

# The Election of Lord Grenville as Chancellor of Oxford University in 1809<sup>1</sup>

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## SUMMARY

*This article examines the election of Lord Grenville as Chancellor of the University of Oxford in 1809. The campaign was a hard-fought one in which Grenville was opposed by the Duke of Beaufort and by Lord Eldon. The membership by Grenville and Eldon of opposing Tory factions, the personal animosity between them, and the fact that the Government of the Duke of Portland was in its dying days made the contest acrimonious. The victory of Lord Grenville was in part due to the remarkable organisation he brought to the campaign. His agents in Oxford, foremost among whom was Bishop Moss of Oxford, reported on the voting intentions of members of the University. His election committees in London and Oxford used their personal and political connections to encourage support for him. His careful use of polling books and intelligence enabled him to devote his energy to those areas which most needed attention. Grenville's election was all the more surprising because he had championed Catholic Emancipation and had thereby invited the opposition of the king.*

The Chancellorship of Oxford was largely an honorific office, but one which brought an influential distinction to its holder. The importance of the office lay in its symbolic authority in representing the University on the national stage. The chancellor also influenced the internal appointments and politics of the University, and exercised some control over who should receive honours from the University, though under Grenville the office became involved in matters of educational importance. The election of Lord Grenville as Chancellor of Oxford University in 1809 was one of the most hard-fought and sensational elections to that office in the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>2</sup> Since 1792 various factions had plotted for the succession to the chancellorship, held until his death in November 1809 by the Duke of Portland. The election was fierce because so many issues were involved in the outcome of the vote. Lord Grenville's support for Catholic Emancipation, notwithstanding a promise to King George III that he would not force its implementation in office, established a divide between himself and

<sup>1</sup> I am pleased to acknowledge the advice of Professor Jeremy Black of Exeter University and Professor James J. Sack of the University of Illinois, Chicago.

<sup>2</sup> For another contest of importance – that of 1758 – though not as hard-fought as that of 1809, see W.R. Ward, *Georgian Oxford* (1958), chapter XIII. For the decline of the chancellor's powers during the 18th century, see L. Sutherland in L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford* (1986) v, 212–13.

the other candidates, the Duke of Beaufort and Lord Eldon, both of whom championed the Protestant ascendancy. Lord Grenville, a former member of Christ Church, was also seeking to harness the authority and dominance of that college, built up during Cyril Jackson's tenure as dean. Christ Church's dominance was such that by 1800 the House claimed proprietorial rights over the election of one of the University's two burgesses.<sup>3</sup> But Grenville's political position earned him the enmity of Jackson, who in 1792 ensured that Portland gained the chancellorship against Grenville. Jackson's retirement from the deanery of Christ Church earlier in 1809, and the appointment to the deanery of Charles Hall, who owed his previous appointment to the Regius Professorship of Divinity to Grenville, raised the prospect of a division among Christ Church voters that could be exploited.<sup>4</sup> The status of the candidates in 1809 also raised the stakes for the election: Grenville, prime minister from 1806–7, and Beaufort, a lord lieutenant of three counties, had both been touted as candidates for the chancellorship in 1792, though neither had the stature of Portland, and both had long-established connections with Oxford. Eldon was Lord Chancellor of England, and had become High Steward of the University in 1801.<sup>5</sup> The cost of losing such a contest for any one of the three was great. Two of the candidates were also bound together in their battle on the national stage, as well as in Oxford. Grenville, who had been prime minister of a 'Ministry of all the Talents', had fallen from power in March 1807 as a result of the defection of Lord Sidmouth over a modest measure of Catholic relief, which he convinced the king was Grenville's devious plot. Sidmouth had become momentarily the darling of the anti-Catholics and was suggested as a possible candidate for the chancellorship of Oxford by a party in New College. Grenville had been succeeded as prime minister by the elderly and ailing Duke of Portland, and Lord Eldon accepted the office of Lord Chancellor under him. The Portland ministry (and its successor led by Spencer Perceval after Portland's resignation in September 1809) was regarded by Grenville as too conservative and pandering to the king's cautiousness. Grenville, in spite of the fact that he had been offered the opportunity to join Perceval's government in September, was in effect the leader of the Opposition and increasingly saw himself as the victim of royal prejudice and obstinacy.<sup>6</sup> Facing such staunch opposition, even from moderate Tories like Lord Liverpool and George Canning, Grenville feared that his career had been ruined by his renewed support for Catholic Emancipation in 1805 and his refusal to join Perceval's government. The layers of political interest, university faction, college connection and personal standing combined to make the chancellorship election one of such ferocity that it was won by Grenville by a margin of just thirteen votes.<sup>7</sup> At the count there was near hysteria when the result was announced and a great cry went up when the Vice-Chancellor announced the votes won by each side. There were rumours that Eldon had already printed his victory letters. The king's messenger waited to take the result post haste to Windsor and a fellow of New College proclaimed that the University was ruined by the result.<sup>8</sup> The sensation echoed through the University in pamphlets and tumults for months, and was revived at Grenville's installation as Chancellor over seven months later. This paper examines the way in which Grenville fought the campaign, employing his close connection with Bishop Charles Moss of

<sup>3</sup> W.R. Ward, *Victorian Oxford* (1966), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 30–1.

<sup>5</sup> A.L.J. Lincoln and R.L. McEwen (eds.), *Lord Eldon's Anecdote Book* (1960), 3.

<sup>6</sup> J.W. Derry, *Politics in the age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool* (1990), 134–8.

<sup>7</sup> G.V. Cox, *Recollections of Oxford* (1870), 66.

<sup>8</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 35.

Oxford,<sup>9</sup> his principal agent in Oxford, and suggests that the way in which the campaign was waged was a major ingredient in the victory.

The foundation stones of his campaign were Grenville's personal friendships and political alliances. Foremost among these was his friendship with, and patronage of, Charles Moss.<sup>10</sup> Moss and Grenville had been contemporaries at Christ Church<sup>11</sup> in the early 1780s, and it was Grenville who obtained the chaplaincy to the House of Commons for Moss. It was to be a firm friendship that served Grenville, and Moss, well. In 1792, when Grenville was considering standing for the chancellorship of Oxford against Portland (though he chose eventually to stand down) he also took care to advance Moss's career.<sup>12</sup> In that year, George Horne, bishop of Norwich, died, and Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, sought the office for Moss. In fact, Grenville was forced to tell Moss that his cousin, the prime minister, William Pitt was 'so hampered with engagements as to make it improbable that this occasion can afford an opening for your receiving the rewards of your services to the House of Commons'. Grenville promised that he would be vigilant in seeking out a vacancy for Moss.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Moss had to wait for a further fourteen years, until Grenville was prime minister, to obtain a mitre. He was appointed to a bishopric in October 1806, when both Bangor and Oxford were vacant, and Moss chose Oxford.<sup>14</sup> At the same time Grenville advanced Bishop William Cleaver of Bangor, a former Principal of Brasenose College, Oxford, to the see of St. Asaph, and John Randolph, a former Regius Professor of Divinity, from the bishopric of Oxford to Bangor. It was a series of changes designed to place Grenville's Oxford friends in high places in the Church. These appointments gave Grenville a boost to the corps of supporters he led in Parliament. In addition to Grenvillite M.P.s, the peers and bishops who would follow his lead in the Lords numbered nearly sixty.<sup>15</sup> The dominance of the Grenvillites by their leader was absolute, and lasted well after his resignation from the premiership. On one occasion, in 1808, he told Moss that he had no intention of 'intimating a wish for your personal attendance in Parliament' and that he did not regard the constant attendance of the bishops necessary. Nevertheless, he later warned Moss that, if he was too ill to attend Catholic Emancipation

<sup>9</sup> Charles Moss was born in 1763, the son of Bishop Charles Moss of Bath and Wells. He was educated at Christ Church. His preferments he owed largely to his father. He was appointed rector of Therfield, and Prebendary of Salisbury on the resignation of his father; he was subsequently appointed vicar of Castle Cary in 1791, Chancellor of Wells in 1797, Precentor of Wells 1799, Prebendary of Wells and rector of Wookey in 1801, all from his father. To Grenville he owed nomination as Chaplain to the Commons in 1789, and received the usual reward of Prebend of Westminster in 1792 and of St. Paul's in 1797.

<sup>10</sup> Grenville also relied heavily on William Windham – see British Library Add. MSS. 51530 ff. 97–100 and 37909. This point is also made in J.J. Sack's, *The Grenvillites* (Chicago 1979), 132.

<sup>11</sup> By one account Grenville was instrumental in gutting Moss's rooms whilst they were students: P. Jupp, *Lord Grenville 1759–1834* (1985), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Moss's pedigree was strong, his father was Bishop of Bath and Wells, and a staunch Tory. Charles Moss Jnr. was brought up in a household in which political service and ecclesiastical office were entwined. See W. Gibson, 'The Diocese of Bath and Wells in the Eighteenth Century: The Careers of Bishops Wynne, Willes and Moss', University of Wales MA thesis (1983), *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Moss Papers, Special Collections Dept., William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, North Carolina U.S.A. [hereafter Moss Papers], Grenville to Moss Jan 26th 1792. In fact Pitt was not allowed the opportunity to discharge any of his 'engagements', because King George III offered the bishopric of Norwich to his favourite, Charles Manners-Sutton, without any consultation with Pitt. The appointment was a source of friction between Pitt and the king for some time.

<sup>14</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 8 Oct. 1806.

<sup>15</sup> M.W. McCahill, *Order and Equipose: Peerage and the House of Lords, 1783–1806* (1978), 143.

debates in Parliament (as Moss claimed), he might find 'the same causes of ill health . . . should have their weight in preventing your giving your vote on a point which you cannot hear discussed'.<sup>16</sup>

Grenville's support for Catholic Emancipation had stimulated Dean Cyril Jackson of Christ Church in September 1809 to encourage the ailing Duke of Portland to resign as prime minister, to enable a new government to be formed under Portland's aegis which would oppose relief for Catholics. Jackson's dominance of Christ Church was extraordinary. He used access to the government to influence the appointment of Christ Church men to offices and places; his network of spies and informants inside the House allowed him to understand and influence the attitude of its members; his support for Sir William Scott, Lord Eldon's brother, obtained for him one of the University's parliamentary seats in 1806; and, above all, Jackson claimed that Christ Church was 'the ministerial house'. Jackson however resigned in October 1809, some said in the knowledge that a contest between Grenville and Eldon would destroy him. Jackson's successor, Charles Hall, was an ally of Lord Liverpool and it was assumed that Liverpool might want a nomination for the chancellorship. Hall's previous support for Liverpool, and Liverpool's appointment of him to the deanery, certainly placed Hall under an obligation to him. However, Hall's appointment by Grenville to the Regius Chair of Divinity in 1807 divided his loyalties, and he sought to escape a duty to either candidate by claiming that the Christ Church Common Room had asked him to remain neutral. When Liverpool refused to accept this, Hall bluntly told him that Grenville would win the Christ Church vote.<sup>17</sup> The effect was that Liverpool chose not to stand; but it was expected that the fight for Christ Church votes would be hard.

The other candidates emerged as the death of the Duke of Portland became imminent. Eldon claimed that he was begged to stand by a delegation of Dr. Parsons, Master of Balliol, Dr. Landon, Provost of Worcester College, and Dr. Eveleigh, Provost of Oriel. He professed that his initial instinct was to decline, knowing that the Duke of Beaufort was likely to be a candidate and expecting him to have the king's support, as a staunch Protestant champion. In fact, George III expressed himself pleased that Eldon would stand, and told the Lord Chancellor that Beaufort would not be a candidate. In spite of the royal assurance, Beaufort came forward, and the king reassured Eldon that *he* still had royal support rather than the duke.<sup>18</sup> The contest between Beaufort and Eldon, who should perhaps have been natural allies against Grenville, was acrimonious doubtless because of the confusion over who was leading the king's friends. With such strong opponents, Grenville's courage failed him momentarily. He told Moss confidentially on 18 October 1809 that, in spite of support from the Rector of Exeter College, he felt that he 'ought not to try it if the thing is quite out of the question'. He thought Liverpool would be a relatively easy opponent, but the seventy-eight-year-old Bishop Barrington of Durham, another widely-touted possible candidate, would have been a shrewd government choice since it would seem unfair of him to oppose such an old man. His plea to Moss was 'what is your opinion of it? . . . if it is determined I should stand, great and immediate activity will be necessary'.<sup>19</sup> Two days later, Grenville was confident that Frodsham Hodson, the Principal of Brasenose College, would support him. Brasenose was the college in which Grenville's support was strongest, and in time became the base for his campaign in the city. But Hodson was a less influential supporter outside Oxford than the Duke of Clarence,

<sup>16</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 17 Feb. 1808.

<sup>17</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 3-31.

<sup>18</sup> A.L.J. Lincoln and R.L. McEwen, *op. cit.* note 5, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 18 Oct. 1809.

to whom Grenville was anxious not to apply for support until Cleaver of St. Asaph had expressed an opinion on the duke's attitude to his candidature. Grenville was also anxious that the imminent announcement of the disposition of offices in Spencer Perceval's new government might prejudice his campaign. 'The revival of the cry of Popery is Perceval's only hope', Grenville told Moss, but he also noted with satisfaction that Robert Dundas<sup>20</sup> had 'declined the seals' of office and even hoped that 'they will therefore advise the K to send again to Grey<sup>21</sup> and me . . .'. With all these possibilities crowding in, Grenville's acute tactics were not blunted, and he concluded his letter to Moss: 'of the Head of Jesus<sup>22</sup> I know nothing – how can I get at him? Has he any connection with . . . Sir Watkin?'<sup>23</sup>

A day later, Grenville was more optimistic, and whilst he recognised that Eldon was 'a more formidable adversary than Liverpool', he discussed with Moss the best way to address the issue of Christ Church votes. Grenville suggested that Moss approach Dean Hall and encourage him to remain neutral, but 'leave Ch Ch men free', recognising that Hall could not openly support him as it would lead Hall to 'open opposition to the government by whom he has just been appointed'. Moss was also encouraged to remind Hall that Grenville was 'a man of his own college'. Grenville was encouraged by the likely support of Richard Richards, an influential Welsh lawyer who had been a candidate for the University seat in Parliament in 1806, but he was depressed at not hearing from Bishop Cleaver.<sup>24</sup>

Grenville was prepared to enlist the support of the highest and lowest in his campaign. On 22 October 1809, he told Moss that he had obtained the support of John Ward, a leading undergraduate at Oriel,<sup>25</sup> and of Lord Essex, and through them he sought to recruit Edward Copleston<sup>26</sup> and Charles Vaughan.<sup>27</sup> Another declared supporter was Lord Charles Spencer, M.P. for Oxfordshire. Grenville urged Moss to use this support to influence as many votes as he could. To Grenville's relief he had heard from Bishop Cleaver, who had arranged for the Vice-Principal of Brasenose to nominate him for the chancellorship, but he remained anxious. Two particular issues concerned Grenville: the support of Principal Hughes of Jesus, for which he told Moss 'nothing is to be left untried in that quarter'; and the fear that one of his supporters would make an unguarded or unauthorised statement about Catholic Emancipation: 'having refused three years ago at the king's requisition to tie myself up by any pledge on that subject, to do so now for any personal object of my own would be inexcusable'. Grenville's advice to Moss was to fight Eldon and Beaufort on the grounds of 'pursuits and general character' and his commitment to the Church of England, in spite of his support for Catholic Emancipation. Grenville's own efforts were focused on obtaining the support of the

<sup>20</sup> Robert Dundas, later 2nd Viscount Melville, accepted office eventually as President of the Board of Control.

<sup>21</sup> Grey was 2nd Earl Grey, a staunch ally of Grenville. He had served under Grenville's premiership as foreign secretary. He was to become the prime minister of a Whig ministry in 1830.

<sup>22</sup> David Hughes the Principal of Jesus had previously been a devious political supporter, but Grenville had some hopes that he would rely on him: Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 25–6.

<sup>23</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 20 Oct. 1809. Sir Watkin was Sir Watkin Williams Wynne, brother of the M.P. for Montgomeryshire, and Grenville's nephew. Like Grenville he was a Christ Church man.

<sup>24</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 21 Oct. 1809.

<sup>25</sup> Later Lord Dudley.

<sup>26</sup> Copleston was an influential member of the University: he had been a fellow of Oriel since 1795, vicar of St Mary's, the University Church, and was at the time Professor of Poetry and Junior Proctor. He was later Bishop of Llandaff. He was thought to be in favour of Catholic Emancipation, and after the election was a frequent visitor at Dromore House, the home of Lord Grenville.

<sup>27</sup> Vaughan was a fellow of All Souls, and Radcliffe fellow. He was subsequently a distinguished diplomat, but refused to support Grenville.

Bishops of Durham and Winchester and of William Jackson, Cyril's brother, and in ensuring Dean Hall's neutrality.<sup>28</sup>

Early on in the campaign personal connections became critical. Lord Sidmouth, whose antipathy for Grenville and political actions had brought down Grenville's government, was increasingly seen as a potential ally. The rapprochement was encouraged by Grenville's hope that Sidmouth could bring the support of Bishop Randolph of London with him. Randolph, as son of a President of Trinity and a former Regius Professor of Divinity himself, carried influence at Oxford and would be a significant supporter as a senior bishop. In fact Sidmouth remained publicly silent, though he privately helped Grenville's campaign.<sup>29</sup> Another connection was that of Lord Bathurst, who could exercise his influence on men like Charles Vaughan. But Bathurst's family connection with the Duke of Beaufort made it unlikely that he would support Grenville, though Bishop Henry Bathurst was an ardent supporter.<sup>30</sup>

The campaign had a number of false starts partly because it was unclear throughout October who would finally emerge as the candidates, and because of the fluctuating health of the incumbent Chancellor, the Duke of Portland. Grenville himself told Moss on 22 October that 'my name may be at any time withdrawn' from the contest, and as late as 31 October there were rumours that Beaufort would withdraw, and on 27 October and again on 4 November that Eldon would withdraw in favour of Beaufort. On 27 October the Bishop of Durham was still considered a possible candidate against Grenville. It seems that the three candidates were only finally clearly identified on 4 November. The Duke of Portland's health proved a far thornier problem. Accurate information was hard to obtain: Grenville told Moss on 18 October that the Duke was 'given over', on the 23rd he was 'said to be rather better', by the 25th he was reportedly 'not expected to live', but by the 26th he was 'better again' and a day later Portland's son Lord Titchfield even reported that the Duke was 'over this attack'. These reports made supporters unwilling to commit themselves too early. Archbishop Harcourt of York told Grenville on 29 October that he was anxious that his name 'should not be brought forward in any manner inconsistent with what is due to the D of P till the vacancy actually arises'.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of these uncertainties Grenville's consultations with Moss continued on a daily basis. On 25 October he suggested that Moss consider approaching Edward Bouverie, son of Lord Radnor and a former M.P.,<sup>32</sup> a particularly important figure since Eldon was rumoured to be suggesting Radnor to succeed him as High Steward of the University, if he was elected.<sup>33</sup> But the key issue remained the Christ Church votes. Grenville was determined to find active supporters to be his agents in the House and hoped to do so by sending a canvassing letter to all members of Christ Church. His concern was that the dean might regard such a letter as 'a failure of due respect to him'. The solution was to send Moss a letter 'under a flying seal' addressed to Dean Hall and to ask Moss to tell Hall that he had the letter asking his permission to canvass in Christ Church, but would delay sending it if it would embarrass Hall.<sup>34</sup> A day later Grenville received news that the Archbishop of York had pledged his support, and that he would contact William Webber,<sup>35</sup> tutor and censor of Christ Church, to

<sup>28</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 22 Oct. 1809.

<sup>29</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 23 Oct. 1809.

<sup>31</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss on: 18, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 31 Oct. 1809.

<sup>32</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 25 Oct. 1809.

<sup>33</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 25 Oct. 1809.

<sup>35</sup> Webber had been chaplain to Lord Robert Fitzgerald's embassy to Copenhagen in 1795; he obtained a B.D. in 1807 and was later chaplain to the House of Commons.



seek his support for Grenville. Grenville told Moss 'it must be useful to make this as generally known as possible' as well as the news that Copleston of Oriel had indicated his support.<sup>36</sup> The bishops of Norwich and Lincoln added their support on 27 October, making Grenville the choice of five bishops, 'something for a heretic to be proud of... and no bad ground of argument at Oxford, I think great use may be made of it.'<sup>37</sup> Certainly Grenville's canvassing among the bishops was met with 'astonishing success', with the notable exception of the Bishop of Winchester, Brownlow North, and may well reflect the fact that the bishops were a more sophisticated electorate than the others, and could distinguish between Grenville's support for Catholic Emancipation and the cry of 'Popery' that Spencer Perceval and others resorted to in order to discredit him.<sup>38</sup>

Unscrupulousness and hypocrisy were, naturally, ever present during the campaign. Lord Eldon was rumoured to be using his position as Lord Chancellor to hold vacant Crown livings in the Church in readiness for supporters on his victory.<sup>39</sup> Grenville, for his part, was quite happy to exploit the divisions in the royal family. Knowing that the king supported Eldon, Grenville felt encouraged to seek the support of the royal princes whose relations with the king were always turbulent. The Duke of Clarence, whose connection with Dr. Cole, the Rector of Exeter College, was useful, pledged his support, as did the Prince of Wales,<sup>40</sup> and the Dukes of York and Gloucester. Grenville expressed disgust when on 29 October he heard that the Duke of Beaufort was a definite candidate, and commented that 'delicacy has not restrained his friends from canvassing for him'. Given Grenville's own activities this was extreme sanctimony. In fact in the same letter to Moss Grenville included his own estimate of voting intentions. Grenville conjectured that his support was strongest in Brasenose, Jesus, Exeter and Pembroke where he would gain a hundred votes. He regarded All Souls, Lincoln, Merton, Wadham and the halls as divided but likely to yield some 64 votes. In Corpus, Queen's, University, Magdalen, St. John's and Worcester he felt he would get only a quarter of the available votes, perhaps 54, and in the strongholds of the opposition, Balliol, Trinity and Oriel, he estimated an eighth would support him, at most ten votes. These figures made Christ Church all the more critical, and Grenville estimated that he would need at least 112 votes from it. For Grenville and Moss, the dilemma was whether to work on the colleges and halls that were divided and could yield a further hundred votes, or to try to assault the Christ Church voters.<sup>41</sup> One option that occurred to Grenville the next day was to approach Christ Church through Joseph Goodall, the Provost of Eton. He told Moss 'send me any Eton names' and he would get Goodall to put pressure on them. One such was Septimus Collinson, Provost of Queen's, whom Goodall canvassed and gained for Grenville.<sup>42</sup>

Another way of focusing on the importance of Christ Church votes in the election was to form a campaign committee of former Christ Church men. On 31 October Grenville told Moss that his London Committee would contain the 'younger men' Charles Williams, George Eden, William Herbert and Sir John Wrottesley; 'all except Herbert are Westminster and Ch

<sup>36</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 26 Oct. 1809. A day later, Grenville changed his mind and decided that he could not make generally known the Archbishop's request to Webber.

<sup>37</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 27 Oct. 1809. In fact the Bishop of Lincoln brought with him the votes of a fellow of Queen's and a fellow of Trinity. There were in fact six supporters: Cleaver of St. Asaph, Randolph of London, Bathurst of Norwich, Moss of Oxford, Pretymann-Tomline of Lincoln and Harcourt of York - see J.J. Sack, *op. cit.*, 132-5.

<sup>38</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Who Grenville asked to approach Bishop Brownlow North of Winchester on his behalf.

<sup>41</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 29 Oct. 1809, and Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 30 Oct. 1809.

Ch'. Moss was instructed to add a Christ Church man to his Oxford Committee too.<sup>43</sup> With such a team, Grenville told Moss, his chief goal was to try to get the Christ Church Common Room formally to declare itself for him rather than Eldon, and he sent an open letter to the Common Room for Moss to communicate to them. He also asked Moss to make public use of the support of a Christ Church graduate, William Bisset, and a letter of support from the Duke of Gloucester. Hedging his bets he also told Moss that he felt further votes could be extracted from Trinity, Oriel and New Colleges, and his letter of thanks to Brasenose should not allow 'any appearance of doubt'.<sup>44</sup>

On 1 November the impending election of a new master of Pembroke College caused some concern to Grenville. Dr. Adams of Pembroke was popularly thought to be the fellows' first choice, but might decline the offer of the mastership. If he did, the college would be equally divided between two other candidates, one of whom, Thomas Wintle, was a strong Grenville supporter; the casting vote would be that of Edmund Dwyer, a young fellow of Pembroke. Grenville was anxious about what could be done. He was concerned that a letter to Dwyer's patron, Lord Essex, would be regarded as an intrusion into the affairs of the college and could be counter-productive. Equally, Grenville's agent, William Bragge, another young don, was anxious to write to Lord Essex. In the end, after careful analysis of the Pembroke fellows' voting intentions, Grenville decided not to contact Essex.<sup>45</sup>

The problem of Christ Church remained. On 2 November, Grenville resolved to write an open letter to all members of Convocation canvassing their support. The letter was in fact a blunt way of enabling Grenville to write to the members of Christ Church. But it meant that he had to remove from the letter all direct references to Christ Church's alleged neutrality. The tactic was also a clever attempt to diffuse the growing jealousy between Brasenose, Grenville's principal base, and the other colleges. The letter was to be signed not by Grenville, but his committee.<sup>46</sup> On 3 November Grenville was again depressed. The Bishop of London had sent him news that his expectations of growing support at Christ Church were 'failing'. In spite of Provost Goodall of Eton's pledge to do all he could, Grenville feared 'that is not much'. The news that All Souls was nearly unanimous in his support did not cheer him, and he concluded his letter to Moss bemoaning the 'lukewarmness' of Christ Church and the unusual manner of 'a body so totally abandoning one of their own members'.<sup>47</sup>

Two days later however the situation had changed dramatically. Principal Frodsham Hodson of Brasenose sent Grenville a list of pledged votes, which listed an astounding 254 votes in Christ Church for Grenville, with the prospect of another 30 possible supporters.<sup>48</sup> A further day passed, and Grenville triumphantly told Moss that 'you do not seem aware of how strong we are in Ch Ch ... I think we are likely to poll at least 100, perhaps more from that quarter and I doubt whether the other two can make 50 between them ... (their) sun is eclipsed'. Nevertheless Webber was still to be pressed to influence more voters there.<sup>49</sup>

With the danger averted of Christ Church votes falling to Eldon or Beaufort, Grenville

<sup>43</sup> Charles Williams was a recent Christ Church graduate (1804), George Eden was a barrister and later a minister and Governor General of India, William Herbert was a Hampshire M.P. and obtained a D.C.L. from Oxford in 1808, and Sir John Wrottesley was M.P. for Lichfield.

<sup>44</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 31 Oct. 1809.

<sup>45</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 1 Nov. 1809. In fact George Hall was elected as master of Pembroke.

<sup>46</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 2 Nov. 1809.

<sup>47</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 3 Nov. 1809.

<sup>48</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 5 Nov. 1809.

<sup>49</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 6 Nov. 1809.



could turn his attentions to the 'out' voters, those numerous members of Congregation who did not reside in Oxford. On 6 November, for example, Grenville asked Moss to get his allies in Exeter College to compile a list of voters living in or near Tavistock, who could be influenced in his favour by the Duke of Bedford, who had promised Grenville the support of his Devonshire connections. Equally, Cornish votes could be obtained through influence of family connections, though in that county Lord Eliot was a grandee, and well connected with Beaufort. Similar activity was employed using Lord Blandford, Grenville's brother and nephew, Lords Buckingham and Temple, and the Revd. William Bradford, rector of Beaconsfield.<sup>50</sup>

Another group of people that Grenville did not neglect were those who might have had previous commitments, but whom Grenville felt might be sympathetic to him. Richard Richards, the former candidate for the University seat, was one such. Grenville wrote to Moss, 'I have also taken a proper course about Richards, but I am aware he must be circumspect because of his own views'. Richard Heber was one who Grenville regarded as 'under some restraint' over Grenville's views of Catholic Emancipation, but whose vote he was sure he could obtain. Dr. Bourne, fellow of Worcester, was another who felt compromised because of his appointment by the government as Reader in Chemistry, but was wooed by Grenville.<sup>51</sup> By 7 November, Grenville had received over two hundred firm promises of votes. Within a week that figure had risen to three hundred and fifty. Nevertheless, on 17 November the Regius Professor of History, Henry Beeke, estimated that Eldon was well ahead.<sup>52</sup>

Grenville's success lay in no small measure in the committees that he assembled for the campaign. It was the first election for the chancellorship which saw the establishment of committees in both London and Oxford, and Grenville recognised their value: 'no man ever', he told Moss, 'was better represented both by Oxford and London committees'.<sup>53</sup> But Grenville's correspondence with Moss also sheds light on the sophistication of his psephology. From 22 October the polling lists became central to Grenville's campaign; on that day the London committee sent Moss three lists for his use. Three days later Grenville obtained a copy of the printed list of the 1792 poll (at which Portland had been elected chancellor) and told Moss 'you had best get all that are to be bought at Oxford as they may be useful'. Moss added his comments to the list, but had doubts about the wisdom of re-printing and circulating it among friends; instead it was felt better that a written list be copied, and Grenville asked his brother, Lord Buckingham, to have his clerks copy the list longhand. Moss was also asked to have all the printed lists bought up in Oxford and interleaved with blank sheets of paper to allow canvassers to add their comments against each name.

By 2 November, when the focus shifted from Oxford voters to 'out' voters, Grenville arranged for a list of all the 'out' voters to be printed and circulated among his supporters. 'All my friends are pursuing me for lists' Grenville told Moss. The format of the lists preoccupied Grenville and he gave specific instructions to Moss: 'as soon as the lists are printed, the London committee will paste them in a book, the names at the edge of that page and the page opposite left blank . . . You had best do the same at the Oxford committee, the size of the book will probably be larger . . .'. Moss suggested that the lists be printed alphabetically and Grenville added a further sophistication on 6 November by listing the 'out' voters by

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 23 Oct. 1809.

<sup>52</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 7 Nov. 1809, and Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 32-3 and Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 5 Nov. 1809.

college, county and address.<sup>54</sup> The lists provided minute details of the voting intentions, but were a source of considerable work. Principal Frodsham Hodson of Brasenose was described as 'inseparable from his canvassing lists' as were Copleston of Oriel and his pupil Ward.<sup>55</sup> Copying the lists was a laborious process, and Grenville encourage Moss to employ clerks in Oxford specifically for the purpose, telling Moss 'do not be afraid of any expenses'. There were also clerks employed in London, as well as by Lord Buckingham for the campaign. The principal activity of the clerks was collating the returns from friends who wrote comments and pledges on their copies of the printed lists, and then sent the lists to London. A master-list was then compiled, from which Grenville determined where the further canvassing effort was needed.<sup>56</sup>

The lists were critical to the fine tuning of Grenville's canvassing as they provided him with the opportunity to make informed judgements. For example, his awareness that opponents in Christ Church were equally divided between Eldon and Beaufort made him relatively sanguine about hostile votes there; by the end of October he was aware that Beaufort was strong in New College and in Trinity and Oriel and made renewed efforts in those colleges, and conversely his knowledge by 3 November that he had most of All Souls's votes meant he did not need to waste further effort in that college. Above all, the lists gave him knowledge of his opponents' relative strengths: for example, news on 6 November that Magdalen had come out strongly for Beaufort caused him some pleasure, 'it is for my advantage . . . it will bring them (Eldon and Beaufort) nearer an equality'. It would have been far worse for Magdalen to support Eldon.<sup>57</sup>

Clerks were also used to seek out correct addresses of the various 'out' voters, who proved to be notoriously difficult to get at. Communication between London and Oxford was critical. On 2 November Grenville asked Moss to have 'some one person to correspond daily with the London committee'. He had already established regular deliveries of lists and letters by his own servants: on 26 October he obtained a schedule of coaches and post chaises to Oxford, 'and will regularly send you a servant by the coach, to return by the same conveyance with what ever you have for him'. Sometimes, as on 7 November, Grenville had nothing to deliver, but sent a servant to Moss in Oxford 'because I am impatient to have the county lists'.

Canvassing lists were supplemented with some astute plans to maximise voting by supporters. In November it was agreed that Grenville's friends would refuse to accept suggestions of 'pairing' by opposition voters. There was also a scare when the Master of Balliol, hoping to advantage Grenville, suggested that Convocation be adjourned during the polling to reduce the period in which voting could take place. Grenville, who had arranged for some voters to travel by night to Oxford, including the Chief Baron of the Exchequer, challenged the proposal and ensured that polling could take place day and night for two days. One means of achieving this was by providing a constant flow of voters during the night to keep the poll open for

<sup>54</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 24 Oct.-7 Nov. 1809. In his obsession about the lists, Grenville came close to patronising Moss. On 6 November in a postscript, he told Moss 'the best way of doing this work would be by two clerks, one to write with a book before him, paged according to the different counties (as in the form sent herewith) and the other to read the names & directions to him, college by college, (taking colleges alphabetically) which directions the writing clerk will write in, one by one, as they occur in the pages of each county. The book in which each entry is made should be large and well spaced to prevent confusion in the directions by running an eye along the wrong line . . .'

<sup>55</sup> W.J. Copleston, *A Memoir of Edward Copleston* (1851), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 6 Nov. 1809.

<sup>57</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 31 Oct., 3 Nov. & 6 Nov. 1809.

forty-eight hours without a closure.<sup>58</sup> On 6 November, Grenville asked Moss to reserve lodgings for supporters travelling to Oxford for the vote. Grenville was concerned that colleges hostile to him would accommodate their supporters in their rooms, but he wished to secure inns and lodging houses for his voters.<sup>59</sup> He also sought to ensure that his voters had transport to the polls. On 2 November he asked Moss to put in place a means for 'bringing up the distant voters without putting them to expense'. It was also understood that Grenville would pay for the transport of Beaufort voters to split the government vote.<sup>60</sup>

Newspapers were also used in the campaign. Grenville claimed he was unlucky with newspapers: Hodson got some coverage for him in the *Oxford Chronicle*, though the *Courier*, which Grenville believed was more widely read, was difficult to obtain support in. The *Times* accepted paid advertisements from Eldon. In spite of Grenville's claim to Moss that he had a 'determined aversion' to making use of the press, he told the bishop on 2 November that he should copy out some letters of support that Grenville had received 'as that would not fail to lead to its filling another column in the newspapers'. However, Grenville was poorly served by Principal Hodson who, seeking to defend Grenville, made a claim that Grenville had given him a letter containing promises of safeguards for the Church if Catholic Emancipation were ever passed. After weeks of questioning, Hodson published the letter, which contained no such safeguards. A howl of protest resounded in the newspapers and undoubtedly lost Grenville some ground.<sup>61</sup> Throughout the election campaign, Grenville himself carefully avoided the issue of Catholic Emancipation, even when Lord Fingall, leader of the Dublin supporters of Catholic Emancipation, encouraged him to make a statement of his support for it and present a petition to parliament (which Grenville refused).<sup>62</sup>

As the campaign reached a climax, the toll on Grenville showed. During November he suffered a series of severe headaches 'from incessant writing', and Lady Grenville was obliged to write the daily missive to Bishop Moss. From time to time, Grenville was so fatigued that he was 'scarce able to write capably'. Probably exhaustion was behind his mislaying of some papers on 7 November, which caused him anguish as a further day's copying of lists was required: 'I am grieved to have lost even a day . . .' he told Moss. Grenville also became aware of the strain he was placing on Moss, whose health had never been strong, and he implored him to not become the victim of his own 'kindness' towards Grenville.<sup>63</sup> However, by the polling day on 18 December 1809, Grenville was confident of the outcome. He had refused to contemplate any suggestion of a deal with either of the other candidates for transfer of votes. In part this was because Grenville knew that, unlike in a parliamentary election, voters would be unlikely to transfer anyway, but also because he would not contemplate defeat.<sup>64</sup>

The victory of Lord Grenville was by a smaller margin than he had estimated. Probably he was right in his assertion that Beaufort's supporters shifted to Eldon toward the close of the campaign. This would certainly explain Eldon's misplaced confidence. The votes cast on 10 December were: 406 for Grenville, 393 for Eldon, and 238 for Beaufort, a remarkably high

<sup>58</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 6 Nov. 1809; G.V. Cox, *op. cit.* 66.

<sup>60</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 2 Nov. 1809; Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* note 3, 34; Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 2 Nov. 1809.

<sup>62</sup> Jupp, *op. cit.* 417, 426.

<sup>63</sup> Moss Papers, Lady Grenville to Moss 3 Nov. 1809 and Grenville to Moss 4 & 7 Nov. 1809. In fact later that day, Lord Grenville did manage a short letter to Moss. His handwriting does, however bear testimony to his exhaustion.

<sup>64</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 4 Nov. 1809.

turnout of 1,037 votes from a constituency of almost 1,300.<sup>65</sup> The majority of thirteen was a sensation: to some it seemed that the leader of the opposition had beaten the government's representative. According to one writer, Grenville's election was 'a testimony to his weight amongst the aristocracy'.<sup>66</sup> As important, however, was Grenville's determination and the sophistication with which he conducted the campaign. Grenville saw the poll as a test of his standing, and without doubt saw it as a way of reasserting his role in national politics. On 8 October, before he had finally decided to stand for the chancellorship, Grenville told Moss that 'the approbation of our friends at least is unanimous and cordial, without a single exception, and that is some test of general opinion'.<sup>67</sup> With the chancellorship he obtained a further test of opinion of what he consistently called 'the government strength' or 'the government candidate'. The expectation that Perceval's ministry would be defeated in the Commons within a month<sup>68</sup> added to the sense that Grenville had achieved a coup that would carry him back to office. These tests and expectations came to nought, but were the driving force behind Grenville's extraordinary exertions in a contest which established new methods and intensity of campaigning. A contemporary and close friend of Grenville, Lord Holland, was convinced that the quality which won Grenville the election was his standing as a scholar and a politician of literary pursuits, but also that there had never been a candidate for the chancellorship 'so much versed in the detail of business'.<sup>69</sup> For a man who by his own admission was 'not competent in the management of men',<sup>70</sup> the management of his campaign was an outstanding feat.

The results of the election were significant, though not perhaps in the way that Grenville had hoped. Grenville never served in a government again, but had the opportunity to reward his friends with University honours at his installation.<sup>71</sup> However, those who had been his staunchest opponents in the election, Liverpool, Eldon and Canning, gained control of the Pittite wing of the Tories which formed the majority in governments after 1812, effectively locking Grenville out of power. Moreover, Grenville failed to get the University's backing for Catholic Emancipation in 1812, after which he was forced to recognise that his bid for it had failed. Nevertheless, he proved to be an excellent chancellor, assiduously supporting attempts to reform the curriculum and teaching of the University. During the alarms of 1820 Grenville won the king's support with a loyal address; he supported the endowment of new subjects such as chemistry and he encouraged the funding of more student accommodation through loans. He was, in short, 'a friend to improvement'.<sup>72</sup> The immediate casualties of the contest were Lord Eldon and Dean Hall of Christ Church. Eldon could not contain his anger and bitterness at his defeat. Even twenty years afterwards he could not disguise his hostility toward Grenville, and disingenuously ascribed Grenville's candidature to jealousy of Eldon's close relations with George III.<sup>73</sup> But Eldon went on to hold the seals of office as Lord Chancellor for almost twenty years. Dean Hall of Christ Church found that his attempt to remain neutral had broken his authority as head of the House, especially after he wrote a fulsome letter of

<sup>65</sup> G.V. Cox, *op. cit.* 66. Cox's figures are confirmed by Ward; it was claimed that the vote was close because Beaufort himself voted for Eldon, as a matter of honour: Ward, *op. cit.* 35-6.

<sup>66</sup> Jupp, *op. cit.* 416.

<sup>67</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss 8 Oct. 1809.

<sup>68</sup> Jupp, *op. cit.* 416-7.

<sup>69</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports on the MSS of Sir John Fortescue* (London 1892-1907), vol. ix, 350.

<sup>70</sup> A.C. Benson, *Fasti Etoniensis* (1899), 209.

<sup>71</sup> Moss Papers, Grenville to Moss July 1810, *passim*.

<sup>72</sup> Ward, *op. cit.* 37, 43, 53, 54, 94.

<sup>73</sup> A.L.J. Lincoln and R.L. McEwen, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

congratulation to Grenville when the result was announced. Following the overbearing reign of Dean Jackson, the members of Christ Church rumbustiously enjoyed the freedom of being ruled by a man too timid to take sides during the election. Liverpool, Hall's erstwhile patron, forsook him – in spite of an attempt by the dean to sponsor Liverpool's candidature for the chancellorship when Grenville seemed gravely ill in the early 1820s. Liverpool's extraordinary tenure of the premiership from 1812 to 1827 effectively denied Hall the bishopric he might otherwise have obtained, particularly when the Prince Regent visited Oxford in 1814 and considered making him the offer of a mitre. Financial embarrassment added to Hall's misery, but even so he must not have expected the rebuff from Liverpool, when he applied for a bishopric in 1820: Liverpool replied that he chose bishops only from among men of merit and could not recommend Hall to the king.<sup>74</sup>

The most significant achievement of the election of 1809 was to reinvigorate university elections. However, subsequent elections for the chancellorship were marked by the nomination of candidates who commanded widespread support, and against whom there would be little factional opposition: the Duke of Wellington in 1834, Lord Derby in 1852 and Lord Salisbury in 1869. But elections for the university M.P.s followed the pattern of the 1809 election: fierce canvassing, the precise use of poll books, the organisation of local and national election committees and the recruitment of election agents became a feature of Oxford elections familiar to Peel, Gladstone, Gathorne Hardy and Talbot.<sup>75</sup>

*The Society is grateful to the Greening Lamborn Trust for a grant towards publication of this paper.*

<sup>74</sup> W. Gibson, 'The Tories and Church Patronage, 1812–1820', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xli, no. 2 (1990), 268–9; Ward, *op. cit.* 32–7.

<sup>75</sup> Ward, *op. cit. passim*.