

# LONDON ELECTORAL HISTORY – STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

## 5.2 HISTORY OF ELECTIONS IN MIDDLESEX, 1700-1852

Note on conventions within all electoral tables

*A vote for a candidate is shown as = 1*  
*A null-vote for a candidate is shown as = 0*  
*A vote which might or might not be given to any other candidate*  
*(in elections for more than one seat) is shown as = \**

Example:

In the three-candidate general election in Westminster (1784), the possible vote codes are: Fox 001, Wray 010, Hood 100, Wray + Fox 011, Hood + Fox 101, Hood + Wray 110. So the aggregate of votes for each candidate is represented by Fox \*\*1; Wray \*1\*; and Hood 1\*\*.

The Middlesex election milieu was both distinctive and undergoing changes during this period. Sir Roger Newdigate's diary of his election campaign in Middlesex in 1747 revealed the courtesies of a political culture that was still extant in the middle of the eighteenth century, but which would have looked distinctly old-fashioned a generation later.

Sir H[ugh] Smithson proposed to me to join him as a candidate for the next election for the county of Middlesex, and upon my declining it as a want of due deference to the county to propose ourselves without the authority of a General Meeting [of the freeholder electorate], he declared that if I would not immediately give him a positive answer he would advertise the next day and give it for a reason that he did not join me that I would not give him an answer, adding that he should be joined. Sir Hugh repeated his proposal to me before Mr Clitherow, and I repeated my answer, upon which Mr Clitherow

declared that it was always the method in the county to appoint the candidates at a General Meeting, that this was the more necessary now as ... if we had declared ourselves ... an opposition to us both would have been declared immediately, and that it would offend the county if we set ourselves up. Mr Cooke came in and said he had been applied to by many of his friends to stand, which he had given in to upon hearing several persons named to be joined with me as Sir Hugh had deserted the Country interest, that if Sir Hugh had acted the same part as I had done, he [Cooke] would have been the last person in the county to have thought of opposition, but was now determined to know at the meeting the sentiments of the county, whether or not Sir Hugh was most in the Country interest. It was then determined to leave the whole to the result of a General Meeting and that we should sound our friends when a meeting should be appointed, and that it should be as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup>

As that account indicated, there was a certain amount of diplomatic manoeuvring behind the scenes that preceded many elections. Potential candidates were canvassed before they decided whether or not to stand. Newdigate's diary implied that the political leadership in Middlesex was still confined to a relatively narrow circle. Yet his comment about the candidates' seeking 'to know the sentiments of the country' indicated that elections provided a valued opportunity to test wider public opinion. The further decision to wait upon the decision of a General Meeting<sup>2</sup> also signalled that the political leaders needed to gain crucial support within the constituency before proceeding to a contest.

Middlesex was utterly atypical as an English county constituency. Even before its abolition as an administrative county in 1965, the anonymous 'man or woman in the street' would have been hard-pressed to name Middlesex's county town as Brentford. In part, this unawareness was caused by Middlesex's proximity to the metropolis, which was effectively enclaved by the county on the northern bank of the River Thames. Middlesex's locational centrality had three political consequences. First, relatively high land values made the 40-shilling freehold qualification for voting attainable with fewer acres than were required in more rural counties. It was a county of many small freeholds, often just a house and its adjoining land, rather than vast estates of rolling acres. Secondly, Middlesex's high population density and continuing urbanisation led to new forms of political communication, which ultimately supplanted the

face-to-face politics that prevailed in the rural shires. And thirdly, the Administration's attempt to influence election results in this prestigious constituency by quietly expanding the number of officers on the Commission of the Peace (which empowered local JPs) had but a limited success. By the later eighteenth century, the constituency was held to be more amenable to – and representative of – the tides of public opinion than were more far-flung counties.

With over 3,000 voters at the beginning of the eighteenth century and around 6,000 a century later, Middlesex was one of England's most populous county constituencies. Indeed, the county of Middlesex itself could plausibly be dichotomised, with Ossulston Hundred in the south east of the county, from Kensington to the Lea valley, becoming more overwhelmingly urban, and the western and northern parts remaining more rural.

Given its agricultural origins, it is not surprising to find that many leading Middlesex MPs in the early eighteenth century had a considerable landed interest in the county. Examples of dynastic representation include three members of the Lake family of Little Stanmore, with their family seat Canons:<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Lake MP for Middlesex in 1614; his 'cavalier' grandson Sir Lancelot Lake, MP for Middlesex from 1660-79; and his Tory great-grandson Warwick Lake, who was Middlesex MP from 1695 until his defeat in 1705.<sup>4</sup>

Other families of similar standing were the Wolstenholmes of Enfield, who provided one MP and one unsuccessful candidate;<sup>5</sup> and the Barkers of Chiswick, who did likewise.<sup>6</sup> More successful were the father and son, both named George Byng, of Wrotham Park, from the naval family which also produced the hapless Admiral John Byng. Both the George Byngs became MPs for Middlesex in the later eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> But the most powerful families in the county's affairs were the Percies and their relatives by marriage the Smithsons, with estates in Tottenham and Yorkshire. Sir Henry Smithson married the Percy heiress in 1740 and later took the Percy name and the ducal title.<sup>8</sup> Based at Northumberland House in Westminster and Syon House in Isleworth, and headed by the dukes of Northumberland, this powerful clan provided both Lords Lieutenant and political representatives for the county. The family's influence was explicitly reported in 1779 by John Robinson, Lord North's election manager: 'I find that although there is great riches within the county, yet there are not many rich individuals, and that it is one of the first estates to have £1,200 in land within the county ... There can therefore be no great following, but the Duke of Northumberland's.'<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, as the succeeding accounts reveal, no one aristocratic election ‘interest’ could take the Middlesex constituency for granted. Especially by the later eighteenth century, the Middlesex electors were displaying not only their famed independence but also, on the part of a significant proportion of them, their radicalism. The shifting balance between covert aristocratic influences and overt public campaigns on issues make the Middlesex electoral story particularly interesting.

### 5.2.1 Middlesex elections in the early eighteenth century

Indeed, Middlesex was something of a weathervane constituency. Already, in the very early eighteenth century, it changed its political complexion regularly. In the general election of 1705 the Tory supporters of the ‘Church and King’ lobby put forward their two incumbent MPs, Warwick Lake<sup>10</sup> and Hugh Smithson,<sup>11</sup> to fight for the Middlesex seats. But despite a strong showing, both were unseated in a close race by the Whig candidates (see Table 26). They were Sir John Wolstenholme,<sup>12</sup> who had previously represented the county in the years 1695-1700, and Scorie Barker, an experienced politician and also a former MP, although not in this county.<sup>13</sup> All four men had local property interests, although they disagreed on the political issues of the day. In the event, Wolstenholme’s death in February 1709 led to a by-election, at which John Austen, who also had prior experience as Middlesex’s Whig MP from 1701-2, was returned unopposed.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 26**

**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 28 May 1705: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1705, *POLL ID* 11**

<b>Date of return: 28 May 1705</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
SCORIE BARKER	6	1,657	*1**	1,657
JOHN WOLSTENHOLME	130	1,630	1***	1,630
Warwick Lake	66	1,349	**1*	1,349
Hugh Smithson	110	1,336	***1	1,336
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>3,012</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1690-1715*; LED.

Shortly after that, Tory hopes in Middlesex were revived once more by the election of 1710, after the trial of Dr Sacheverell had boosted the High Church interest.<sup>15</sup> This time the Tories did not merely regain the two Middlesex seats. They won handsomely (see Table 27). James Bertie<sup>16</sup> was placed at the head of the poll. With his running mate Smithson, he ousted the Whig incumbents Barker and Austen. Bertie, whilst politically experienced, was not a local landowner but he was partnered by Henry Smithson, who was.

**Table 27**

**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1710: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1710, P011 ID 12**

<b>Date of return: 12 October 1710</b>					
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>		<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
		<i>Post Boy</i>	<i>News-Letter</i>		
JAMES BERTIE	12	1,916	1,920	**1*	1,946
HUGH SMITHSON	110	1,876	1,886	***1	1,904
Scorie Barker	6	1,313	1,316	1***	1,323
John Austen	4	1,239	1,234	*1**	1,235
<b>Total LED cases</b>					<b>3,213</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1690-1715*; LED.

In connection with these Whig/Tory disputes in Middlesex in the 1710s, some confusion has been generated by a printed poll that appeared in 1714. Issued with the title *Freeholders names ... who in the last controverted election polled for Mr Bertie and Mr Smithson*,<sup>17</sup> this document has been impossibly ascribed by Sims to the contest of 1715. But, since the election of 1713 was uncontested, the 'last controverted election' when this printed poll was published was that of 1710. And indeed Bertie and Smithson were the two Tory candidates then. The list is thus an account of those who voted for both Tory candidates, or for either of them, together with details of their split votes with Austen or Barker. The purpose of its belated issuing, sometime after the election, is uncertain, but it was probably associated with canvassing for a forthcoming contest rather than with challenging the outcome of a contest that was long dead and buried.<sup>18</sup> Neither this listing nor the

manuscript poll used to create Table **PM1710**, *POLL ID* 12, is the original poll book; and there are discrepancies between the two sources. But the data from the printed listing is also available within the LED and is available for comparative analysis.<sup>19</sup>

At the following election in 1715, a broadly similar line-up of candidates greeted the electors of Middlesex. The sole change was the replacement of Scorie Barker by his son Henry Barker, who proved a persistent though unsuccessful candidate.<sup>20</sup> Again the combination of the incumbents, Bertie and Smithson, triumphed over Austen and Henry Barker. Religious and political issues continued to divide the electorate, although once the Hanoverian succession became clearly established, political passions began to abate.

This 1715 election is represented in the Database by a table containing data only for those voters whose freeholds lay in the eastern part of the constituency (see Table 28). This definition of ‘eastern’ is quite narrow, and approximates to Ossulston Hundred: freeholders’ addresses ranged from Whitechapel to Westminster, including only the urbanised part of the county. The table thus contains about two-fifths of the full poll book, which no longer survives.

**Table 28**  
**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1715: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1715, *POLL ID* 14**

<b>Date of return: 27 January 1715</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
JAMES BERTIE	12	1,604	**1*	680
HUGH SMITHSON	110	1,553	***1	662
John Austen	4	1,330	1***	723
Henry Barker	5	1,325	*1**	716
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>1,399</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1715-54*; LED.

No poll book data survives for the Middlesex election of 1727. Instead there is a table containing the barest minimum of individual level data: a list of those who polled, lacking even a corresponding list of qualified electors who abstained. Once again, the Tory candidates were successful in Middlesex. Bertie was returned at the head of the poll, with

Francis Child, a London liveryman,<sup>21</sup> in second place. These two were comfortably ahead of their opponents Henry Barker and Thomas Paget.<sup>22</sup> The LED Table **PM1727**, *POLL ID* 15, records the names of 2,491 Middlesex electors who polled in 1727: summarised here in Table 29.

**Table 29**  
**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1727**

<b>Date of return: 6 September 1727</b>	
<b>Candidate name</b>	<b>Votes received</b>
JAMES BERTIE	1,410
FRANCIS CHILD	1,305
Henry Barker	1,074
Thomas Catesby Paget	1,039
<b>Total LED cases</b>	<b>2,491</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl.*, 1715-54; LED.

No further contest occurred until 1747, by which date the line-up of candidates had changed. On the death of Sir Francis Child in 1740, the vacancy had been filled by Sir Hugh Smithson (later Duke of Northumberland).<sup>23</sup> In 1747 he faced his first serious contest in the constituency. He was defending the Administration's interest, in what might be termed a moderate Whig stance, with the newcomer Sir William Proctor.<sup>24</sup> They were opposed by Sir Roger Newdigate,<sup>25</sup> who had sat for the county since his return at a by-election in August 1742, and by Sir George Cooke.<sup>26</sup> In the event Smithson and Harvey Proctor were returned with substantial majorities.

All the candidates were knights or baronets, marking their social respectability. Furthermore, the names of two of these families later gained their own cultural resonance: the Smithson family is remembered by the celebrated Smithsonian Institution in the USA,<sup>27</sup> and the Newdigates are known (at any rate at Oxford University) for the annual Newdigate prize for poetry.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 30**  
**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1747: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1747, Poll ID 16**

<b>Date of return: 2 July 1747</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
HUGH SMITHSON	111	1,797	1***	1,734
WILLIAM PROCTOR	9	1,457	*1**	1,408
George Cooke	26	899	***1	867
Roger Newdigate	83	794	**1*	761
Total LED cases				2,539

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1715-54*; LED.

After that, Smithson's succession to the peerage as precipitated a by-election in March 1750, when Cooke again contested the Middlesex seat. Despite strong support given by the government to Frazer Honywood,<sup>29</sup> Cooke greatly improved his standing, and successfully won the by-election. The contest generated strong feelings locally.<sup>30</sup> And the outcome indicated that the government of the day could not expect to control the seat, as became even more apparent in the later excitements of 1768-9. The contest in 1750, however, did not gain anything like the notoriety of those that were to follow.

**Table 31**  
**Middlesex parliamentary by-election, March 1750: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1750, Poll ID 17**

<b>Date of return: 8 March 1750</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
GEORGE COOKE	26	1,617	10	1,617
Frazer Honywood	55	1,201	01	1,201
Polled				2,818
Unpolled electors				17
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>2,835</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1715-54*; LED.



### 5.2.2 Middlesex elections and John Wilkes in 1768-9

Few pre-reform elections have captured the interest of historians like the three that took place for Middlesex in 1768-9.<sup>31</sup> It was the genius of John Wilkes<sup>32</sup> to divine that he could create a personality that could appeal over the heads of the political establishment to the electorate at large. He was able to do this by harnessing mass communication to a nascent mass politics. His outsized personality was kept in the public gaze by a combination of print and material artefacts. His persecution by his political opponents gained him considerable popular support. And his outwitting of the authorities made him an archetypal anti-hero for those who enjoyed the spectacle of individuals who were cocking a snook at the powers that be.<sup>33</sup>

John Wilkes was also an indefatigable collector and publisher of material relating to his own career.<sup>34</sup> His roots were urban, being born in Clerkenwell – the son of a distiller; but he inherited an estate in Buckinghamshire and, as a young man, he moved in raffish gentry circles. He had both social ‘reach’ and personal confidence, which stood him in good stead as a radical campaigner. In cultivating a distinctive public persona, moreover, he inaugurated what became a long tradition in metropolitan politics. Attention was readily attracted to activists in these populous constituencies, which were sited close to the political hub of Westminster and the Houses of Parliament. Another example of distinctive personal politics can be seen in a later case of a controversial Middlesex MP, Sir Francis Burdett. When he was arrested for breach of parliamentary privilege in 1810, he took care to ensure that the arrest took place as he was reading Magna Carta to his infant son.<sup>35</sup> Other instances of flamboyant London politicians in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries may also come readily to mind.

In 1768, John Wilkes returned from exile, already a heroic or notorious character, according to political taste. He had criticised the King’s chief minister Lord Bute in 1763, been arrested under a General Warrant (search warrants, later declared to be illegal),<sup>36</sup> and then fled to Paris to escape prosecution for publishing his scandalous *Essay on Woman*. In 1768, at the age of 43 and harassed by his creditors, he returned to London and decided to seek election to the Commons, in part to gain the MPs’ legal protection against being declared bankrupt. Wilkes had formerly been MP for Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. But his strongest support lay in the metropolis. Accordingly, he stood in the City of

London election of 1768 (see below, section 5.3.2) but came at the bottom of the poll. This outcome seems to have engendered complacency among his opponents. Certainly they were unprepared for his standing in the Middlesex election, just two days after his defeat in London. Wilkes was dramatically returned at the head of the poll for Middlesex, albeit on a fairly low turnout. The senior incumbent Proctor, Middlesex's MP since 1747, was pushed into third place, while Cooke, who had won the 1750 by-election, retained his seat, albeit with many fewer votes than Wilkes and only a slender majority over Proctor: see Table 32.

**Table 32**

**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1768: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1768A, *POLL ID 19***

<b>Date of return: 28 March 1768</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
JOHN WILKES	126	1,297	**1	1,268
GEORGE COOKE	26	827	*1*	821
William Proctor	9	802	1**	809
Polled				1,986
Unpolled electors				1,490
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>3,476</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1754-90*; LED.

Luck is one of the trickiest elements that both politicians and historians have to factor into their analysis. In this case, Sir George Cooke's death, barely ten weeks after the general election, proved a stroke of luck for Wilkes. The by-election in December 1768 enabled him to keep Middlesex politics on the boil, with a vigorous campaign to return the Wilkite lawyer, Serjeant John Glynn.<sup>37</sup> Glynn stood on an overtly Wilkite ticket. There was much public excitement and debate. And Glynn won a comfortable majority over the hapless Proctor. He had improved his vote, in comparison with the previous election in March 1768, but not by enough to win: see Table 33.

**Table 33**  
**Middlesex parliamentary by-election, December 1768: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1768B, P011 ID 20**

<b>Date of return: 14 December 1768</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
JOHN GLYNN	39	1,548	01	1,538
William Proctor	9	1,272	10	1,267
Polled				2,805
Unpolled electors				671
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>3,476</b>

Source: *Hist. Parl., 1754-90*; LED.

On 3 February 1769 the Commons resolved to expel Wilkes.<sup>38</sup> This move naturally gained him both publicity and considerable sympathy, although by no means all welcomed his return. Many were shocked by the notorious *Essay on Woman*. Dr Johnson was one eminent example.<sup>39</sup> The many facets of Wilkes's career gave ammunition to his opponents. "Dine with Jack Wilkes, Sir!" Boswell fancied the irascible Samuel Johnson growling: "I'd as soon dine with Jack Ketch [England's infamous seventeenth-century executioner]".<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, Wilkes became a popular hero. His supporters toasted him with cries of 'Wilkes and Liberty'. At the ensuing by-election, he was returned unopposed. Outraged, the House of Commons took the precaution of declaring Wilkes to be incapable of being re-elected. Again he was expelled, and again re-elected unopposed. It seemed that Wilkes could only be stopped if he faced a serious rival. But when an election contest was contrived in April 1769, Wilkes overwhelmingly defeated the government's candidate Henry Lawes Luttrell.<sup>41</sup> see Table 34.

At the nomination two other candidates appeared. It may be that the lawyer Serjeant William Whitaker's<sup>42</sup> candidature was a serious attempt to come between Wilkes and Luttrell. In the event, Whitaker received no more than five votes. Meanwhile Captain David Roache, a Wilkite whose function was to act as a lightning conductor to protect the champion, declined the poll and received none.<sup>43</sup> A petition against the return of Luttrell failed in the face of hostility in the Commons, which solemnly declared Luttrell to have been elected.<sup>44</sup> There was public

uproar. Thus Horace Walpole declared Luttrell to be ‘the man in England most obnoxious to the Opposition’.<sup>45</sup>

**Table 34**  
**Middlesex parliamentary by-election, April 1769: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1769, P011 ID 21**

<b>Date of return: 13 April 1769</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
John Wilkes	126	1,143	010	1,135
HENRY LUTTRELL	75	296	100	294
William Whitaker	124	5	001	2
Polled				1,431
Unpolled electors				2,045
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>3,476</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1754-90*; LED.

Walpole’s comment referred not to a formal opposition party but to the informal coalition of critics of the government, angered by the Wilkes affair. There was an issue of principle at stake. Hence the Middlesex elections of 1768-9, and the exclusion of Wilkes from the Commons, led to a vigorous pamphlet skirmish between those who defended the right of the Commons to determine who was eligible to sit,<sup>46</sup> and those who defended the right of the Middlesex freeholders to elect whomsoever they wished.<sup>47</sup> The conservative traditional ‘constitutionalists’ argued that, by voting for the ineligible Wilkes, the freeholders had merely exercised their right to waste their votes. The Wilkites took a broader and hence more ‘democratic’ view of the constitution, countering that the right to determine the eligibility of any candidate lay with the electorate. Eventually that proved to be the constitutional principle that won.

The Wilkite elections in Middlesex marked a high point in electoral excitement and engagement, on issues of national importance. There were plentiful election meetings, committees, publications and counter-publications, canvassing, the wearing of campaign favours, and political passions, for and against. It was a moment of proto-democracy in particularly vivid action. Of course, not all electors, let alone the entire

Middlesex public, were involved. Complete involvement is not generally found in any democratic system today. But the basic elements of constitutional campaigning, within an electoral system, were all present during the Wilkite controversies in Middlesex. And the issues were seen as extending to more than the fate of one man. Hence the radical reformers, who supported Wilkes, founded a new political association in 1769. Entitled the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, its name was cautious, harking back to the Whig principles of 1689. Its policies, however, were potentially radical, favouring fresh reforms to the electoral system to curb aristocratic influence. Moreover, its organisation proved to be a forerunner of other radical political organisations.

### **5.2.3 Middlesex elections in the later eighteenth century**

Middlesex had, however, no consistent history of returning radical MPs. Its politics were influenced by national moods as well as moments of local intensity over specific issues. Moreover, eighteenth-century opposition movements were in themselves fissiparous, lacking coherent ideological objectives. Without the adhesive of office to keep them together, they were liable to have their members picked off piecemeal by Administration politicians who could offer the prospect of place, favour, and office. The Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights could also be viewed as a personal fundraising party for Wilkes. Hence, many of the more thoroughgoing reformers left the Society in 1771 to join the Constitutional Society under the tutelage of John Horne (later known as John Horne Tooke).<sup>48</sup>

As for John Wilkes himself, he remained politically active, while gradually losing his firebrand reputation. Frustrated in Middlesex, he turned his attention back to the City of London, where he was elected alderman in 1769, sheriff in 1771, lord mayor in 1774,<sup>49</sup> and chamberlain in 1779. He gradually ceased to be seen as a threat to the established order. Indeed, like the radical reformer John Horne Tooke, John Wilkes was a supporter of the Administration's candidate in the Westminster by-election of 1788.

One clear sign of his increasing assimilation into political respectability was apparent in 1774, when Wilkes regained a seat in parliament, without any great public furore either for or against his candidacy. Henry Luttrell having quietly moved to the pocket borough of Bossiney, Wilkes was elected for Middlesex and this time allowed to take the seat, which he held

until 1790. It was a triumph, if not for radicalism, then certainly for the persistent electors of Middlesex.

Divisions within the reformers' ranks, however, widened still further after the death in 1782 of the Marquess of Rockingham, the leader of the moderate Whig reformers.<sup>50</sup> Wilkes supported Shelburne (and later Pitt) against the new popular favourite, Charles James Fox.<sup>51</sup> At the time of the 1784 election, the younger Pitt could indeed make a plausible case to be a prime minister with a reforming agenda. In that context, Wilkes was re-elected for Middlesex that year on a Pittite-Administration ticket. John Wilkes, however, now came in second place. His running-mate was another Pittite, William Mainwaring,<sup>52</sup> who comfortably headed the poll, while the Middlesex landowner George Byng, MP for Middlesex since 1780,<sup>53</sup> ran a close third. Table 35 gives the result, which indicated that the Middlesex electorate was not unwilling to vote for the more conservative candidates, when the political climate had changed. Eventually, the ageing John Wilkes tested the water in 1790, but did not stand. His links with Middlesex were ended.

**Table 35**

**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1784: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1784, P011 ID 22**

<b>Date of return: 22 April 1784</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
WILLIAM MAINWARING	76	2,118	**1	2,111
JOHN WILKES	126	1,858	1**	1,849
George Byng	17	1,792	*1*	1,763
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>3,635</b>

Source: *Hist. Parl.*, 1754-90; LED.

### 5.2.4 Middlesex elections in the early nineteenth century

By the beginning of the nineteenth century pressure over issues of reform was not to be gainsaid, in what had become a semi-metropolitan constituency. An unofficial pact, however, helped to avoid too many contested elections. George Byng,<sup>54</sup> a local landowner and son of the previous Middlesex MP of that name, was first returned for Middlesex in

1790 when Wilkes stood down. By 1802, Byng was placed at the head of the poll, as shown in Table 36. He continued to represent the county until his death in 1847. It was a notably long tenure of 57 years, showing a desire for continuity and some representation of the conservative interest in the county.

Yet the second Middlesex seat was a different matter. A new radical campaigner appeared in the form of Sir Francis Burdett.<sup>55</sup> He came from affluent landowning stock and had furthermore married Sophia Coutts, an urban heiress to a great banking fortune. Armoured by his financial and intellectual independence, Burdett threw himself into radical good causes. Before he stood in Middlesex, he had already gained ascendancy over the metropolitan radical movement during his time as MP for Boroughbridge (1796-1802).

In particular, Burdett had championed from 1798 onwards the cause of the inmates of Coldbath Fields prison in Clerkenwell. So when contesting the Middlesex election in 1802, he directed his political fire – with emotive cries of ‘No Bastille’ – against the incumbent MP William Mainwaring. He was a conservative figure, who was, moreover, the chairman of the Middlesex and Westminster Quarter Sessions. In that role, he had at least some responsibility for the treatment of the Coldbath Fields prisoners. The result is shown in Table 36: Burdett could not match Byng’s tally but outdid William Mainwaring by 269 votes.

**Table 36**  
**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1802: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1802, Poll ID 23**

<b>Date of return: 13 July 1802</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
GEORGE BYNG	18	3,848	*1*	3,831
FRANCIS BURDETT	16	3,207	**1	3,189
William Mainwaring	76	2,938	1**	2,938
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>6,295</b>

**Source:** *Hist. Parl., 1790-1820*; LED.

Nonetheless, Burdett’s victory proved to be pyrrhic. His majority was gained by the polling of a number of votes which were deemed to be

spurious. A petition to the Commons resulted in the election being declared void in 1804,<sup>56</sup> and a new writ was issued. At the ensuing contest, Burdett failed to hold the seat against Mainwaring's son, George Boulton Mainwaring.<sup>57</sup> Burdett then had the brief consolation of being awarded the seat on a petition to the Commons in 1805. But that decision in turn was rescinded and the seat again awarded to Mainwaring. His own role as MP for Middlesex, however, proved only brief: from 1804-5 and in 1806, in marked contrast to his father's 18-year tenure.

For Burdett, meanwhile, this costly failure in county politics, either at the hands of the electorate or by the House of Commons, began to produce disenchantment with the county's politics. Just as Wilkes's political career moved from the City of London to Middlesex and back to London, so Burdett's moved from Middlesex to Westminster. There his high-profile stance as a radical independent gave him the necessary authority to become the figurehead of the Westminster Committee – and a new political platform.<sup>58</sup>

After that, Middlesex electors tended to return one Administration candidate and one anti-Administration candidate, promoting political balance and avoiding the cost of a contest. Political dissent, however, returned in 1820. In the general election that year, William Mellish,<sup>59</sup> who had been the incumbent Middlesex MP since 1806, sought to retain his seat. However, he was challenged by the intervention of another moderate reformer Samuel Charles Whitbread. He was the son of the Whig reformer Samuel Whitbread, from the famous brewing family.<sup>60</sup> As a result, there were two candidates fishing in the same limited pond for anti-Administration votes. After nine full days of polling, it was clear to Mellish that Whitbread's majority of 500 votes had become unassailable. Mellish accordingly withdrew, and Whitbread was returned with the veteran Byng.

Voting records for this election survive only for the Tower division of Ossulston Hundred. And the returns from the first day's poll are missing. But this fragmentary survival, summarised in Table 37, represents the last available individual-level poll book data for Middlesex, out of a series of poll records stretching back over more than a century.



**Table 37**  
**Middlesex parliamentary general election, 1820: vote codes and distribution of votes in Table PM1820, POLL ID 24**

<b>Date of return: 17 March 1820</b>				
<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Votes received</b>	<b>Vote code</b>	<b>Number of records</b>
GEORGE BYNG	18	4,004	1**	601
SAMUEL WHITBREAD	125	3,585	**1	462
William Mellish	79	3,093	*1*	410
<b>Total LED cases</b>				<b>871</b>

**Source:** Stooks Smith; *Hist. Parl., 1820-32*; LED.

Middlesex with its 40-shilling freeholder franchise before 1832 was thus far from a democracy. Its property-owning voters returned traditional candidates such as the Smithsons and the Byngs. But at the same time, the constituency was acquiring over time sufficient urban and ‘popular’ characteristics to make it a natural hotbed of Wilkite politics and subsequent support for reformers. Hence neither Middlesex conservatism nor Middlesex radicalism was ever completely predominant. The issues were decided through electoral struggle, which made it emphatically proto-democratic.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Election diary of Sir Roger Newdigate, 30 April 1747: LMA Acc. 1085/F/P/002. In an act of archival lunacy, this document was separated from the canvassing book which once accompanied it and which is still located at Warwickshire RO, CR136 A253.
- <sup>2</sup> General Meetings of freeholders, summoned by the sheriff, were held to discuss topical matters, often relating to elections. The Meetings from time to time also appointed Committees to pursue issues more closely, as at the time of the John Wilkes controverted elections (discussed below). These events were commonly held in public venues, such as rooms in taverns or in the Assembly Rooms at Mile End. Attendance figures were not commonly collected or reported but, in times of political excitement, the participants were described as ‘very numerous’.

- <sup>3</sup> This manorial estate was so named after its owners, the canons of the Augustinian priory of St Bartholomew in London's Smithfield. After the Reformation, the property came into lay hands, one being Sir Thomas Lake (see n. 4), who built a grand Jacobean house named Canons. It was extensively rebuilt in the early eighteenth century, becoming an even grander house named Cannons. Its owner was James Brydges, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Chandos, whose first wife Mary Lake had inherited the estate. But their son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke, then demolished the house in 1747, after facing acute financial difficulties. The old name is commemorated today in the public gardens of Canons Park, on the site of a considerable portion of the gardens of Cannons House, and the nearby tube station on the Jubilee line.
- <sup>4</sup> For Sir Thomas Lake (1567-1630), MP for Middlesex 1614; see *ODNB*, and *Hist. Parl.*, 1604-29. His grandson Lancelot Lake (1609-80) is also noted in *Hist. Parl.* For Warwick Lake, see below n. 10; and Table 26.
- <sup>5</sup> For Sir John Wolstenholme (1649-1709), see below n. 15. His son Nicholas Wolstenholme also contested Middlesex unsuccessfully in December 1701; and again in 1702.
- <sup>6</sup> For Scorie Barker (c. 1652-1713), see below n. 12; and for his son Henry Barker (d. 1745), see below, n. 19.
- <sup>7</sup> For George Byng (1735-89), see below, n. 53; and for his son George Byng (1764-1847), see below, n. 53.
- <sup>8</sup> For Hugh Smithson (c. 1662-1740), see below, n. 11; and for his cousin and heir Sir Hugh Smithson (1715-86), see n. 22. The Smithsons married into the Percy family, and Sir Hugh Smithson adopted their name. Meanwhile Sir Hugh Smithson's son Hugh Percy and grandson Hugh Percy maintained the family interest in the county's only borough: see below section 6.2.
- <sup>9</sup> BL Add. Ms. 39,212 fo 115, cited in *Hist. Parl.*, 1754-90, i, p. 332.
- <sup>10</sup> Warwick Lake (1661-1712), contested Middlesex, January 1696; MP for Middlesex, 1698-1705; contested Middlesex, 1705. See *Hist. Parl.* 1690-1715, iv, pp. 585-6.
- <sup>11</sup> Hugh Smithson (c.1662-1740), contested Middlesex, 1698; MP for Middlesex, January 1701 – November 1701; contested Middlesex, December 1701; MP for Middlesex, 1702-5; contested Middlesex, 1705; MP for Middlesex, 1710-22. See *Hist. Parl.* 1690-1715, v, pp. 513-4; *Hist. Parl.* 1715-54, ii, p. 428; and above n. 8. Not to be confused with his cousin and heir Sir Hugh Smithson, MP for Middlesex, May 1740 – February 1750: for whom, see below n. 22.

- <sup>12</sup> Sir John Wolstenholme (1649-1709), MP for Middlesex, 1695-1700; contested Middlesex, January 1701; MP for Middlesex, 1705 – February 1709. See *Hist. Parl. 1690-1715*, v, pp. 916-7; and above n. 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Scorie Barker (c.1652-1713), MP for Wallingford, March 1679 – March 1681; contested Middlesex, December 1701; MP for Middlesex, 1705-10; contested Middlesex, 1710. See *Hist. Parl. 1660-90*, i, p. 594; *Hist. Parl. 1690-1715*, iii, pp. 135-6; and above n. 6.
- <sup>14</sup> John Austen (c.1674-1742), MP for Middlesex, December 1701 – 1702; contested Middlesex, 1702; MP for Middlesex, March 1709 – 1710; contested Middlesex, 1710; contested Middlesex, 1715; MP for Middlesex, 1722-7. See *Hist. Parl. 1690-1715*, iii, pp. 89-90; and *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, i, p. 425.
- <sup>15</sup> For Sacheverell, see Anon., *The tryal of Dr Henry Sacheverell, before the House of Peers, for high crimes and misdemeanors* (London, Jacob Tonson, 1710); and later discussions in G. Holmes, *The trial of Doctor Sacheverell* (1973); and essays in M. Knights (ed.), *Faction displayed: reconsidering the impeachment of Dr Henry Sacheverell* (Chichester, 2012), being a special issue of *Parliamentary History*, 31 (2012).
- <sup>16</sup> Hon. James Bertie (1674-1735), MP for New Woodstock, 1695-1705; MP for Middlesex, 1710-34. See *Hist. Parl. 1690-1715*, iii, pp. 198-200; and *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, i, p. 549.
- <sup>17</sup> Anon, *Freeholders names, and the parishes, towns, and places where their freeholds lye, who in the last controverted election voted for Mr Bertie and Mr Smithson* (1714).
- <sup>18</sup> With thanks for discussion on this question to Perry Gauci, who independently confirms that this poll is from 1710. His summary of the Middlesex elections in the early eighteenth century is available in *Hist. Parl. 1690-1715*, ii, pp. 369-73.
- <sup>19</sup> Consult LED for Table **PM1710B**, *POLL ID* 13.
- <sup>20</sup> Henry Barker (d. 1745), contested Middlesex, 1715; contested Middlesex, 1722; contested Middlesex, 1727; contested Middlesex, 1740. His death, on 31 August 1745, is noted in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 15 (1745), p. 502.
- <sup>21</sup> Sir Francis Child (c. 1684-1740), Goldsmith and alderman of Farringdon Without ward; MP for London, 1722-7; MP for Middlesex, 1727 – April 1740. See F.G.H. Price, *The Marygold by Temple Bar* (1902); *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, i, p. 549; and *ODNB*. Not to be confused with his father Sir Francis Child (1642-1713): contested Devizes, 1695; MP for Devizes, 1698-1702; contested London, February 1701; MP for London,

- 1702-5; MP for Devizes, 1705-8; contested London, 1708; MP for Devizes, December 1710 – 1713.
- <sup>22</sup> Thomas Catesby Paget, Lord Paget (1689-1742), MP for Staffordshire, 1715-27. See *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, ii, pp. 320-1.
- <sup>23</sup> Sir Hugh Smithson (1715-86), MP for Middlesex, May 1740 – February 1750. See *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, ii, pp. 428-30; and above n. 7. He married the daughter and heiress of Algernon Seymour, Duke of Somerset, whose mother had inherited the Percy estates. Smithson succeeded as Baron Warkworth and Earl of Northumberland in 1750, whereupon he took the surname Percy, and was created Duke of Northumberland in 1766. The Middlesex poll book of 1747 at Alnwick Castle is from his archive. Not to be confused with his cousin Hugh Smithson, for whom see n. 11.
- <sup>24</sup> Sir William Beauchamp Proctor, Bt (1722-73), MP for Middlesex, 1747-68; contested Middlesex, December 1768. See *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, i, p. 448; and *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, ii, pp. 70-1.
- <sup>25</sup> Sir Roger Newdigate, Bt (1719-1806), MP for Middlesex, August 1742 – 1747; contested Middlesex, 1747; MP for Oxford University, January 1751 – 1780. See *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, ii, pp. 592-3; and *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, iii, pp. 196-9.
- <sup>26</sup> Sir George Cooke (c. 1705-68), MP for Tregony, January 1742 – 1747; contested Middlesex, 1747; MP for Middlesex, March 1750 – June 1768. See *Hist. Parl. 1715-54*, i, p. 574; and *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, ii, pp. 249-50.
- <sup>27</sup> The Smithsonian Institution was founded under the terms of a bequest by the British scientist James Smithson (1764-1829), who had never visited America. He was the illegitimate son of Sir Hugh Smithson, who became Earl of Northumberland in 1750 and 1<sup>st</sup> Duke (of the new creation) in 1766: see above n. 23.
- <sup>28</sup> The Newdigate Prize was founded in 1805 by Sir Roger Newdigate (1719-1806): see above n. 25.
- <sup>29</sup> Frazer Honywood (d. 1764), contested Shaftesbury, December 1747; contested Middlesex, March 1750; MP for Steyning, February 1759 – January 1764. See *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, ii, p. 635.
- <sup>30</sup> For more on this election, see Anon., *A collection of papers pro and con, which have been published during the election of a knight of the shire for the county of Middlesex, to serve in the present parliament in the room of Sir Hugh Smithson* (1750).
- <sup>31</sup> See G. Rudé, ‘The Middlesex electors of 1768-9’, *English Historical Review*, 75

(1960), pp. 601-17; idem, *Wilkes and liberty: a social study of 1763-74* (Oxford, 1962); and J. Brewer, *Party ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976).

- <sup>32</sup> John Wilkes (1725-97), contested Berwick-upon-Tweed, 1754; MP for Aylesbury, July 1757 – January 1764; contested London, 1768; MP for Middlesex, 1768 – February 1769, when expelled; MP for Middlesex, 16–17 February 1769, when declared ineligible to sit; MP for Middlesex, 1774-90. He also stood for lord mayor in 1772, and enjoyed the lucrative post of chamberlain of London, 1779-97. Biographies of him are numerous. P.D.G. Thomas, *John Wilkes: a friend to liberty* (Oxford, 1996) is strong on politics. More recently, A.H. Cash, *John Wilkes: the scandalous father of civil liberty* (New Haven, Ct, 2006) is strong on character and personality. See *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, iii, pp. 639-40; *BDMBR*; *ODNB*; and below, sections 5.2.2, 5.2.3 and 5.3.2..
- <sup>33</sup> See J. Brewer, ‘Commercialisation and politics’ in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J.H. Plumb (eds) *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialisation of eighteenth-century England* (1982), pp. 197-262.
- <sup>34</sup> Wilkes’s papers are in BL, Add. Mss. 30,865-6 and 31,900, with further material at Guildhall Ms. 14,173-14,176.
- <sup>35</sup> For Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844), see below, n. 55.
- <sup>36</sup> General Warrants, which did not specify specific persons or objectives, were declared to be illegal by Lord Camden, in the legal case of *Entick v. Carrington* (1765). This ruling in favour of the Wilkite John Entick proved to be a significant constitutional safeguard against the unfettered powers of the executive arm of government. Following the same constitutional tradition, General Warrants were also declared to be illegal by the Fourth Amendment (ratified 1791 as part of the American Bill of Rights) to the constitution of the newly formed United States of America: see B.A. Newman, *Against that ‘powerful engine of despotism’: the Fourth Amendment at the founding and today* (Lanham, Md, 2007).
- <sup>37</sup> John Glynn (1722-79), serjeant-at-law; contested Newtown, Isle of Wight, 1768; MP for Middlesex, December 1768 – September 1769. See *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, ii, pp. 506-7.
- <sup>38</sup> For the shifting attitudes of the Commons over the Wilkes case, see P.D.G. Thomas, ‘The House of Commons and the Middlesex elections of 1768-9’, *Parliamentary History*, 12 (1993), pp. 233-48.
- <sup>39</sup> Among those who wrote against the legitimacy of Wilkes’s return for Middlesex was Dr Johnson (1709-84): see [Samuel Johnson], *The false alarm* (Dublin, 1770).

- <sup>40</sup> James Boswell (1740-95), who enjoyed embellishment, admitted that this particular phrasing was imagined: see J. Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (3 vols, 1900), ii, p. 273.
- <sup>41</sup> Hon. Henry Lawes Luttrell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Carhampton [I] (1737-1821), MP for Old Leighlin [I], 1783 – January 1787; MP for Bossiney, 1768 – April 1769; MP for Middlesex, April 1769 – 1774; MP for Bossiney, 1774-84; MP for Plympton Earle, 1790 – February 1794; MP for Ludgershall, June 1817 – April 1821. See E.M. Johnston-Liik (ed.), *History of the Irish Parliament, 1692-1800: commons, constituencies and statutes* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), v, pp. 141-3; *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, iii, pp. 65-6; *Hist. Parl. 1790-1820*, iv, pp. 476-8; and *ODNB*.
- <sup>42</sup> William Whitaker (d. 1777), serjeant-at-law; contested Middlesex, April 1769. H.W. Woolrych, *Lives of eminent serjeants-at-law of the English Bar* (2 vols, 1869), ii, pp. 562-6, contains a brief notice of him. His death, on 17 October 1777, is noted in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 47 (1777), p. 508.
- <sup>43</sup> R.W. Postgate, *That devil Wilkes* (revised edn, 1956), pp. 145-6.
- <sup>44</sup> *CJ*, 32, pp. 385-7.
- <sup>45</sup> Walpole to Horace Mann, 20 September 1772, in W.S. Lewis (ed.), *Horace Walpole's correspondence* (48 vols, New Haven, Ct, 1937-83), xxiii, p. 434.
- <sup>46</sup> Among the 'constitutionalists' were [Jeremiah Dyson], *The case of the late election for the county of Middlesex* (1769); and [Samuel Johnson], *The false alarm* (Dublin, 1770). Another contribution to the debate came from [Nathaniel Forster], *A letter to the author of An essay on the Middlesex elections: in which his objections to the power of expulsion are considered: and the nature of representation in parliament examined* (1770).
- <sup>47</sup> Among the Wilkite pamphlets was: Anon., *A fair trial of the important question, or the rights of election asserted: against the doctrine of incapacity by expulsion, or by resolution* (1770).
- <sup>48</sup> For the Rev. John Horne, later John Horne Tooke (1736-1812), see references in section 6.2.
- <sup>49</sup> See below, section 5.3.
- <sup>50</sup> For the short administration (1780-2) under Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Rockingham (1730-82) and the break-up of the Rockingham Whigs, see L.G.

Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the disintegration of the Whig party*, 1782-94 (Oxford, 1971); and F. O’Gorman, *The rise of party in England: the Rockingham Whigs, 1760-82* (1975).

- <sup>51</sup> For Charles James Fox (1749-1806), see references in section 6.2.
- <sup>52</sup> William Mainwaring (1735-1821), MP for Middlesex, 1784-1802; contested Middlesex, 1802. See *Hist. Parl. 1754-90*, iii, pp. 97-8; and *Hist. Parl. 1790-1820*, iv, pp. 524-5. For his son, see n. 57.
- <sup>53</sup> George Byng (1735-89), MP for Wigan, 1768-80; MP for Middlesex, 1780-4. Not to be confused with his son of the same name. See *Hist. Parl.*, 1754-90.
- <sup>54</sup> George Byng (1764-1847), contested Maidstone, July 1788; MP for Newport, Isle of Wight, January 1790 – June 1790; MP for Middlesex, 1790-1847. Not to be confused with his father of the same name. See *Hist. Parl.*, 1754-90.
- <sup>55</sup> Sir Francis Burdett, Bt (1770-1844), MP for Boroughbridge, 1796-1802; MP for Middlesex, 1802 – July 1804; MP for Middlesex, March 1805 – February 1806; MP for Westminster, 1807-37; MP for Wiltshire North, 1837 – January 1844. See *ODNB*; *Hist. Parl*; Francis Burdett, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Francis Burdett* (1810); and M.W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and his times, 1770-1844* (2 vols, 1931). There are a number of doctoral theses on Burdett, which are available as electronic resources; but the lack of an up-to-date political biography is striking. See also section 6.2.3 and within that n. 63.
- <sup>56</sup> See *CJ*, 58; *BPP* (1803-4), ii, pp. 225-480; and summary in section 3.2.
- <sup>57</sup> George Boulton Mainwaring (born c. 1773), MP for Middlesex, August 1804 – March 1805; MP for Middlesex, February 1806 – 1806. See *Hist. Parl. 1790-1820*, iv, pp. 523-4.
- <sup>58</sup> See section 6.2.
- <sup>59</sup> William Mellish (c. 1764-1838), MP for Great Grimsby, 1796-1802; MP for Great Grimsby, March 1803 – 1806; MP for Middlesex, 1806-20; contested Middlesex, 1820. See *Hist. Parl. 1790-1820*, iv, pp. 578-80.
- <sup>60</sup> Samuel Charles Whitbread (1796-1879), MP for Middlesex, 1820-30. For his family background, see R.T.B. Fulford, *Samuel Whitbread, 1764-1815: A study in opposition* (1967).