BATH POLITICS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY JOHN CANNON

In 1761, when William Pitt was returned for the second time as the member for Bath, he paid tribute to 'a city, ranked among the most ancient and most considerable in the kingdom, and justly famed for its integrity, independence and zeal for the publick good'.[1] The compliment was deserved, for Bath was without doubt one of the most distinguished of the pre-Reform boroughs. It returned two members to Parliament, and it invariably chose men with the strongest local connections or of national reputation. It was one of the few boroughs where a complete stranger, however wealthy, had no chance of success. Though the government of the day sometimes tried to place a nominee at Bath, he had to be hand-picked for the occasion, a man of worth.[2] Nor was any family able to monopolise the representation of the city, though the Pratts and Thynnes came close to it in the later period.

The right to vote was limited to the Corporation, a self-perpetuating oligarchy, thirty in number. From time to time the rest of the citizens attempted to gain an extension of the franchise: in 1727, for example, they petitioned that the Corporation had 'assumed to themselves the sole right of electing members', but this, and similar complaints, came to nothing.[3] Within the Corporation, voting was extremely independent, and there was little continuity of party groups. A man such as Marshal Wade or General Palmer could sometimes build up an almost impregnable position, but this was a matter of personal prestige. Around them the current flowed with bewildering eddies. Of the 22 councillors who supported Robert Gay in 1719, only 9 voted for him two years later: John Codrington received 20 votes in 1722, but at the following election, of the 14 previous supporters remaining on the Corporation, 11 deserted him. The same thing was happening later in the century. Sir John Sebright polled 25 votes in 1768, but when there was a contest six years later,

[1] Pitt to the Corporation, 12 April 1761, Chatham MSS.

[2] A marked contrast with Malmesbury, where, in the later Eighteenth century, candidates did not even attend elections, or Hindon, where the voters were content to have a candidate introduced under the name 'General Gold'.

[3] *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxi. 49. For an attempt in 1715, see *Journals*, xviii. 33. Another effort was made in 1812.

he polled only 10. The following year, at a by-election, he polled 24.[4]

As one would expect, Bath's special character as a spa was reflected in its political life. The Corporation usually contained at least one doctor and several apothecaries. Robert Gay, who represented the city 1720 - 22 and 1727 - 34 was an apothecary: Abel Moysey, 1774 - 90, was the son of a Bath doctor, and two other sons of Bath doctors, Henry Addington and William Skrine, sat elsewhere. The Post Office, too, played its part. Ralph Allen, the postal reformer, was a member of the Corporation 1725 - 63, and exerted a powerful influence. John Palmer, the sponsor of mail coaches, was in the Corporation from 1775 until his death: he represented the city in Parliament 1801 - 07, and was succeeded by his son, Charles, who sat 1807 - 26 and 1830 - 35.

Elections after the Restoration were almost without exception contested, the candidates being men of property in the city or neighbourhood.[5] William Blathwayte, a leading Whig politician, held one seat without much difficulty from 1693 until 1710,[6] but then lost it to Colonel John Codrington, of Codrington, near Sodbury, through the intervention of the Duke of Beaufort. Samuel Trotman, a lawyer, of Syston Court, near Bitton, was elected in 1706, and he and Codrington were unopposed in 1713 and 1715.[7] In 1719, Robert Gay succeeded Trotman, and in 1722 there was a three-cornered contest between Gay, Codrington, and George Wade, the soldier.

Wade is said to have been sent to Bath in 1715 at the head of a detachment of troops to suppress Jacobite tendencies in the city. Among the friends he made there was Ralph Allen, who married Wade's natural daughter, about the year 1718.[8] When the election

4 This unpredictability was aided by the fact that between General Elections there might be six or eight new councillors chosen. All the evidence in this article about the Corporation comes from the Minute Books, preserved in the city archives.

5 There were contests in 1661, 1669, 1679, 1681, 1689, 1690, 1695, and 1698.

6 For Blathwayte, see G. A. Jacobsen, *William Blathwayte*, 1932.

7 For Trotman, see *Trans. Bristol & Glos. Arch. Soc.* xxiii. 65, 104, and for Codrington, *ibid*, xxi. 331.

8 It is sometimes suggested that Allen's influence helped to bring Wade in. But it should be remembered that Allen was only 28 in 1722, and did not become a member of the Corporation until three years later. Wade's influence helped Allen, not *vice versa*.

came in 1722, Wade headed the poll with 23 votes, followed by Codrington with 20 and Gay with 11.

For the next twenty-five years, Wade's position in the city was unchallenged. He had the advantage of government support, but his supremacy was due to his great personal reputation. He was re-elected in 1727, 1734, 1741, and 1747 without the slightest difficulty. In 1734 he even succeeded in polling all thirty votes, a unique achievement, and the more remarkable since he had voted for the unpopular Excise Bill the previous year. He lived in the Abbey Courtyard, and took a prominent part in the life of the city. Though there is no evidence of Bath voters accepting bribes, Wade's seat was not inexpensive — there were subscriptions to local charities, feasts to the Corporation, and gifts to the Abbey. In 1728 he undertook to have portraits of the whole Corporation painted at his own expense: seven years later, he made a donation of five hundred guineas 'for some public good', which was spent eventually on St. Michael's Church.

Codrington and Gay continued to fight for the second seat. In 1722 it went to Codrington, in 1727 to Gay, and in 1734 to Codrington once more. On this occasion he defeated Philip Bennet of Widbrook by 16 votes to 14. Bennet's sister was married to Ralph Allen's younger brother, and Allen cast his votes for Bennet and Wade. At the following General Election, in 1741, Bennet turned the tables, defeating Codrington by 16 votes to 15, presumably on the casting vote of the Mayor. Only two of the councillors present failed to vote for Wade.

Bennet did not contest the next election, at which two new candidates appeared. Robert Henley, the lawyer, was supported by Allen, who now carried great weight in the city. Henley had been a constant visitor to Bath, where he had met his wife, and his 'convivial habits' are reported to have made him very popular. The second candidate was Joseph Langton, of Newton St. Lo, between Bath and Bristol. His grandfather had represented the city in 1690. Wade came through with 29 out of a possible 30 votes, and Henley beat Langton for second place by 17 to 13.

A few months later, Wade died at the age of 80. The *Bath Journal*, 21 March 1748, reported three candidates for the vacancy—Langton,

the Hon. Mr. Poulett, and General Sir John Ligonier.[9] Ligonier was then a national hero, after the battle of Laffeldt, and it seems that Allen and his group put his name forward to stave off a powerful local challenge. He was abroad at the time, and had no knowledge of the election until it had taken place. The third candidate withdrew, leaving a straight fight between Ligonier and Langton. Three of Langton's supporters on the Corporation objected that Ligonier was ineligible, not being a freeman of the city, but this was brushed aside. Even so, Ligonier carried the day by only one vote, polling 15 to 14, after three of Langton's supporters had deserted. The following year he made an official visit to the city, and was met at Batheaston by Allen, who introduced him to the Corporation, and gave him hospitality at Prior Park.

Henley and Ligonier were affable men, and seem to have been on good terms with most of the Corporation. In 1751, Henley was elected Recorder of the city, and when he stood for re-election on taking office as Solicitor-General to the Queen, he was not opposed. Nor did Langton's group make any move at the General Election of 1754. But two years later, when Henley was appointed Attorney-General, there was a determined attempt to oust him. Langton had been assured by eighteen members of the Corporation of their support, Nevertheless, when the time came, Henley made his return unopposed.[10] A letter from John Lovell, the newest member of the Corporation and a supporter of 'honest Mr. Langton', tells the full story:

> At the day of trial, six of our party (the above mentioned eighteen) proved traitors, and went over to Henley's side, so that Mr. Langton's Interest was entirely destroyed, and this time we could do nothing for him: but to shew a just resentment and contempt of the six traitors . . . twelve of us absented ourselves from the election. There were eighteen present at the election, seventeen of whom voted for Henley, whom Mr. Collibee the Mayor pronounced to be duly elected, but, when his own voice was asked, said . . . he should not vote for Mr. Henley, and therefore would give no vote at all . . .

9 Poulett is not mentioned again, but was probably Vere Poulett, 3rd son of John, Lord Poulett, whose estates were at Hinton St. George. Ligonier was the son of a French Huguenot, and came to England at the age of 17. A recent biography is by Rex Whitworth.

10 *Bath Journal*, 13 Dec. 1756.

> I must tell you it was ever a custom with the Corporation of this place to entertain the Member on the day of election, with either a dinner or supper, but our honest Mayor would give neither, which occasioned the greatest disappointment, and no less mortification to our enemies, especially the shameful six.[11]

Langton was equally unfortunate on the next occasion he came forward. Early in 1757, Henley was appointed Lord Keeper, and vacated his seat. The *Bath Advertiser*, 25 June 1757, reported: 'Interest is making for Joseph Langton, Esq., a neighbouring gentleman'. But, on this occasion, he was confronted with an opponent even more powerful than Henley, for Allen and his friends resolved to offer the seat to William Pitt, whose popularity was at its height. The negotiations were conducted on Pitt's behalf by his friend Thomas Potter, the dissolute son of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In June, Collibee, still Mayor, replied to Potter:

> Your obliging favour . . . came to hand yesterday morning at eight; in it you hint at a conversation that passed between us in regard to Mr. Pitt's being a candidate for this city. I remember at that time I set forth to you the connections that were between Mr. Langton and his friends, and the improbability of their desisting from the intention of serving him till a generall election. . .
>
> I immediately on the receipt of your letter convened my Friends . . . But at the first onset of treaty with our Party I found the town was canvassing in favour of Mr. Pitt. . .
>
> Mr. Langton was sent to, and as his resolutions are to offer himself a candidate, his Friends are determined to serve him.[12]

Collibee was agrieved to discover that Pitt's agents had already been at work. Certainly the Corporation's offer to Pitt was not quite the spontaneous gesture that his biographers have sometimes claimed. As early as the spring of 1756 Potter had been putting out feelers, as his letter of 4 June from Bath indicates:

> There was an imagination here, that Parker would be made

11 John Lovell to Miss Harvey, 9 Dec. 1756, Cole Park MSS. (Wiltshire Record Office). The Corporation Minute Book confirms the story: Collibee is marked as 'did not vote', and there were twelve absentees.

12 Printed in R. E. M. Peach, *Life and Times of Ralph Allen*, 161.

> Chief Justice, and Henley Chief Baron. . . I felt our friend on the occasion, and found him staunch and firm: but I had done a little more; I had detached a Tory common councilman from all those who were likely to be the candidates, and had brought him to hold that language of you, as that the moment your name had been proposed, he must have embraced your interest with eagerness.[13]

The resistance to Pitt did not last long. Langton may have felt his cause hopeless, or have shared the respect for Pitt as a statesman.[14] In less than a week, Pitt received a 'very polite letter of invitation' from Langton and his supporters, and accepted. Potter deputised for him at the election, and turned the occasion to advantage on his own account:

> He [Pitt] thinks it will be best to chuse a new Recorder while the Corporation is harmonious. He mentioned Mr. Pratt as a fit person, but, if you approve it, I have many reasons which induce me to take it myself, having had an education at the Bar, and being, I trust, qualified for it. . .[15]

Pitt was accordingly elected by a unanimous vote.[16] Cannon were fired, beer served out, the Abbey bells rung, 'and the Inhabitants in general expressed great joy at having so worthy a member to represent them'.[17] Potter was chosen Recorder in place of Henley the following year, and entertained hopes of succeeding to the seat when Ligonier should die or retire.[18] But Potter himself died in June 1759, fourteen months after taking office. His successor as

[13] *Correspondence of William Pitt*, i. 162. 'Our friend' was Allen. By 'a Tory common councilman', Potter means a Langton supporter. Langton, as a local gentleman who had opposed government placemen, was a Tory.

[14] Earlier the same year, the Corporation had given the freedom of the city to Pitt and Legge in gold boxes.

[15] Potter to Allen, Peach, *op. cit.* 162.

[16] He polled 29 out of a possible 30. One member, Johnson Robinson, was absent, but he lived in London, and rarely attended.

[17] *Bath Journal*, 11 July 1757.

[18] Pitt's election at Bath was the signal for a re-shuffle. He gave up the family seat at Oakhampton to Potter, who had previously represented Aylesbury. John Wilkes was then able to come in for Potter's old seat. In October 1758 Potter wrote to Pitt from Prior Park that he intended to resign at the General Election in favour of his son, 'depending for myself on the friendship of my good host'.

Recorder was Charles Pratt, later Lord Camden, one of Pitt's closest associates. He and his son held the Recordership for the next seventy-six years.

The force behind Pitt's candidature was Allen. Potter was a frequent visitor to Prior Park, and Pitt and Allen were well acquainted. When Pitt accepted the Mayor's invitation, declaring that he had 'long ambitioned the honour of a seat there', he submitted the letter under flying seal to Allen, thanking him for 'repeated instances of your kind friendship, and too favourable opinion'.[19]

Bath could now boast as her representatives two of the most eminent men in the country, the first Minister and the Commander-in-Chief. One of his supporters wrote to Pitt after the election that the seat 'may be easily secured to you as long as you live'.[20] But Pitt did not make the mistake of relying merely on glory. The Corporation of Bath may have been remarkably disinterested, but it still expected favours from its members. A few months after the election, Pitt received an urgent note from Potter that one of the members of the Corporation, Roger Hereford, was dying:

> It is of great importance to fill up his place with a proper person, and in order to do it there is a necessity to use all our influence. You are therefore desired immediately to apply to the Lord Keeper desiring him to write in the most pressing terms to his friends Hale, Wiltshire and Hicks to concur with Mr. Allen on this and all future occasions.[21]

In February 1759, Potter reminded him that Lieutenant Chapman, cousin to Alderman Chapman, had been promised promotion twenty times:

> Lord L[igonier] may for ought I know be very little sollicitous about preserving the interest at Bath, but it is of consequence I presume to you and I am sure it is to me. I must therefore

19 Peach, *op. cit.* 163-4.

20 J. Grist, 9 July 1757, Chatham MSS. B. Williams, *Life of Pitt*, i. 323-4 describes Grist as a member of the Corporation, but he was not. He claimed to have been one of Pitt's earliest supporters: 'I proposed this to a leading man the beginning of last October, but agreed to lie quiet . . . . Mr. Allen managed for you with great discretion. You have not only the Vox Corporationis, but also the Vox Populi, which I hope you'll ever retain'. Grist was an apothecary, and died soon after Pitt's election. See Warburton to Hurd, 12 Sept. 1757.

21 2 Sept. 1757, Chatham MSS.

beg you by the first opportunity to get this matter done.[22] No sooner had Chapman been dealt with than there was 'yet another man who *must* be provided for':

> Richard Hereford, brother to Mr. Hereford, Apothecary and Sheriff of Bath, must be a first Lieutenant of Marines or have some civil employment. . . Hereford was the first man who declared for you against the Langton interest, which was thereby broke to pieces. Mr. Allen and I have both recommended this business to Lord Ligonier. But I do not find his Lordship relishes it, and as Hereford and Chapman never were friends to him he thinks it hard that it should be put on him to provide for them both . . . You see the necessity I am under therefore of troubling you. It relates to your separate interest at Bath.[23]

So Potter, a month before his death, and Pitt, in the midst of planning his campaigns, made time to deal with the Interest. It is a more convincing picture of Eighteenth century politics than that drawn by Basil Williams, who tells us of Pitt that 'with dispensing political favours he would have nothing to do. He refused to meddle with the regular promotions in the army and navy'.[24]

In October 1760, Pitt and Ligonier were paid a supreme compliment when the Corporation begged them to accept nomination at the General Election 'without suffering you to offer yourselves as candidates for your re-election'.[25] Pitt replied that he was 'proud of the title of servant of the city of Bath', and Ligonier that he greatly appreciated their 'noble and generous way of acting'.[26] A month earlier, Ligonier had been desperately ill. Allen had then confided

22 23 Feb. 1759, Chatham MSS.

23 Chapman and Hereford had been followers of Langton, i.e. Tories. Once Langton's men had come round to Pitt, they supported him with great enthusiasm. In October 1760, when the Corporation addressed Pitt and Ligonier, three councillors, Henry Atwood, Collibee, and John Horton wrote to tender their services separately, 'as distinguished merit cannot be attributed to Lord Ligonier so deservedly as to yourself'. All three had been Langtonites. Horton had been described by Potter in 1758 as 'an old Tory': like Hereford, he was an apothecary. Collibee became a devoted personal follower of Pitt.

24 *Life of Pitt*, i. 332.

25 Allen to Pitt, 7 Oct. 1760, Chatham MSS.

26 Peach, *op. cit.* 170-1.

to Pitt: 'whenever our country shall lose that truly deserving and amiable man, the measure you have been pleased to propose for Mr. Pratt's immediate succession at Bath appears to me as necessary as it does to you'.[27] But Ligonier, though eighty, had another ten years of life in him, and at the General Election he and Pitt were returned without opposition.

Once again, Pitt was unable to be present, and Sir John Sebright, an army officer and an acquaintance of Ligonier, deputised for him. He reported to Pitt:

> Conscious of the dignity of their choice, and the honour they derive from it, it has been with great difficulty that your electors are persuaded to accept of the customary treats. They think their present election cannot be too distinguished from all others, by rejecting every appearance of Interest.[28]

Even when allowance has been made for the favours that kept the Corporation loyal and contented, it was a relationship that did credit to both sides.[29]

For some years the serenity lasted. Later in 1761, for example, when Pitt left office, the Corporation sent him an address thanking him for the 'great, unparalleled services' he had done his country. In the spring of 1763, Ligonier wrote to inform Allen that he had been promised an English peerage, and to ask his opinion on the propriety of recommending his nephew, Colonel Ligonier, to succeed him.[30] Allen seems to have disapproved, perhaps thinking him not of sufficient weight for a city like Bath. In April he wrote to Pitt:

> I beg leave to acquaint you that Sir John Sebright came hither on Sunday evening. Soon after his arrival here, he received an account that Lord Ligonier is made an English

27 Allen to Pitt, 6 Sept. 1760, Chatham MSS.

28 28 Mar. 1761, Chatham MSS.

29 In this respect Bath was almost unique among Eighteenth century parliamentary boroughs, though Salisbury and Devizes were also conscious of their civic dignity. More typical were Shaftesbury, which was for many years 'notorious for the venality and profligacy of the electors', or Honiton, where 'the whole of the inhabitants were bound together in an indissoluble chain of venality'.

30 Ligonier to Allen, 16 Mar. 1763, Morrison MSS. Ligonier had been made an Irish peer in 1757, but this did not disqualify him from sitting in the House of Commons.

> peer, which caused him yesterday morning to wait upon me and offer himself as a candidate to succeed his Lordship . . . and I have the satisfaction to let you know that I have not the least doubt of his success.[31]

It seems very probable that Pitt had notified Sebright in advance: otherwise the coincidence is extraordinary. Certainly Pitt approved the candidature, for Sebright wrote in May to declare the pleasure that Pitt's 'approbation' had given him.[32]

At this time, Sebright was a man of 38, a Major-General, and a baronet.[33] But he did not gain the seat without a contest. The remnant of Langton's group decided to support a local man, Walter Long, of South Wraxall.[34] Sebright polled 22, including Ralph and Philip Allen: Long polled only 5, all of whom had absented themselves at the by-election of 1756.

The second event of the year 1763 was a difference of opinion between Allen and Pitt over the treaty of peace that had ended the war with France. Pitt had attacked the treaty in the House of Commons as totally inadequate, and was astounded to be asked by the Corporation to present an address which pointedly referred to the 'adequate and advantageous peace'. He refused to do so, and sent a stinging letter to Allen, declaring that the address was as 'repugnant' as it was 'unexpected'. In his most icy manner he concluded that he was 'but ill qualified to form pretensions to the future favour of gentlemen, who are come to think so differently from me, on matters of the highest importance to the national welfare'.[35] Allen explained in reply that the wording was his own: that he had suggested it to replace another resolution even less

31 Allen to Pitt, 19 Apr. 1763, Chatham MSS.

32 30 May 1763, Chatham MSS.

33 He was unflatteringly described by Lady Holland at the time of his marriage in 1766 to 'the pretty Miss Knight' as 'a bald man with his nervous disorders: he really looks so shabby and so nervous *que cela fait pitié*'. *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster*, ed. B. Fitzgerald, i. 445.

34 Walter Long was concerned in the Linley-Sheridan elopement in which he is variously described as having played a generous and a despicable part. He was satirised by Samuel Foote in 'The Maid of Bath', performed at the Haymarket in 1771.

35 Peach, *op. cit.* 176. The exchange between Allen and Pitt was published, at Pitt's request, in the *Bath Journal*, 8 Aug. 1763.

acceptable: and that he would hold back Pitt's letter to the Corporation until he heard from him again. But Pitt was furious. He replied at once that it would be improper to conceal from his constituents 'the insurmountable reasons which prevented my obeying their commands'. Allen complied, telling Pitt that it was 'the most painful commission' he had ever received.

No very satisfactory explanation of this episode has ever been suggested. Some writers have maintained that the offensive word 'adequate' was penned by accident, but a letter from Collibee to Pitt makes it clear that the wording was deliberate:

> The late behaviour of our Corporation has greatly alarmed me, as knowing well the expressions made use of by them in their address must prove very dissatisfactory to you . . . Happy am I not to be of the number who voted for it; but where the *Leading Man* directs, too many I am sorry to say follow his dictates. My endeavours on this occasion proved fruitless.[36]

Allen not only accepted responsibility, but reiterated the sentiments expressed: 'neither have I any apology to make for the expression in which I am so unfortunate as to differ from you'.[37]

Allen came under severe attack for his share in the business. Two caricatures drew attention to the 'One-Headed Corporation', suggesting that the members had been corrupted by Lord Bute and the Court. Pitt was shown declaring: 'Let who will represent such wretches, I won't'.[38] The incident was used by Charles Churchill in his satire, *The Ghost*, which came out in November 1763.

That the sentiments expressed represented Allen's own opinions can scarcely be doubted. He had a life-long reputation for integrity and plain-dealing, and the exchange of letters with Pitt reveals that he was deeply affected by the disagreement. Indeed, within six

[36] 14 Aug. 1763, Chatham MSS.

[37] *Correspondence of William Pitt*, ii. 226.

[38] The caricatures are printed in Peach, *op. cit.* The artist seems to have been a stranger to Bath. The members of the Corporation are not given faces but are represented by their callings. Though Sebright had been the member of parliament for two months by the time the caricature was published, Ligonier is still shown as the second representative. The portrait of Allen, which Peach calls an admirable likeness, seems undoubtedly a copy of the one by T. Hudson. The Hudson portrait is reproduced in C. Spender and E. Thompson, *Bath*, p. 94.

months, he had resigned his Aldermanic gown and retired from public life. Pitt suspected that Allen's son-in-law, Bishop Warburton, had influenced him,[39] and a study of the two caricatures suggests that Sebright might have taken some part in procuring the address.[40] Certainly Bute and his friends took considerable trouble to elicit addresses in support of the Peace.

To estimate the extent of influence is always difficult. It would be unwise to accept the accusations made against Allen without reservations: the charge of dictatorship is a commonplace of politics. Allen certainly had his followers in the Corporation. Richard Jones, for example, was the Clerk of Works in the Postal Department, and no doubt under Allen's command. But it should be remembered that, for the most part, the members of the Corporation were substantial gentlemen or tradesmen. They contrast markedly with the corporations at Malmesbury or Wootton Bassett, which were composed of labourers and artisans. The Chapmans had been a prominent Bath family for two centuries. The Wiltshires owned Shockerwick House, where Pitt the Younger heard the stunning news of Austerlitz. Thomas Atwood was an acquaintance of Burke, whom he entertained at Turleigh. Leake, the brother-in-law of Samuel Richardson, was a bookseller; Charles Biggs a lawyer. John Lovell's family had

39 *Correspondence*, ii. 253. Warburton wrote to Pitt in September, accepting responsibility for the address from the Diocese of Gloucester, but denying any share in that from Bath. He complained that 'miserable scribblers' had reviled him:

> Nay, in picture likewise (in the contrivance of which one Collibee, a member of the Corporation, a Jacobite, and on that account an old, inveterate, and declared enemy of M[r]. Allen, is supposed to have a hand), where the addressers of Bath are libelled in the vilest manner, your humble servant is brought in, in his episcopal habit, to whisper in Mr. Allen's ear the word *adequate*.

According to H. Walpole, *Memoirs of George III*, i. 223, Warburton's wife was Allen's natural daughter. The *D.N.B.* and other sources describe her tactfully as Allen's 'favourite niece'.

40 Peach, *op. cit.* observes on p. 180 that Leonard Coward, a member of the Corporation, is shown saying 'Don't drive me, St. John'. He comments that St. John was 'apparently a citizen who exercised some influence upon Coward: there was no person of the name on the Council'. But a careful examination of the caricature reveals that the words are 'Sr. John', and the figure represents Sebright. Peach identifies the same figure of a greyhound correctly in the second caricature as Sebright. There he is represented saying, 'I care not who is out of place, I am in'. Sebright was a supporter of the ministry.

considerable estates in Wiltshire and Somerset. Lewis Clutterbuck, the Town Clerk, was Lord of the Manor of Southwick: his family owned the estate of Hardenhuish, near Chippenham. Allen's great wealth and connections gave him, in later years, a very powerful influence, but the candidates he recommended — Ligonier, Pitt, and Sebright — would have been entitled to respect by any Corporation. Churchill's charge against Allen, 'himself a Corporation', is unjust.[41]

Pitt held the seat for a further three years, though his relations with the Corporation were cool. In 1766, when he was created Earl of Chatham, there was a contest between Walter Long, and another local man, John Smith, of Combe Hay. Smith was returned with 15 votes against 14, but Long petitioned. Sarah Lovell, wife of John Lovell, who had supported first Langton and then Long, wrote to her brother:

> Mr. Long is endeavouring to make Frederick the Bookseller's vote invalid as he has not received the sacrament within the year he was chose in to the Corporation, so then thear must be a new election, and we hope it will be in favour of Mr. Long. Notwithstanding Mr. Lovell has been such a friend of Mr. Long's, Mr. Smith brought his son to visit in the hollidays Peter and Jack, and insisted upon their coming the next night to play with Master Smith, so they was treated with tea, cake, apple pye and claret, and a guinnea in Peter's pocket, and half a guinnea in Jack's. This seems a good deal like bribery, but that will not do with Mr. Lovell, senior.[42]

These precautions turned out to be unnecessary. Smith's counsel argued that Frederick was covered by the annual Act of Indemnity, and the House of Commons confirmed him in possession of the seat.

Sebright and Smith were re-elected in 1768 without opposition. Neither of them seems to have been very active at Westminster: there is no record of any intervention in debate. Smith voted constantly with the opposition, Sebright with the ministry. At the following General Election in 1774, there was a three-cornered contest between the sitting members and Abel Moysey, son of one of the most successful of Bath doctors. Smith polled 29 votes, leaving the other two to compete for second place. Moysey polled 19

41 He resigned his place on the Corporation in a letter of 18 Oct. 1763, pleading his 'weak state of health and growing infirmities', and died the following year.

42 Sarah Lovell to John Harvey, 16 Jan. 1767, Cole Park MSS.

and Sebright 10. The balance had now swung back to the local men.

Moysey, a lawyer, lived at Rosewell House, in Kingsmead Square, and had been a member of the Corporation since 1768. The *Bath Chronicle* observed that after the election 'the mob paraded as usual, and were as usual treated with plenty of strong beer'. Though deprived of the franchise, the citizens seem to have taken considerable interest in elections. A month later Moysey gave a grand election ball, the company being 'more numerous than ever known on a like occasion'.

John Smith, the senior member, died after a fit of coughing in November 1775. There were several candidates for the vacancy. Lord Camden, the Recorder, hoped to recommend Lord Mahon, son-in-law to Lord Chatham. Captain John Miller, later Sir John Riggs-Miller, Bt., whose wife was famous for her poetry circle at Batheaston, was also mentioned. So was Sir George Onesiphorus Paul, of Woodchester, in Gloucestershire. But, according to the *Bath Chronicle*, they all withdrew on finding the 'superior interest' of Sir John Sebright, who was restored to his former position, to the 'general satisfaction'. He and Moysey supported Lord North's administration. In 1777, Moysey was appointed Second Justice of Brecon, and made his re-election at Bath without trouble.

There was now a marked divergence of view between the two members and the Recorder, who was strongly opposed to Lord North. Camden decided to put forward his son, John Jeffries Pratt, at the next election. In October 1779, he wrote to his daughter from Bath:

> where your brother and I are at present and we are come to a resolution to declare his intention to stand for the city before we leave the place. How it will turn out finally I can not pronounce with any degree of certainty . . . I am already sure of 13, the rest are doubtful as yet, but neither of the other two can build upon so many . . . This circumstance of 3 candidates makes the business very perplexed and disagreeable. But it is worth the trial, and it will cost nothing but a little trouble if it fails.[43]

There were not many boroughs in the country where it cost nothing to promote a candidature.

[43] 23 Oct. 1779, Camden MSS.

The announcement of Pratt's intention to stand was delayed until April 1780. At the same time, Lord Camden arranged for his son to be brought in for Lord Abingdon's borough of Westbury, by way of insurance. His opponents at Bath also professed confidence. John Robinson, Lord North's election manager, wrote in the course of the year:

> Altho' a contest with Lord Camden's son Mr. Pratt, Mr. Moysey says that he trusts Sir John and he shall carry it, but he wants an assurance of the nomination of a boy to the Charterhouse, and a promise of a living of about the value of £200 per annum for the son of another voter.[44]

The threatened contest did not, however, develop. A week before it was due, the *Bath Chronicle* reported that Sebright 'on account of his ill state of health' had written to the Corporation declining to stand. Robinson made frantic efforts at the last moment to find a suitable government supporter to fill the gap. But a mere moneyed man or second-rate lawyer would not do for Bath. First it was mooted to put up General Amherst.[45] Next Lord Ligonier, an Irish peer, was suggested. He had the double advantage of being the nephew of the old member, and the son-in-law of Robert Henley, now Earl of Northington. The matter was important enough to engage the King's attention: 'I hope Lord Ligonier has been persuaded to go to Bath', he wrote on September 1st.[46] But Ligonier was unwilling to stand, and on September 11th, Moysey and Pratt were elected unopposed.

The local newspapers reported at interminable length the handsome and pleasing disposition of the new member, his generosity, and the ecstasy of the electors. But they were forced to concede that he was no great speaker: indeed, when called upon to return thanks to the Corporation, 'his modesty overpowered his abilities'. The *Bath Chronicle* added, in saccharine vein, that this silence was more moving than eloquence. Lord Camden was pleased with his success,

44 'State for the 1780 election', Windsor MSS. I am most grateful for permission to quote from the Royal Archives.

45 Jenkinson to Robinson, 24 Aug. 1780, Abergavenny MSS. The man intended was not the famous general, the first Lord Amherst, but his brother, William Amherst, Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland.

46 The King to John Robinson, Add. MS. 37835, fo. 149. See also Add. MS. 38307, fo. 208.

but disgusted at the prospect of the election ball,

> which, as it is managed, will be as disagreeable as I expected it otherwise. Each elector, and there are 30, have the privilege, besides their own families, of inviting as many of their friends as they think fit, without limitation. . . This will not only crowd the rooms beyond their capacity, but will admit the lowest and most ordinary tradesmen and women of the place to the offence of their betters . . . Moysey set the example to atone for his father's parsimony and your brother is under a necessity of pursuing the same plan. So the expence will be enormous and nobody will be pleased.[47]

This was not merely aristocratic disdain. The *Bath Chronicle* reported that several councillors had decided not to attend, to lessen the numbers, while Pratt went off to his regiment to avoid being pestered for tickets.

The two members were now in opposite political camps at Westminster. Pratt voted against Lord North's administration, and then supported Shelburne and Pitt. Moysey was a follower of North, and went with him into the Coalition with Fox. In August 1782, John Robinson made an analysis for Lord Shelburne: Moysey and Pratt, he wrote

> came in on the interest of their friends in that Corporation. Mr. Moysey is well inclined to support administration; owed his office to Lord North, and may, it is thought, be classed hopeful. Mr. Pratt with.[48]

Pratt was given minor office in Shelburne's ministry, and was re-elected at Bath with ease. He took office again in December 1783 when Pitt formed his administration. Lord Camden wrote:

> Your brother is at Bath attending his election. The friends of the present opposition sent down a Mr. Smith, a neighbouring gentleman, to feel the pulse of the Corporation, but Jack's interest drove him home again without the encouragement of one single vote. He is safe there as long as I live.[49]

47 Camden to Robert Stewart, 19 Oct. 1780, Camden MSS.

48 *Political Papers of John Robinson*, ed. Laprade, p. 45.

49 Camden to Fanny Stewart, 4 Dec. 1783, Camden MSS. 'Mr. Smith' might, I suppose, be the son of the previous member, and the little boy referred to in reference 42 above. In 1784 he would have been 25. On his death in 1813 he was said to have been 'long and universally beloved and respected in this city and its neighbourhood'.

Moysey's position, on the other hand, was becoming difficult. In February 1784, the Corporation sent an address to the King deploring 'the unconstitutional attempts of your Majesty's late Ministers to deprive a great commercial company of their chartered rights', and welcoming the new administration. It was agreed to present Pitt with the freedom of the city in a golden box. Meanwhile Robinson hoped to turn out Moysey when the General Election should come. Under Bath, he noted:

> Wanted, a candidate vice Moysey. Quere, Jarret Smith. Mr. Pitt to consult Lord Camden.[50]

In the course of March, it was suggested that Pitt himself might be the candidate, and the King urged him to agree.[51] But Pitt's ambition was to represent his University. On March 24th he wrote to Wilberforce:

> I set out this evening for Cambridge, where I expect, notwithstanding your boding, to find everything favourable. I am sure, however, to find a retreat at Bath.[52]

Pitt was returned for the University on April 3rd, and wrote at once to the Corporation of Bath to assure them that 'nothing but the particular circumstance of my connection with this place could have prevented my embracing an offer so flattering to my feelings'. This did not leave his friends at Bath much time to decide what to do, as the election there was on the 6th. Eventually they agreed that they would still cast their votes for him 'to give that public proof of their adherence to the principles they invited him on'. Even then he polled 14 votes against 17 for Moysey, and there seems no doubt that, had his campaign been vigorously pressed, he could have taken the seat.[53]

50 Robinson, *op. cit.* 116. Jarret Smith was an odd choice. He had been dead more than a year, and had he been alive would have been 93. Presumably Robinson meant his son, Sir John Hugh Smith, a mere 49. The Smith estate was at Long Ashton, near Bristol.

51 See the King to Pitt, 5 Apr. 1784, printed in *The Letters of George III*, ed. B. Dobrée, 185.

52 Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, i. 202.

53 Pitt's letter is dated 6 Apr. 1784, and is printed in the *Bath Chronicle*, 8 Apr. 1784. This made me at first suspect that it did not reach Bath in time, and the candidature went off at half-cock. But it seems clear that the date given to the letter is wrong, since Pitt writes that he thought it his duty 'to take the first moment' to inform the Corporation of his return for Cambridge This scarcely suggests a delay of three days in writing. Unfortunately I have not been able to find the original of his letter in the Corporation archives.

Moysey remained in opposition during this Parliament, voting against Pitt on the Regency question in 1788. He did not stand at the General Election of 1790, and Pratt was returned with Lord Weymouth, son of the Marquis of Bath. Three votes went to John Morris, a lawyer, whose seat was six miles away at Box. He was a follower of Lord Shelburne, who returned him at Calne. Jeremy Bentham, disgusted that Shelburne had not found him a seat, poured scorn on Morris' endeavours at Bath:

> Morris, I think, had two merits. He had tried at Bath, and he was to help settle Calne. Yes, try at Bath he did, and you see what came of it. Three votes out of — what was the number? — forty, fifty, or sixty? This was his proof of importance. In Westminster Hall, in his own profession . . . he is nobody. In the country, as something between the country gentleman and the country lawyer, he was supposed to be somebody; and you see what it amounts to . . . But he had been spending his money, I think you said, or something like it, in Bath. He spend money? How? What did he spend it in? in buying votes? What? Those votes! would any man in his senses go to give one farthing for three out of forty votes? And for whom would he have been spending his money if he had spent any? for you? If he had got into Bath, would this have made Bath your borough?[54]

Pratt succeeded his father as Earl Camden in 1794, and his place at Bath was taken by Richard Pepper Arden, a close friend of Pitt. The Pratt family now had control over one seat, and the Thynnes over the other. In 1796, when Thomas Thynne became Marquis of Bath, Lord John Thynne was elected, and held the seat until the Reform Act of 1832.

It would seem that Bath had at last followed the usual pattern and become a closed borough, but this is not completely true. In 1801, when Pepper Arden was granted a peerage, there was a contest in which John Palmer, the postal pioneer, defeated John Berkeley Burland, a Somerset gentleman. Palmer was a friend of the 2nd Lord Camden,[55] and relied upon his interest. In 1808, Palmer retired, and brought in his son Charles, an army officer. Four years later there was another abortive attempt to reopen the franchise,

54 *Memoirs*, x. 238.

55 He may have been a relative, since his wife was a Miss Pratt.

when two candidates, one of them the local pawnbroker, offered themselves on the 'freeman vote'.

Bath politics flared up again just before the Reform Act. Charles Palmer had quarrelled with Lord Camden, and in 1826 was opposed by Camden's son, Lord Brecknock. Thynne and Brecknock carried the seats, but Palmer managed to oust Brecknock in 1830. These contests were conducted amid scenes of tremendous excitement, the general public being devoted partisans of Palmer. When Thomas Clutterbuck, one of the councillors, supported Palmer in 1826, he explained that he 'could never submit that this city should become the close property of two Peers'. Thus something of the old spirit of independence survived.