from abuse and corruption, the early electoral outcomes presented new and different challenges to the reform of parliamentary politics. But if anyone tried to reconcile the political, ideological and partisan with truth in electioneering at the birth of the Liberal Party, it was those new election agents/solicitors, epitomised by Joseph Parkes and James Coppock.

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- 1 Potwalloper was the term used to describe those with the vote as the head of a household with a large pot or cauldron. The 1832 Reform Act redefined this archaic notion of household elector.
- 2 Philip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties, 1832-1841* (Boydell, 2002); Philip Salmon, 'Local Politics and Partisanship: The electoral impact of Municipal Reform, 1835' *Parliamentary History*, xix, 2000; John Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818-1841* (Clarendon Press, 1992); John Phillips, 'The Many Faces of Reform: The Reform Bill and the Electorate', *Parliamentary History*, i, 1982; John Phillips and Charles Wetherell, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England', *American Historical Review*, c, 1995; Miles Taylor, 'Interest, Parties and the State: The Urban Electorate in England, c. 1820-72', in Lawrence and Taylor (ed.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Scolar Press, 1997).
- 3 For the role of the electoral agent, see E. A. Smith, 'The Election Agent in English Politics, 1734-1832', *English Historical Review*, lxxxiv, 1969; D. L. Rydz, *The Parliamentary Agents: A History* (Royal Historical Society, 1979); Nancy LoPatin-Lummis, "'With All My Oldest and Native Friends". Joseph Parkes, Warwickshire Solicitor and Electoral Agent in Age of Reform', in Nancy LoPatin-Lummis (ed.), *Public Life and Public Lives: Politics and Religion in Modern British History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Nancy LoPatin-Lummis, 'Joseph Parkes, Electioneering and Corruption in Post-Reform Bill Elections', *Proceedings: The Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750-1850*,

- Selected Papers*, 2006, ed. Frederick C. Schneid and Denise Davidson (High Point University Press, 2007).
- 4 Coppock has received almost no historical attention. There is the *Dictionary of National Biography* written by Albert Nicholson, revised by H. C. G. Matthew in 2004 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6279>), but little more than a mention in other historical works. The one work published by the man himself was a manual of electors' rights, *The Electors Manual of Plain Direction by Which Every Man May Know His Own Rights and Reservations* (Finsbury Reform Club, 1835).
- 5 2 Will. IV c. 45, 738, clause 56; see Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work*, pp. 20–25.
- 6 2 Will. IV c. 45, 729–738.
- 7 See Joseph Parkes, *The Governing Charter of the Borough of Warwick, 5 William and Mary, 18 March 1694, with a Letter to the Burgesses on the Past and Present State of the Corporation* (Birmingham, 1827).
- 8 The Parkes and Melbourne manuscripts reveal a few significant letters in May 1832 between the men, discussing ways in which the BPU's actions could be softened. See Parkes MSS, University College London and Melbourne MSS, British Library.
- 9 Minutes of Evidence, 9 March 1840, in *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections and on Election Proceedings and Expenses: With Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, 1834–44* (Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers, Government, Elections, 2; Irish Academic Press, 1970), p. 558.
- 10 Parkes MSS, Parkes to Durham, 21 July 1835. For more details on the creation of the Reform Club, see the Parkes MSS throughout second half of 1835; Tennyson MSS, TED H/31/14, Parkes to Tennyson, 20 June 1835; Parkes MSS, University College Library, Parkes to Stanley, 14 October 1835; Durham MSS, Lambton Castle, Memorandum by Molesworth on the Formation of the Reform Club, 7 February 1836.
- 11 Philips and Wetherall, 'The Great Reform Act and the Modernization of England', pp. 413–14.
- 12 Brougham MSS, 20,959, Parkes to Brougham, 28 September 1833.
- 13 Parkes MSS, Parkes to W. Hutt, M.P. (copy enclosed to Lord Stanley), 19 August 1838.
- 14 Salmon, *Electoral Reform Act Work*, p. 22. This revises estimates previously offered by Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1973), p. 312 and Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties, The Unreformed of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 179.
- 15 2 Will. IV c. 45, 729–738.
- 16 Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on Election Petitions Recognizances, *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 541.
- 17 Henry James Perry and Jerome William Knapp, *Cases of Converted Elections in the Eleventh Parliament of the United Kingdom; Being the First since the Passing of Acts for the Amendment of the Representation of the People* (J. & W. T. Clarke, 1833).
- 18 For a detailed assessment of this particular case in Warwick and its impact on both electoral practice and the beginnings of Municipal Corporation Reform, in which Parkes played a part as Secretary to the Select Parliamentary Municipal Corporation Reform Commission, see my article "'With All My Oldest and Native Friends'". Joseph Parkes, Warwickshire Solicitor and Electoral Agent in Age of Reform,' in Nancy LoPatin-Lummis (ed.), *Public Life and Public Lives: Politics and Religion in Modern British History*, p. 96–108.
- 19 *Annual Register*, (1833), ch. VIII, pp. 211–12.
- 20 *Parliamentary Papers* (1833), IV, pp. 633–4; XI, p. 197; *The Times*, 6 August, 1834, p. 3.
- 21 *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 469.
- 22 This was certainly the case in Warwick. Parkes directly asked Edward Ellice, who in turn raised the funds with Lord Durham, for a £1,000 to cover court costs. Lambton MSS, Parkes to Ellice, 15 April 1834.
- 23 *Ibid.*, Parkes to Durham, 9 March 1836.
- 24 *Ibid.*, Parkes to Durham, 2 February 1836; Parkes to Durham, 1 March 1836.
- 25 *Ibid.*, Durham to Parkes, 20 March 1836.
- 26 Jerome William Knapp and Edward Ombler, *Cases of Converted Elections in the Twelfth Parliament of the United Kingdom; Being the Second since the Passing of Acts for the Amendment of the Representation of the People* (London: 1837).
- 27 Henry Stooks Smith, *Register of Parliamentary Contested Elections* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1842), p. 29.
- 28 Coppock, *The Electors Manual*, p. 12.
- 29 Stooks Smith, *Register of Parliamentary Contested Elections*, p. 7.
- 30 *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 468.
- 31 Coppock, *The Electors Manual*, pp. 12–13.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 725.
- 34 Thomas Falconer and Edward Fitzherbert, *Cases of Controverted Elections, Determined in Committees of the House of Commons in the Second Parliament of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Saunders and Benning, 1839).
- 35 William Wardell Bean, *Parliamentary Representation of Six Northern Counties of England from 1603 to 1886* (C. H. Bamwell, 1890), p. 435.
- 36 William Retlaw Williams, *Parliamentary History of the County of Oxford including the City and University* (Brecknock, 1899), p. 225.
- 37 Falconer and Fitzherbert, *Cases of Controverted Elections*.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Hobhouse MSS British Library Add MSS, 36,471, f. 379, Coppock to Hobhouse, 14 March 1838.
- 41 Broughton MSS, British Library Add MSS 36,472, f. 81, Coppock to Broughton, 21 September 1837.
- 42 For more on this, see my article, 'The Reform Club and the creation of the Liberal Party' in a forthcoming special edition of the journal *Parliamentary History*.
- 43 *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 727.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 728.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 723.
- 46 There is nothing to suggest how Coppock arrived at this figure in his testimony before the select committee, but his fundraising efforts within the Reform Club, as well as Parkes's nervousness about the state of funding and correspondence with Ellice and others, render the hefty amount plausible.
- 47 *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 728.
- 48 Minutes of Evidence take before the Select Committee on Election Petitions Recognizances, *Reports from Select Committees on Controverted Elections*, p. 541.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 Parkes MSS, Folder 8, Bright to Parkes, 26 June 1857.

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- 19 Conservative Party Archive, CCO 3/1/63, Col. P. J. Blair to Sir Arthur Young 15 Jun. 1949. For more details of the evolution of the Woolton–Teviot agreement, see D. Dutton, *Liberals in Schism: A History of the National Liberal Party* (I.B.Tauris, 2008), pp. 157–66.
- 20 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Simon MSS 98, fos. 6–7, Teviot to Simon, 27 Jul. 1949.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*, fos. 3–5, Simon to Teviot, 26 Jul. 1949.
- 23 The party formally changed its name to National Liberal in 1948.
- 24 *The Times*, 19 Nov. 1949.
- 25 National Library of Wales, Davies MSS, J/3/58, Teviot to Davies, 4 Oct. 1951.
- 26 Woolton MSS 21, fo. 116, Teviot to Woolton, 19 Sep. 1950.
- 27 Teviot and J. Maclay to *The Times*, 7 Jun. 1955.
- 28 House of Lords Debates, vol. 238, col. 63.
- 29 *Ibid.*, vol. 225, cols. 473–4.
- 30 *Ibid.*, col. 475.
- 31 *Ibid.*, vol. 227, col. 530.
- 32 *Ibid.*, col. 529.
- 33 *Ibid.*, col. 528.
- 34 *The Times*, 26 Oct. 1944.
- 35 House of Lords Debates, vol. 216, cols. 601–2.