

A Political Man

The political aspirations of William Taylor Haly

That most political of nineteenth century novelists, Anthony Trollope, regarded a seat in Parliament as 'the highest object of ambition to every educated Englishman'.¹ His own attempt to enter Parliament, at Beverley in 1868, was described in his autobiography as 'the most wretched fortnight of my manhood' and confirmed his agent's prediction that 'You will spend £1,000 and lose the election'.² That Trollope went ahead with his campaign at Beverley is indicative of the lure of parliament for an ambitious man. Just how many men held this ambition is revealed in that 'bible' of nineteenth century elections, *McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book*.³ Within its pages and index are the names of all the candidates, both successful and unsuccessful, who stood for Parliament between 1832 and 1910, and many of them were to see their ambitions frustrated on more than one occasion.

One such frustrated candidate is the subject of this article, a lawyer named William Taylor Haly whose attempts to become one of the members for the Dorset seaport borough of Poole in the late 1850s brought elements of excitement and acrimony into what had become a cosy pact between the town's two political parties or, more realistically, factions. Haly's experience is probably typical of many an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate but he does reveal the hold politics can exert over a man.

Poole was one of the boroughs whose electorate had been changed by the Reform Act of 1832. Before that date the right to vote had been limited to members of the town's Corporation, a self appointed and self perpetuating body of ninety-one resident and seventy-one non-resident 'burgesses'. The majority of these were merchants and their relations whose wealth and prosperity was based upon the lucrative Newfoundland trade (the town had long been major supplier of goods to, and importer of products from, that island). After the Act the electorate increased to 412 (reaching 547 by 1859) and was made up of shopkeepers, craftsmen, merchants and professional men. By tradition the

Lords of the nearby Manor of Canford, who owned most of the land around Poole, had influenced the choice of the members and, as the Lords of the Manor were usually Liberals,⁴ they naturally expected Poole to return men from that party. This was deeply resented by many people in Poole, for the majority of its leading citizens, especially the Newfoundland merchants, were staunch Tories. During the early 1850s a compromise had been reached whereby the town was represented by one member from each party and was dubbed a 'Whig-Tory Compact'. Thus there had been no contest at the general election of 1852, there being only two candidates. These were a Bristol merchant named George Woodroffe Franklyn for the town and the Tories, and Henry Danby Seymour, a relative of the Duke of Somerset, for Canford and the Liberals. This arrangement was expected to continue at the next general election in 1857, but the appearance of a third candidate, William Taylor Haly, brought a return to contested elections.

Haly had been born in Poole on 30 June 1818,⁵ the first son of Richard Standish Haly, a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and Ann Gee Young, a member of an old Poole family. The Youngs had been among the first to enter the Newfoundland trade and were ship masters and merchants into the early nineteenth century. Richard Haly was not a Poole man but, probably through the influence of his in-laws, had become a member of the town's unreformed Corporation. Surviving poll-books record him as voting Liberal in Poole at the general election of 1826 and in the Dorset county by-election of 1831. His Liberal views clearly went further than just voting for the party's candidates. In 1821 he published a forty-three page pamphlet entitled *Impressment: an attempt to prove why it should and how it could be abolished*.⁶

During his early years William accompanied his father to the West Indies and subsequently made an extended tour of the United States.⁷ Precisely when the Halys left Poole is uncertain but it would appear to have been in the early 1830s, for Rich-

ard's name appears among the Burgesses (members of the Corporation) of 1830 and (as mentioned above) in the County poll-book for 1831. He does not appear in any of the three poll books published in Poole after the election and subsequent by-election of 1835. The Admissions Register of the Middle Temple, where William was admitted in April 1846, has Richard Haly as being 'late of the Parish of Clarendon in the Island of Jamaica'.⁸

Before studying law William Haly 'devoted himself to literary pursuits'⁹ and in the early 1840s was connected with *The Times* and the *Daily News*. The *Glasgow Citizen* of 10 April 1852 states that he 'commenced life as a Parliamentary reporter for the daily press'. He also published three books during this period, two of them being concerned with contemporary politics. One, in 1843, was *The Opinions of Sir Robert Peel, expressed in Parliament and in Public* which *The Times* described in its review as '...a perfect encyclopaedia of political knowledge'.¹⁰ The second, also in 1843, was an esoteric work called *A Report on the Proceedings at the Bread Street Ward Scrutiny AD 1843, with a Digest of Decisions Exemplifying their Bearing upon the Act II Geo. I Cap. 18*. His third book was entitled *Education: Showing What is done; What is not done; What we can do; What we must do: to Educate the People*, a title reminiscent of his father's *Impressment...* of twenty-six years earlier. William's book was a ninety-five page analysis of how the state must involve itself in radically extending primary education although, rather paradoxically, he maintained that compulsory education was repugnant to English feeling. It was addressed to Sir George Grey, Bart., MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department and Haly was described on the frontispiece as being 'of the Middle Temple, Secretary to the Southwark Fund for Schools, etc'.

Haly studied law at the Middle Temple from 1846 and was called to the Bar in May 1849. His subsequent legal career was at the Parliamentary Bar and he acted on behalf of the Corporation of the City of London on several occasions.¹¹ He was thus already a political man and it was perhaps inevitable that

he should set his sights on membership of the House of Commons.

His active involvement in Parliamentary politics began during the general election of 1852 when he contested the Scottish borough of Paisley, carrying with him letters of praise and recommendation from five leading Radical-Liberal MPs, one of whom was Richard Cobden. Another, from Viscount Duncan, acknowledged Haly's support in his campaign to have the Window Tax repealed and described him as 'an indefatigable and zealous advocate of Reform and Retrenchment'.¹² His address to the electors of Paisley clearly stated his views which included a large extension to the Suffrage, Triennial Parliaments, the Ballot, Free Trade and opposition to 'every State Endowment for ecclesiastical purposes'.¹³ Haly was clearly a Liberal, but so too was his opponent at this election, Archibald Hastie, who had held the seat since 1836.

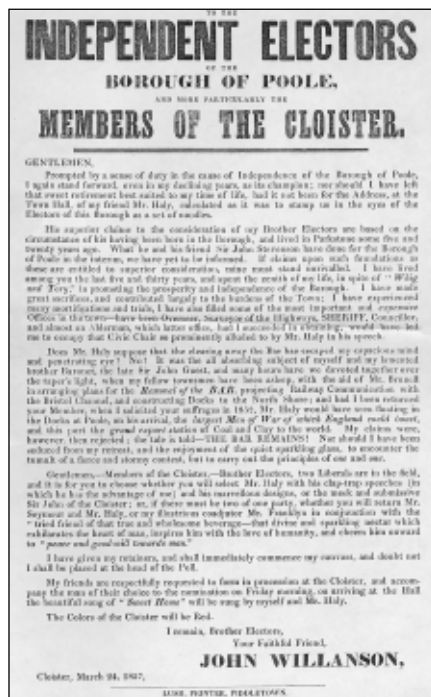
Newspaper accounts of this election include comment on Haly with the *Glasgow Citizen* saying that 'as a public speaker, Mr Haly, although much superior to Mr Hastie, does not seem to rank very high.' It went on to note that 'He seems to be an intelligent man, well acquainted with business, and might probably be a useful working member; but the oratory of the House of Commons must be no great thing if his would command attention.' Other newspapers, however, such as the *Renfrewshire Independent*, describe his style as inciting great laughter and applause. Accounts of his speeches in Poole, a few years later, confirm his ability to entertain an audience.

Haly was unsuccessful in Paisley, Hastie polling 406 votes to his 374, but his active involvement in politics continued throughout the 1850s, particularly through his association with Richard Cobden. A letter from Cobden to the Leicester MP Joshua Walmesley in 1852 informed him that 'the League, having a little money left, is employing Haly to collect together some of the facts concerned with intimidation, bribery etc of the late election'.¹⁴ He was again mentioned in a letter from Cobden for, when writing in September 1852 regarding the formation of lo-

cal societies in favour of the ballot, he said 'I urged upon some men in the Reform Club, whom I met there (such as...Haly etc) to work in this matter.'¹⁵ In 1856 Haly was, for a short time, editor of the *Morning Star*, a newspaper that had Cobden as its chief advisor.¹⁶

In 1857 William Haly came back to Poole after an absence of some twenty-five years. He had a detailed knowledge of Parliament and public life and presented himself as someone who would break the 'Whig-Tory Compact'. Naturally, the existing parties within the constituency did not welcome Haly's intervention. The Mayor initially refused to allow him the use of the Town Hall and a long, anonymous poster was published querying his political principles and concluding that he was an extreme radical. Haly described his views as being those of an 'advanced Liberal' but in both Poole and Paisley he had to defend himself against charges of radicalism. Although the poster that charged him with being a radical had no signature it had been printed by a firm whose partners were to vote for the sitting Liberal, Seymour, at this election and did so again in 1859. Six years later, at the election of 1865, they again voted for Seymour and a like-minded Liberal. This suggests that it was Poole's Liberals (and therefore the Manor of Canford) who most feared Haly's candidacy. Indeed, Haly seems to have made a point of fighting other Liberals, rather than the Tories.

His campaign began with a meeting at the Town Hall and, according to the *Poole Pilot*, he 'carried the whole town'. He concentrated on Poole's economic problems, the town's capabilities and its possibilities in the future, ignoring party politics. The following evening he invited the electors to meet him at the *London Tavern*. 'They came' said the *Poole Pilot* 'without distinction of party or sect'.¹⁷ The next time he addressed the electorate was on nomination day, Friday 27 March. This was a rowdy affair, with a five-foot high barricade separating those who possessed the right to vote from the less privileged majority of the population. During a speech by one of the proposers of the Tory candidate, Franklyn, it was suggested that the electors also returned



Seymour, the sitting Liberal. This idea immediately led to cries of ‘coalition!’, an allegation that Seymour emphatically rejected during his own speech.

When Haly came to speak, he maintained that one member should be a Poole man, and in addition to stating his political views, promised (in a rather modern gesture) that, if elected, he would visit the borough during each recess and live in the neighbourhood for four months a year. This promise, however, was to no avail for at the following day’s poll Seymour was placed first with 211 votes and Franklyn was also re-elected with 189 votes. Haly received 98. Seymour’s triumph ended on a sour note for him for when he was returning from the Town Hall to his hotel after the declaration, he was set upon by a mob of youngsters. Fortunately he was rescued by several gentlemen whom the *Poole Herald* described as his political opponents.

In December of that same year Haly saw a third chance to enter Parliament when Hastie, the victor at Paisley in 1852, died. Haly returned to Scotland for the by-election but it was again a wasted journey. His opponent, once again another Liberal, was H.E. Crum-Ewing and he received 767 votes to Haly’s humiliating 98, coincidentally the same number that he had achieved in Poole the previous April.

In 1859 there was another general election, brought about by Lord Der-

by’s minority Conservative Government’s attempt to tackle the recurrent problem of further Parliamentary reform. In Poole the contest was to be a re-run of 1857 with Seymour, Franklyn and Haly the only candidates to face the electorate at the polls.

All three candidates published election addresses during the first week of the campaign although Seymour’s was actually produced by his brother as he was away on a visit to the United States. Franklyn’s pamphlet stated simply and confidently that ‘my political principles are well known to you – I therefore will not trouble you with a detail of them’¹⁸ although he did go on to re-affirm his support for Derby’s Government. Haly, on the other hand, dwelt at length on Poole’s ills, its possible disenfranchisement, and his own local origins. He was also the most active of the candidates, holding meetings in the suburbs of Parkstone and Hamworthy as well as in the Town Hall. His continual emphasis on local matters at his meetings led to Seymour and Franklyn having to defend their Parliamentary records on matters concerning Poole. For Franklyn this was difficult as he was an infrequent attender and never spoke during his time in the House. Seymour, though, was an active member and held a minor government post between March 1855 and March 1858 as Joint Secretary to the Board of Control. His political career was cut short in 1868 by financial problems.

The nominations were once again an unruly affair with all the speakers having to contend with the cheering and heckling of the crowd, many of whom were not entitled to vote. Once again these un-enfranchised citizens were segregated from their more privileged fellows by being restricted to the back of the hall by barricades and special constables. One topic which provoked a great deal of interest was whether Poole would retain two Members of Parliament after any future reform act.¹⁹ When the speeches were over a show of hands was taken and the Sheriff declared this to be in favour of Franklyn and Haly. Inevitably a poll was demanded and as the candidates left the hall, Seymour was jostled and his clothes damaged until the police and

the special constables rescued him. Polling took place the following day and Haly and Franklyn were present but Seymour took the advice of his friends and stayed away.

When the poll was declared the result was Franklyn 208, Seymour 193 and Haly 143. Perhaps the most important point about these figures is that 69 of Haly’s votes were from ‘plumpers’, people who supported only him, while a further 51 votes were from people who used their other vote for Franklyn. Only 22 people voted for Seymour and Haly despite them both being Liberals. Thus the division was clearly between the ‘Poole’ and ‘Canford’ parties and Haly was not part of the latter and only had partial support from the former. Thompson has pointed out that the Canford influence over Poole was ‘something much more shadowy and delicate than secure proprietary ownership’²⁰ and there were certainly men living within the town (as against those living in its suburbs) who gave their allegiance to the Manor rather than the Tory dominated Corporation. That many of these were from the professional classes within the town suggests an empathy with their social betters at Canford.

Haly’s final attempt to enter Parliament came six years later. In July 1865 the Poole electorate prepared themselves for what, although they did not know it, was to be the last occasion they would return two members to Parliament.²¹

Steps towards selecting the candidates had begun eighteen months earlier when the Canford backed Liberals decided to abandon the ‘compact’ and try to win both seats. Seymour was again a candidate and the choice for the second seat was Charles Waring, ‘a partner in the firm of Waring Brothers of Westminster, contractors for public works’.²² This firm was the contractor for the Dorset Central Railway Company whose directors included Henry Danby Seymour and Sir Ivor Guest of Canford. In March 1865 Waring, with Seymour’s assistance, had obtained the necessary Parliamentary authority for an Act to set up a company to provide a much needed railway line between Poole and the new and rapidly growing

seaside resort of Bournemouth, a few miles to the east.

William Haly once again came forward as a candidate and on this occasion it seemed possible that he might have 'official' backing, albeit from those who should have been his political opponents. The Conservative member, Franklyn, had decided to retire after thirteen silent years in the Commons and Poole's Tories toyed with the idea of adopting Haly as the independent candidate for the town against the influence of the Canford Liberals. However, at a meeting called by the Tories at the *Antelope Hotel* three days before the nominations, a gentleman from Lincolnshire named Stephen Lewin and who had recently bought an iron foundry in the town, offered himself as a candidate and was accepted.

When the news of Lewin's adoption reached Haly 'he left the borough in disgust'.²³ The *Dorset County Chronicle* stated that a deputation from among Haly's supporters visited him in Bournemouth and asked him to fight the election 'in connexion with Mr Lewin'. Haly declined this offer and the *Chronicle*, after saying that this suggestion 'caused the Liberal party to tremble' and that it 'shook the foundations of all their hope', then concluded that the refusal was 'the wisest thing Mr Haly ever did for had he returned there would in all probability have been a riot on the day of nomination and polling'.²⁴ Perhaps Haly was simply a realist,

knowing from bitter experience that he would again be fighting a hopeless battle and could not hope to overcome the Canford influenced suburban or 'outer district' vote. The wisdom of his decision to withdraw is shown by the eventual result, for when the poll was taken the two Liberals, Seymour and Waring, received 259 and 249 votes respectively whilst Lewin received only 178.

William Taylor Haly cannot be regarded, in the national context, as being even a minor historical figure. He was never important politically, just interesting as someone whose efforts to become an MP reveal something of the new breed of man entering public life at a time of great social and political change. Haly was, in some ways, a rather modern figure because of his opinions and his promise to be a 'full-time' member, even to the extent of offering to live in the constituency. The *Glasgow Citizen's* hunch that he would make a 'good working member' was probably an accurate one and, as the Liberal party evolved into a powerful provider of governments, he might well have become a junior minister.

After 1865 Haly ceased to be active in politics. Like Anthony Trollope, who admittedly made only one attempt, he had experienced the excitement and discomfort of fighting elections and presumably decided it was simply not worth the effort. A bachelor, he spent the rest of his life in London, but when he died there in 1874 at the age of 55,

his body was brought back to Poole, the town in which he was born and spent much of his childhood, and whose politics he enlivened. He was buried in Poole cemetery where his tombstone still stands, a memorial which fails to reveal his role in the electoral history of the borough. In truth, though, his only enduring memorial is his inclusion in the pages of works of reference such as *McCalmont*. There his italicised name indicates not only his presence at election campaigns, but also the fact that he failed to win a seat.

Terry McDonald is a Senior Lecturer in history and politics at the Southampton Institute.

- 1 A. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, (Oxford, 1928), p.265
- 2 Ibid., pp. 272-4.
- 3 J. Vincent and M. Stenton (eds.), *McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book of all Elections, 1832-1918*, (Brighton, 1971).
- 4 The Manor had been bought in 1846 by the iron master and Liberal MP for Merthyr Tydfil, Sir Josiah John Guest from another Liberal (and former MP) the Hon. Charles Ponsonby.
- 5 His date of birth comes from a poster which Haly published on 30 June 1865, mentioning that it was the anniversary of his birth in Poole, and from his tombstone. He was not baptised until 27 December 1818. (Entry in parish register of St James, Poole.)
- 6 British Museum Catalogue, BM 8807 bb.37.
- 7 Obituary in *The Law Times*, February 1874.
- 8 It also has him as 'Captain' and 'deceased'.
- 9 Obituary in *The Law Times*, February 1874.
- 10 Cited in Haly's book on the Bread Street Scrutiny.
- 11 *Glasgow Citizen*, 10 April 1852.
- 12 The five letters were published in the Scottish newspapers in 1852 and in the *Poole Herald* in 1857.
- 13 Paisley Central Library collection.
- 14 Cited in H. Walmesley, *Life of Joshua Walmesley*, (London, 1879) p.268. The 'League' referred to was the Anti Corn Law League.
- 15 Ibid., p.277.
- 16 J.A. Hobson, *Richard Cobden - The International Man*, (London, 1918) p.141. The *Morning Star* was published between 17 March 1856 until 13 October 1869.
- 17 *The Poole Pilot*, 17 October 1868.
- 18 *Dorset County Chronicle*, 14 April 1859.
- 19 Reform, when it came in 1867, did indeed reduce Poole to one Member of Parliament. It ceased to be a Parliamentary constituency in 1885 but was re-created in 1950.
- 20 F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1971), p.42.
- 21 Until 1997 when part of the town was joined with Mid-Dorset to create a new constituency.
- 22 F. Boase, *Modern English Biography, containing... memoirs of persons who have died since 1850*, 6 Vols., (Truro, 1892-1921.)
- 23 *The Poole Pilot*, 17 October 1868.
- 24 *Dorset County Chronicle*, 13 July 1865.

Tune,---"RED, WHITE, and BLUE."

**HALY and SEYMOUR for ever,
They are the Men for Poole,
For they are really clever,
But FRANKLIN is a f---l.**

**So let us all join together,
And to our colors prove true,
That FRANKLIN may not sever,
The Pink from the White and Blue.**

**Three Cheers for the Pink, White, and Blue,
Three Cheers for the Pink, White, and Blue,
HALY and SEYMOUR for ever,
Three Cheers for the Pink, White, and Blue.**