EPSOM AND EWELL IN PARLIAMENT

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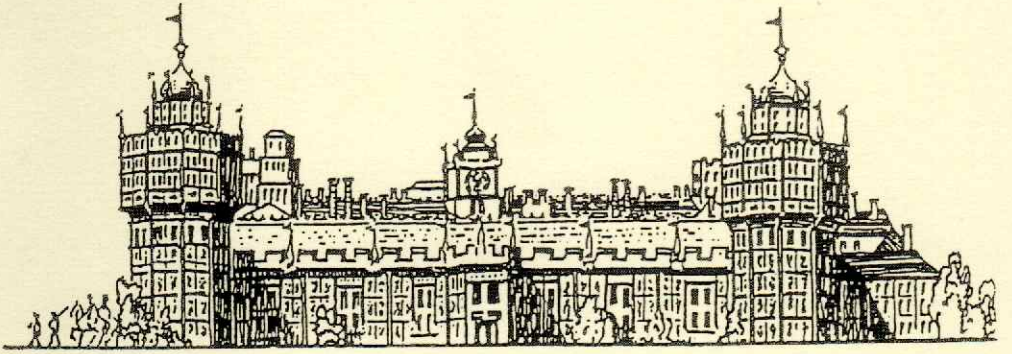

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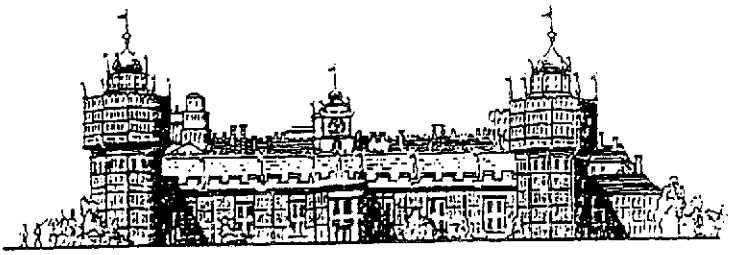
Charles Abdy



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Introduction

On 9 April 1992 all citizens of Epsom and Ewell who had reached the age of 18 years had the opportunity of voting for the person that they wished to represent them in the House of Commons. There were numerous polling stations at which people could cast their votes by secret ballot. We tend to take such a state of affairs for granted, as if it had always been so, and seldom give a thought to how things were in the past; for instance, before 1918 women were not allowed to vote and before 1832 men had to own freehold property and travel to Guildford to vote.

Parliament is an ancient institution, but Parliamentary Democracy as we know it today is a comparatively recent development. This short paper charts the background of that development and outlines the changes that have taken place in the way in which people in the Epsom and Ewell area have been represented in Parliament over the centuries.

Even a brief monograph such as this involves a considerable amount of research. What is finally published is but a subjective selection from the mass of material that is built up, an accumulation that has been facilitated by the help of a number of people. In particular, I would thank Sir Archie Hamilton and the Staff of the House of Commons Library; also Mr Maurice Exwood, F.R.Hist.S., who willingly made available his own research notes on the franchise.

The Development of Parliament

The story of Parliament is also the story of the development of democracy and the slow transfer of power from the Monarch to a government largely made up of elected representatives of the people.

The idea of a national assembly to advise the King goes back to Saxon times, with the Witenagemot, or assembly of the wise. The Norman kings had the Great Council composed of their officers, bishops and chief landowners, the inner circle of which constituted the Curia Regis, or King's Court, from which the present day Privy Council has descended. (The Privy Council consists of persons who hold or have held high office, peers and persons distinguished in their professions; all Cabinet Ministers are included. The total membership numbers more than 300 and it operates mainly through committees).

The first Parliaments were summoned by writs issued by the King for specific purposes, usually concerned with raising money for him: they had no legislative power. Each county had a sheriff who was responsible for securing the representatives. Sometimes he would be instructed to return men best fitted to advise on particular matters, commercial or maritime, for example.

It is ironic that an assembly that met in 1265 which set a pattern for representation was summoned, not by the King, but by a baron, Simon de Montfort, who was seeking support for opposition to the King. He summoned two knights from every shire, and also two citizens elected by certain cities and boroughs, and this was to be the composition of the assembly for many centuries.

It was during the 13th century that the assembly became known as 'Parlement' from the French 'parler', to talk: what could be more appropriate! Parliament acquired limited power to pass laws in 1308 and in 1346 the House of Lords and the House of Commons agreed to sit separately. The succeeding centuries are marked by struggles by Parliament to curb the power of the Monarch and have a greater voice in affairs of State.

Surprisingly, Henry VIII did not disregard Parliament, but his strength was such that he was able to bully them into accepting the measures he wished to take, however brutal.

The conflict between King and Parliament literally came to a head in the Civil War of 1642 to 1646, at the end of which Charles I lost his. The return of Charles II in 1660 was subject to safeguards for the freedom of Parliament.

Further power was won in the 'Bloodless Revolution' of 1688 when James II was replaced by William and Mary, who had to accept the Bill of Rights, which meant that the monarch could no longer ignore the wishes of Parliament.

The Reform Bill of 1832 gave the Commons ascendancy over the Lords, and thereafter the development of the Constitutional Monarchy proceeded to the point where the executive powers of the Monarch have passed to the House of Commons, with the House of Lords able to delay, but not veto, the passing of new legislation.

Early Parliaments did not always meet in London; other important towns as far flung as York and Carlisle were the meeting places on some occasions. However, after 1681 it was always Westminster.

The Reform Bill of 1832 was the first of a series of Acts that dramatically changed the nature of the Parliamentary system. It did away with 'Rotten Boroughs' that returned Members even though they had few voters. A prime example was Old Sarum, where seven voters had two Members, and the borough consisted of nothing but fields. Before 1832 Parliamentary seats could be bought and sold openly and were even advertised in the press, at an average price of £6,000 ! The Bill also extended the right to vote to some leaseholders and copyholders: previously it had been restricted to freeholders in the shires, while in the boroughs, in some places, only the Mayor and Corporation could vote.

It was shortly after 1832 that the somewhat loose grouping of M.P.s into Tories and Whigs that had existed since towards the end of the 17th century developed into the Conservative and Liberal parties, conflict between which was to dominate politics until well into this century.

A Bill of 1867 extended the franchise and the Third Reform Bill of 1884 removed the property requirements.

There was an important step forward in 1872 with the introduction of secret voting, before which voters were under pressure to vote for candidates approved by their employers and landlords. At the same time, the division of county and borough constituencies into polling districts was made obligatory and Returning Officers were permitted to use school premises free of charge as polling stations. This made it much easier for people to vote. Elections had come a long way since the days when they were simply mass meetings at which voting was by acclamation or show of hands.

Women were not allowed to vote until 1918 and then it was only those who had reached the age of 30 and were local government electors or wives of local government electors. Equality with men was achieved in 1928 with the voting age reduced to 21, which came down to 18 in 1969.

It was not only the extension of the franchise that made things more democratic: in 1858 property qualifications for Members of Parliament were abolished. In the early days, when Parliament had little power, being appointed a representative was not always regarded as something to be desired, and Members returned were frequently, particularly in the case of boroughs, fairly humble people, such as tailors, chandlers and bakers, who would be helped financially by the town councils that put them forward. However, by 1500 a seat in Parliament was seen as something that brought honour, dignity and influence, and men of wealth began to compete for membership, which, particularly for the shires, became the prerogative of the landed gentry. It was not unusual for shires to be represented by

successive members of old county families: many elections were uncontested.

Getting elected could be a costly business: the only polling place for Surrey was Guildford and candidates needed to defray the travelling expenses of voters from and to their homes, and provide entertainment. An entry in John Evelyn's diary for 11 February 1679 bears this out: 'My Brother Evelyn of Wotton was now chosen knight for the County of Surrey, carrying it against my Lord Longford and Sir Adame Browne of Betchworth Castle; the County coming in to give their suffrages for my brother were so many, that I believe they eate and dranke him out neere £2,000 by a most abominable costome.'

Trade arising from the colonies and the growth of manufacturing produced a new breed of men of wealth, to the extent that the landed interests felt threatened, and fought for an Act that was passed in 1710 which made the possession of a large estate a pre-requisite of election to Parliament. In practice, men of sufficient wealth found ways of getting into Parliament without acquiring land, which some regarded as an unrewarding investment. By 1858 the new monied classes were able to get rid of the restrictions.

The introduction of salaries for MPs in 1911 made it easier for people without private incomes to stand for Parliament. Also in that year, the duration of a Parliament was set at a maximum of five years; prior to that it had been a maximum of seven years, in accordance with an Act passed in 1715. (The duration was extended beyond five years during the two World Wars).

The 19th century was a golden age for Britain; our scientists, engineers, architects, artists and writers were supreme and their creations are all around to remind us of their greatness. Not the least of these creations is the masterpiece of Barry and Pugin at Westminster, the Houses of Parliament. What we sometimes forget is the tremendous achievements in social reform, in bringing about a more democratic system of government, that went on within those walls.

The Situation in Surrey

One of the earliest Parliaments for which records exist was that called to Westminster by King Edward I in 1290. The names of the 67 knights who attended included two Surrey men, Roland de Acstede and William Ambesac, and these are the earliest traceable Members for Surrey. There were also representatives from Bletchingley, Guildford, Reigate and Southwark (then part of Surrey).

In the reforms of 1832, Surrey was partitioned into two Divisions, East and West, each returning two members. Epsom and Ewell came in West Surrey, the polling places for which were Guildford, Dorking and Chertsey. The Constituencies were further re-arranged in 1885 into six one-member Divisions, one of which, mid-Surrey, was known as Epsom, and included what is now Epsom and Ewell.There have been changes since 1885 to reduce constituency areas as populations have grown. This process was strengthened by the Redistribution of Seats Act of 1944 which laid down the maximum size of a constituency as 100,000 electors. The present constituency of Epsom and Ewell which consists of that borough (created in 1937) plus the Banstead area of the Borough of Reigate came about as a result of a review carried out in 1970.

The Reform Act of 1832 extinguished the Boroughs of Bletchingley, Gatton and Haslemere. Gatton was a notorious 'Rotten Borough' that had returned two Members in spite of having usually less than two dozen voters, and candidates nominated by the lord of the manor.It is no wonder that William Cobbett referred to Gatton as ' a very rascally spot of earth.' Reigate was reduced from a two-seat to a one-seat Borough and then in 1867 was disenfranchised for electoral malpractices.

The situation in respect of Bletchingley before the Reform Act led Cobbett to denounce it as 'the vile rotten borough of Bletchingley.' For most of the 18th century it was in the hands of the Clayton family; different members sat in 23 Parliaments. They were strongly supported by a Rector who lectured his parishioners on the fearful consequences of not voting to his

instructions. At election time, inns set out barrels of beer in the street; it was free to all drinkers, but there was strong pressure to support the candidate being pushed by the publican.

As has been explained, in the early days of Parliament the interests of Epsom and Ewell would have been covered by the two Surrey members, not that there would have been much in the way of consultation. The list of Members does occasionally include local men. In 1340 Sheriffs were directed to send a specified number of merchants, and Johannes atte Churchgate de Ebbesham (Epsom) was nominated. From 1350 to 1373 Simon de Codynton (Cuddington) appears frequently, and from 1391 to 1407 Radulphus de Codynton is mentioned several times. William Saunder of Ewell was a Surrey member in 1553,1554 and 1555. It is significant that he was a Catholic, and it was the reign of Mary I.

Some of the Surrey Members were quite distinguished: eight Surrey men became Speakers of the House of Commons. It was said of Arthur Onslow who became Speaker in 1727, 'He raised the office of Speaker to the high standard of courtesy, patience, inflexible impartiality and dignity.....which caused him to be known ever since as The Great Speaker Onslow.' Arthur Onslow was Speaker for 33 years: his qualities were such as to make him acceptable to all factions in the House. Given that it was an age in which bribery and corruption in public life were regarded as normal behaviour, it is quite remarkable that he was able to maintain for so long a reputation for honesty and integrity. (Hogarth's satirical pictures of an election were painted in 1753-4, i.e.,towards the end of Onslow's term of office. The goings-on at the election at Eatanswill portrayed by Dickens in The Pickwick Papers indicate that the bribery and corruption were just as bad at the beginning of the 19th century.)

The Great Speaker Onslow was saddened by electoral corruption. Referring to it in a letter to a friend, he wrote, 'God knows there is so much of it almost everywhere that I dread the consequences of it with regard to the religion and morals of the nation. I say this to you as a man of virtue to whom I can disclose my heart without being liable to be laughed at.'

Arthur Onslow was held in high esteem for his detailed knowledge of and his regard for Parliamentary procedures, as well as his probity. His formality led a humorist to pen the following lines after his death:

> 'His rules and orders with his latest breath
> Onslow lamenting saw the approach of death.
> To order! Sir! To order Death replied,
> Death knows not rules, or orders, - Onslow died!'

The Great Speaker came from a family that dominated Surrey politics for a considerable period in a way that no other family has done: in fact it is doubtful whether any other family in any other county could equal their record. From 1627 to 1768 Onslows were elected to no less than 27 Parliaments, without counting those who were elected for Guildford and other boroughs. They also provided Lords Lieutenant for Surrey and numerous Justices of the Peace: there were no less than eight members of the family serving as J.P.s in 1812.

Not all the Onslows were known by such dignified names as The Great Speaker: Thomas Onslow who became the second Baron Onslow in 1717 was known as Dicky Ducklegs, because of a certain peculiarity of build and a waddling progress!

Between 1832 and 1885 when Epsom and Ewell were in the West Surrey constituency, Members included Henry Drummond of Albury Park , the wealthy banker who helped found the Irvingite Apostolic Church, and George Cubitt of Denbies.

Members for the Epsom and Ewell area since 1885 and their dates of election are given in the following list.

It is of interest that two members who were made Lords chose local names: Sir George Rowland Blades became Baron Ebbisham (Epsom) and Sir Peter Rawlinson became Baron Rawlinson of Ewell. (The title of Baron Ebbisham passed to his son, but as he died without a male heir, the title is lost. Baron Rawlinson of Ewell is a Life Peer.)

The Election of Members of Parliament for the Epsom and Ewell area since 1885

1885	G.Cubitt
1886	G.Cubitt
1892	T.T.Bucknill
1895	T.T.Bucknill
1899	Upon Mr Bucknill being made a Judge, W.Keswick
1900	W.Keswick
1906	W.Keswick
1910	W.Keswick
1913	H.Keswick
1918	Sir George Rowland Blades
1922	Sir George Rowland Blades, Bt.
1923	Sir George Rowland Blades Bt.
1924	Sir George Rowland Blades Bt.
1928 (by-election)	Commander A.R.J.Southby
1929	Commander A.R.J.Southby
1931	Commander A.R.J.Southby
1935	Commander A.R.J.Southby
1945	Commander Sir Archibald Southby Bt.

1947 (by-election)	M.S.McCorquodale
1950	M.S.McCorquodale
1951	M.S.McCorquodale
1955	P.A.G.Rawlinson
1959	P.A.G.Rawlinson
1964	Sir Peter Rawlinson
1966	Sir Peter Rawlinson
1970	Sir Peter Rawlinson
1974(Feb)	Sir Peter Rawlinson
1974(Oct)	Sir Peter Rawlinson
1978 (by-election)	A.G.Hamilton
1979	A.G.Hamilton
1983	A.G.Hamilton
1987	A.G.Hamilton
1992	A.G.Hamilton (now Sir Archibald Hamilton)

Brief Lives of Members of Parliament who have represented the Epsom and Ewell area since 1885

Sir George Rowland Blades, 1868-1953 Educated Kings College School. Had many connections with the City of London, and was Lord Mayor in 1926-7. Knighted 1918, made a Baronet in 1922, created Baron Ebbisham in 1928.

T.T.Bucknill, 1845-1915 Educated at Westminster and Geneva. Called to the Bar 1868; Q.C.1885; Recorder of Exeter 1885. Alderman of the Surrey County Council 1889-1892. Appointed High Court Judge 1899. Knighted 1899.

The Rt. Hon. G.Cubitt, 1828-1917 Son of Thomas Cubitt of Denbies. Educated Trinity College, Cambridge. Was second Church Estates Commissioner 1874 to 1879. Member for West Surrey 1860-85 and for the Epsom Division from 1885 to 1892. Created Baron Ashcombe in 1892.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Archibald Hamilton, born 1941 Younger son of 3rd Baron Hamilton of Dalzell. Educated Eton. Served Coldstream Guards 1960-63 (Lt.). Government Whip 1982-86. Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement 1986-87; Parliamentary Private Secretary to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, 1987-88; Minister of State for Armed Forces, 1988-93. Became a Governor of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in 1993 and a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee in 1994. Knighted January, 1994.

H.Keswick, 1870-1928 Born in Shanghai, son of W.Keswick (see below). Educated in England (Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge). Was member of firm trading in Hong Kong, China and Japan; member of Hong Kong Legislative Council and Shanghai Municipal Council. Served in S.African War 1900.

W.Keswick, 1835-1912 Business connections with China. Member of Hong Kong Legislative Council; Director of Indo-China Steam Navigation Company. High Sheriff of Surrey 1898.

The Rt. Hon. M.S.McCorquodale, 1901-1971 Educated Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford. Chairman of various Printing Companies. A Parliamentary Private Secretary in several ministries. Service with R.A.F.V.R in 1940. Created Baron McCorquodale of Newton, 1955. President of British Employers' Confederation, 1960.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Rawlinson, born 1919 Educated Downside School and Christ's College, Cambridge. Served in Irish Guards, 1940-46, demobilised with rank of Major. Called to the Bar 1946, practised until 1985; Attorney General 1970-74. Knighted 1962. Created Baron Rawlinson of Ewell (Life Peerage), 1978. Author of poems, articles and essays in law as well as an autobiography and novels.

Commander Sir Archibald Southby, 1886-1969 Educated Brandon House School, Cheltenham and H.M.S.Britannia. Joined R.N in 1901; retired as Commander in 1920; served with Home Fleet and Grand Fleet in World War I and Allied Commissions 1918-20. Chevalier of Legion of Honour. Later appointments included Deputy Lieutenant for Surrey. Made a Baronet in 1937.

Note. 'The Rt. Hon' indicates membership of the Privy Council.

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