



Partisanship and Popular Politics in a Cornish ‘Pocket’ Borough, 1660–1714^{★†}

JAMES HARRIS

Lincoln College, Oxford

Historians have rarely considered the political views of electorates in small constituencies with strong proprietorial interests, or ‘pocket’ boroughs. However, through a detailed case study of the Cornish borough of Mitchell, this article reveals a rural settlement with a multifaceted and divided community, which experienced a high degree of partisan conflict during the later Stuart period as its inhabitants engaged in an ongoing struggle over the nature of the franchise. A group of often-disenfranchised inhabitants launched a sustained and independent assault on the lord of the borough’s limited franchise, in favour of an inhabitant-based vote; they were opposed by a group which oscillated between loyalty to the borough’s patron and attempts to secure its own influence. Party allegiances and political ideologies can occasionally be identified on both sides, but the franchise dispute did not always align with these divisions. The article argues that while partisan conflict occurred in ‘pocket’ boroughs, it took extraordinary circumstances for this to boil over and facilitate change – in Mitchell’s case, these circumstances were the frequent elections to the Exclusion Parliaments, and the patron’s self-imposed exile in France. Yet even once a popular inhabitant-based vote was established, the widened electorate still found it difficult to determine the outcome of elections, as the borough’s patron and local gentry families soon reasserted their authority. Therefore, while the electorates of boroughs such as Mitchell were not supine or monolithic, their ability to actively participate in the electoral process was ultimately fragile.

Keywords: Cornwall; electioneering; franchise; parliamentary election; partisanship; pocket borough; poll sheets; representation

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In his influential lecture, *The Electorate and the National Will in the First Age of Party*, Geoffrey Holmes observed that little could be known about the political views of the electorates of tiny constituencies like the Yorkshire village of Aldborough, or the Cornish ‘rotten boroughs’.¹ The small town of Mitchell in mid-Cornwall perhaps constituted one of these boroughs. The settlement was unremarkable aside from the roads from St Columb to Truro,

[★]Judged *proxime accessit* for the *Parliamentary History* Essay Prize, 2017.

[†]I would like to thank Grant Tapsell, Kathleen Keown, and the *Parliamentary History* judging panel for their comments on previous drafts of this article. I am also pleased to acknowledge financial assistance from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Cornwall Heritage Trust, and the Oxford University Cornwall Society.

¹Geoffrey Holmes, *The Electorate and the National Will in the First Age of Party* (Lancaster, 1975), 5.

and from Launceston to St Ives. In 1715, Browne Willis described it as no more than a 'small Hamlet, scarce containing thirty Houses, all Cottages, save one, which is a publick Inn ... the only til'd House in this poor Borough'.² Its archaic franchise traditionally left the election of MPs entirely at the discretion of the lords of the manor, the Arundell family of Lanherne. When this franchise was replaced in 1689 by one based on residency in the borough, *The History of Parliament* states that the town's inhabitants simply 'sold themselves to the highest bidder'.³ Ostensibly, then, any electioneering within Mitchell can tell us little about the political opinions of the electorate. However, closer study reveals a multifaceted and divided community, which experienced a high degree of partisan conflict during the later Stuart period.

Since the 1980s, historians have increasingly stressed the social depth of political opinion, and the important role played by popular political agitation.⁴ To an extent, Holmes himself was a pioneer of this movement. Alongside scholars such as W.A. Speck, Derek Hirst, and J.H. Plumb, he ascribed great significance to the role of the electorate in determining the outcome of elections during the Stuart period.⁵ More recently, historians have conceived of the public more expansively, arguing that huge numbers of people beyond the enfranchised classes held political views, and could engage in the political process in numerous ways – from rioting to participation in local government.⁶ Mark Knights believes that during the later Stuart period, Britain underwent a 'significant shift towards a representative society'. Changes including more frequent elections, the lapse of pre-publication licensing, emergence of party politics, creation of public debt, and growth of ideological conflict, offered the public a new routine and participatory role in political culture.⁷ However, the critical focus remains overwhelmingly on London and provincial towns with large electorates.⁸

²Browne Willis, *Notitia Parliamentaria: or, An History of the Counties, Cities, and Boroughs in England and Wales* (2 vols, 1715), ii, 155.

³*The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1690–1715*, ed. Eveline Cruickshanks, Stuart Handley and D.W. Hayton (5 vols, Cambridge, 2002) [hereafter cited as *HPC, 1690–1715*], i, 126.

⁴See Tim Harris, 'Understanding Popular Politics in Restoration Britain', in *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steven Pincus (Cambridge, 2001), 125–53.

⁵Holmes, *Electorate and the National Will*; Geoffrey Holmes, *The Making of a Great Power: Late Stuart and Early Georgian Britain, 1660–1722* (1993), 324–33; W.A. Speck, *Tory and Whig: The Struggle in the Constituencies, 1701–1715* (1970), ch. 2; W.A. Speck, 'The Electorate in the First Age of Party', in *Britain in the First Age of Party, 1680–1750*, ed. Clyve Jones (1987), 45–62; Derek Hirst, *The Representative of the People?: Voters and Voting in England under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1975), chs 2–4; J.H. Plumb, 'The Growth of the Electorate in England from 1600 to 1715', *Past & Present*, No. 45 (1969), 90–116.

⁶See *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 2001).

⁷Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005), esp. ch. 1.

⁸E.g., Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration to the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987); Gary S. De Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party, 1688–1715* (Oxford, 1985); Perry Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660–1722* (Oxford, 1996). One exception is John Triffitt, 'Politics and the Urban Community: Parliamentary Boroughs in the South West of England, 1710–1730', University of Oxford DPhil, 1985. Triffitt studies politics in seven south-western towns (Bridgwater, Dartmouth, Plymouth, Taunton, Tavistock, Tiverton, and Totnes) in the early 18th century. However, all were relatively large urban centres with a substantial 'middling sort'. There have also been detailed studies of individual pocket boroughs in *Northern History* which focus on the 18th century: Henry French, 'The Creation of a Pocket Borough in Clitheroe, Lancashire, 1693–1780: "Honour and Odd Tricks"', *Northern History*, xli (2004), 301–26; Joseph M. Fewster, 'The Earls of Carlisle and Morpeth: A Turbulent Pocket Borough', *Northern History*, li (2014), 242–62.

Knights himself admits that he is referring primarily to 'English civic communities'.⁹ It is unclear whether a popular political culture existed in small, rural communities like Mitchell, and, if it did, how it manifested.

This article provides an account of partisan politics during parliamentary elections in Mitchell – a small, rural constituency on the geographical periphery with an ostensibly strong proprietorial interest. The Exclusion Parliaments of 1679–81, combined with the Triennial Act of 1694, meant that general elections occurred at a rate of one every two-and-a-half years during the later Stuart period. In Mitchell, an extraordinary number of these elections were contested: between 1660 and 1714, 78% of elections were contested, compared with a figure of 23% among Cornwall's other borough constituencies.¹⁰ While it should be stressed that elections were neither the only, nor the most routine, opportunity available for the lower orders to engage in the political process, a remarkable run of surviving Mitchell poll sheets sheds fascinating light on the electoral process in that town. They cover elections held in 1673, 1679 (twice), 1681, 1685, 1689 (twice), 1690, 1695, 1697 (twice), 1698, 1705, and 1713; when read in unison, they reconstruct a long-standing conflict which is lost in the *Commons Journals*.¹¹

Mitchell demonstrates that a borough with a small electorate could have a lively political culture. Partisan conflict in the town revolved around the nature of the franchise: from February 1679, an organised group of often-disenfranchised inhabitants launched a sustained and independent assault on the lord of the borough's limited franchise, in favour of an inhabitant-based vote. A combination of factors made their challenge successful, notably three elections in quick succession in 1679–81 at a time when the lord of the borough's influence was undermined by his Roman catholicism. While this dispute appears to have been initially motivated by popular resentment of the restrictive franchise, a degree of venality also certainly played a role. There was not always a clear correlation between those who supported and opposed the traditional franchise and party allegiances, but, during the 1690s, certain whig candidates became associated with the new inhabitant-based franchise. Once this wider franchise was established, however, the case of Mitchell highlights how precarious the ability of the electorate to determine the outcome of elections could be. The local gentry, in conjunction with a loyal bloc of inhabitants, regained control of elections, and by the early 18th century the influence of the inhabitants had been diminished once again.

2. Elections and the Electorate

Since partisan conflict in Mitchell was centred on the nature of the borough's franchise, it is worth briefly elaborating how this franchise functioned. In many respects, Mitchell was a textbook pocket borough operating under an idiosyncratic and archaic franchise: at

⁹Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation*, 25.

¹⁰Calculated from *HPC, 1690–1715* constituency entries, plus a hitherto unknown contest at Grampound in 1710: Cornwall RO [hereafter cited as CRO], CF/1/4545.

¹¹CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 1r–21r: Mitchell poll sheets, 1673–1713, plus contemporary transcripts on ff. 22r–24r; AR/3/55: Mitchell poll sheet, 4 Aug. 1698; AR/10/18/36: John Stephens to George Bere, 6 Aug. 1698, including Mitchell poll sheet; Devon Heritage Centre [hereafter cited as DHC], 1262M/0/O/EP/1: Mitchell poll sheet, 19 May 1705.

an election, the lord of the manor selected two 'elizers' from the borough's inhabitants, who, in turn, appointed a further 22 men to form a jury of electors.¹² A portreeve acted as returning officer (the official responsible for conducting the election), who was elected annually at the manor court by a jury of principal inhabitants chosen by Arundell's steward. The portreeve was always selected out of the five major landowners in the borough – known as 'mesne' or 'deputy' lords – and the position was traditionally rotated between the families: Vyvyan of Trelowarren, Borlase of Truthan, Courtney of Trethurfe, Boscawen of Tregothnan, and Gully of St Enoder.¹³ As returning officer, this office gained tangible importance after the Arundells' traditional franchise was challenged and eventually replaced with an inhabitant-based franchise.

The electorate of Mitchell was far from static, and was permeated with complex social relationships. Given the breadth of their various occupations, wealth, and status, it is perhaps unsurprising that it was a deeply divided community. Between 1673 and 1714, at least 154 different men voted in Mitchell. On those occasions when an inhabitant franchise was in operation, the voterate (the number who voted, as opposed to the number who were eligible to vote)¹⁴ remained relatively consistent at around 43, decreasing slightly as the period progressed. This decrease was probably a result of partisan returning officers rejecting voters in the early 18th century, as two lists of adult male inhabitants in 1679 and c.1710 suggest that the town's population remained fairly consistent.¹⁵ The high rate of turnover between the voterates listed in the Mitchell poll sheets for the 1705 and 1713 general elections has led W.A. Speck and J.H. Plumb to argue that small boroughs had unstable and inconsistent electorates.¹⁶ However, their calculation of a 50% turnover is slightly exaggerated – rather, Mitchell's turnover averaged at about 40% (Table 1)¹⁷. If we take two runs of three poll sheets, 1679–89 and 1698–1713, we find that in both sets of elections about 20% of voters appeared at all three polls, and 57% at two. The consistency between these two periods suggests that this level of turnover was a natural cycle in the town; men died and were replaced by their sons, and families came and went.

Although the evidence is incomplete, it is possible to build something of a portrait of Mitchell's community. Ranging widely in rank and occupation, the community included a tinner, feltmonger, butcher, shopkeeper, husbandman, and minor gentleman – but was predominantly comprised of yeomen.¹⁸ In terms of wealth, there were also vast disparities. One voter was pejoratively described as one who 'begs at the Door' and another allegedly

¹²'Eliser, law, one of two persons appointed in certain cases to select a jury', *Oxford English Dictionary*, available at <http://www.oed.com>; CRO, AR/10/132: George Bere to Frances Bellings, 17 Nov. 1701; *CJ*, viii, 92.

¹³Willis, *Notitia Parliamentaria*, ii, 156–7; CRO, AR/3/74: voting rights in Mitchell, [nd]; AR/10/494: George Bere to Richard Bellings-Arundell, 16 Sept. 1714. For profiles of some of the key individuals, see *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1660–1690*, ed. B.D. Henning (3 vols, 1983) [hereafter cited as *HPC, 1660–90*], i, 682–3, 686–90; ii, 147; iii, 646; *HPC, 1690–1715*, iii, 265–72, 754; v, 759–60.

¹⁴On this distinction see Stephen W. Baskerville, Peter Adman and Katharine F. Beedham, 'The Dynamics of Landlord Influence in English County Elections, 1701–1734: The Evidence from Cheshire', *Parliamentary History*, xii (1993), 129.

¹⁵CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 6v, 34r: lists of Mitchell inhabitants, 1679, [c.1710]. Both have 40–4 names.

¹⁶Speck, *Tory and Whig*, 19–20; Plumb, 'Growth of the Electorate', 114–15.

¹⁷By-elections are italicised in all tables.

¹⁸Evidence collected from wills at CRO.

Table 1: *Voterates and Turnover in Mitchell Poll Sheets, 1679–1713*

Election	Voterate	Number of new voters (%)
Feb. 1679	46	
Feb. 1681	56	21 (38%)
Sept. 1689	41	19 (46%)
Mar. 1690	41	5 (12%)
Aug. 1698	42	21 (50%)
May 1705	39	12 (31%)
Sept. 1713	33	12 (36%)

had to be supplied with a cow by the parish, while surviving leases also reveal wealthier inhabitants such as Josias Free and Frederick Vincent.¹⁹ The electorate therefore represented a wide swathe of social ranks and occupations.

While they were not completely clear-cut, two rival factions emerged in Mitchell during the conflict over the borough's franchise. The first favoured the traditional system, and included most of the town's corporation, such as Josias Free, Frederick Vincent, Robert Hellens, and Richard Hellens. That most of them could sign their names in 1690, implies a degree of literacy, education, and affluence typical of the 'middling sort'.²⁰ This group appears to have shrunk somewhat after the 1680s, with a significant proportion of reliable supporters of the old franchise disappearing. None the less, their wealth gave them substantial influence. Two further members of the corporation (neither of whom could sign their names), John Hicks and Robert Paul, were said to have lived with Vincent, and it was implied that he could influence his tenants' votes.²¹ Less is known of the rival faction which pushed for a wider franchise. Only two of them were listed as members of the town's corporation in 1690, and of the three for whom there is evidence, only one could sign his name. It is likely that their wealth and education was inferior to the first group's. Although an incomplete picture, the evidence points towards a small community which was deeply divided in terms of wealth, education, and influence.

3. *The 'Pocket' Borough, 1660–89*

Following the Restoration, there is strong evidence that Mitchell was a quintessential 'pocket' borough under the influence of Sir John Arundell. The Arundell family had been settled at Lanherne Manor in the parish of Mawgan in Pydar since the early 13th century, and over the centuries had acquired vast estates in Cornwall and across the west country. A resolute royalist during the civil wars and interregnum, Sir John was part of a powerful loyalist Cornish coalition after the Restoration, alongside Richard Arundell (a distant

¹⁹ *CJ*, x, 306–7; *CRO*, AR/1/931; GP/537; R/1749: leases, land in Mitchell.

²⁰ *CRO*, WH/1/5192, f. 31r: presentments of Mitchell court, 27 Oct. 1690.

²¹ *CJ*, x, 306–7.

relation), baron of Trerice, and Sir John Granville, earl of Bath.²² Despite his recusancy, Arundell was appointed commander-in-chief of all Cornish horse troops by Lord Lieutenant Bath, and assisted in the political and military management of the county.²³ During the 1660s, the Bath–Arundell–Arundell cabal utilised the traditional 'elizer'-based franchise to return a string of court-supporting lawyers and government agents.²⁴

This conveyor belt of courtiers was only upset by an apparently independent challenge by one of the deputy lords of the borough, Humphrey Borlase. Borlase was something of an enigma. Although, like Arundell, he hailed from a prominent catholic and royalist family, Borlase proved to be a persistent thorn in Arundell's side – in 1660 he challenged Mitchell's traditional franchise by claiming that the right of election belonged 'to the Commonalty at large'.²⁵ Moreover, during the Exclusion Crisis (1679–81), Borlase was thought to favour the exclusion of the catholic, James, duke of York, from the line of succession, and later committed a *volte-face* to become one of James II's foremost Cornish allies.²⁶ He stood for election at Mitchell six times between 1660 and 1681, succeeding only once at a by-election in 1673. Yet, despite his ill fortunes, Borlase's indenture at a double return in 1661 was signed by 30 inhabitants.²⁷ His ability to generate wide support among Mitchell's inhabitants for a larger electorate would prove a worrying portent for Arundell's interest in the borough.

It was not until the three fraught elections to the Exclusion Parliaments of 1679–81 that an opportunity arose for a serious assault on the traditional franchise. Three candidates proceeded to the poll: two local court supporters presumably backed by Bath, Sir John St Aubyn and Walter Vincent, and the indefatigable Humphrey Borlase.²⁸ At the poll, Arundell's agent nominated 'elizers' and formed a jury in the 'Antient accustomed way of Chusinge Burgesses', but was afterwards forced to take the votes of an additional 24 inhabitants. He noted that: 'I did refuse to swear them ... & those votes were taken only to please the common people & nothing else.'²⁹ Interestingly, however, virtually every vote – of both the jury and 'common people' – was cast for St Aubyn and Vincent. If those who had insisted on voting in a broader franchise were encouraged by Borlase, it failed to alter the outcome of the election. Yet this was, none the less, a partisan act: a popular challenge to oligarchic rule within the borough by those who were disenfranchised and deemed illegitimate.³⁰

²²Mary Coate, *Cornwall in the Great Civil War and Interregnum, 1642–1660: A Social and Political Study* (2nd edn, Truro, 1963), 255–6, 285, 289–90, 301. For the parliamentary careers of Granville and Arundell, see *The History of Parliament: The House of Lords 1660–1715*, ed. Ruth Paley (5 vols, Cambridge, 2016), ii, 79–83; iii, 134–52. The ties between the Arundells were further strengthened in 1677 when Sir John took Lord Arundell's sister as his second wife: CRO, AR/17/118–125: law suit relating to the marriage of Sir John Arundell and Anne Arundell, c.1677–1681.

²³CRO, AR/22/39: appointment of Sir John Arundell, commander of horse troops, 20 Jan. 1661.

²⁴HPC, 1660–90, i, 171–2.

²⁵HPC, 1660–90, i, 171–2; CJ, viii, 92.

²⁶HPC, 1660–90, i, 682–3; George Duckett, *Penal Laws and Test Act, Part I* (1882), 370–2, 377–8, 379.

²⁷HPC, 1660–90, i, 171.

²⁸Two others canvassed: an outsider named Charles Smyth (brother-in-law of Lord John Robartes), and John Tremayne (son of a former royalist officer), but neither proceeded to the poll: HPC, 1660–90, i, 171–2; CRO, T/1740: Lewes Tremayne to [unknown], 1 Feb. 1679.

²⁹CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 4r–5r: Mitchell poll sheet, 10 Feb. 1679.

³⁰On partisanship, see Paul D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998), 6–11.

Table 2: *Mitchell Election Results, 1679–81*

Election	Candidates	Jury's votes	Additional votes
Feb. 1679	SIR JOHN ST AUBYN (1st Bt)	24	24
	WALTER VINCENT	23	23
	Humphrey Borlase	1	0
	Charles Smythe	0	1
Aug. 1679	SIR JOHN ST AUBYN	17	
	WALTER VINCENT	18	
	Humphrey Borlase	1	
		<i>6 refused to vote</i>	
Feb. 1681	SIR WILLIAM RUSSELL	24	5
	HENRY VINCENT	23	8
	Humphrey Borlase	1	28
	Nicholas Borlase	0	23

This was not necessarily concurrent with the rise of political parties in Westminster. As Paul Halliday demonstrates, partisan politics of this kind had existed in corporations since at least the Restoration.³¹ It was only during subsequent elections that party divisions were seemingly injected into Mitchell. The second election of 1679 resulted in the same candidates defeating Borlase again. This time, Arundell's agent tried to reassert his employer's authority by only taking votes from members of the traditionally-nominated jury. In protest, six men refused to vote altogether – a tactic which became increasingly commonplace thereafter.³² Borlase's only recourse was to protest the election of his rivals by submitting a petition to the committee of elections and privileges, which the house of commons adjudicated.³³ His unsuccessful petition was accompanied by one from 'the Portreve and Burgesses of the Borough', though it is unclear whether this was in support of, or in opposition to, an enlarged franchise.³⁴ In any case, popular support for Borlase was confirmed during the 1681 election to the Oxford parliament. A jury was formed in the usual custom, which voted almost unanimously for two new Tories ahead of Humphrey Borlase and his son, Nicholas. As in February 1679, however, an additional 32 inhabitants insisted on voting afterwards, with Arundell's agent again refusing to swear them in.³⁵ Significantly, this time most of the additional votes were cast for the Borlases.

Between February 1679 and the beginning of 1681, party conflict had erupted in Mitchell. What had begun as a challenge to the traditional franchise and ruling oligarchy, ended as a conflict between Tories and Whigs. However, this was only achieved due to the

³¹Halliday, *Body Politic*, 6–11.

³²CRO, WH/1/5192, f. 6r: Mitchell poll sheet, 30 Aug. 1679.

³³See W.A. Speck, '“The Most Corrupt Council in Christendom”: Decisions on Controverted Elections, 1702–42', in *Party and Management in Parliament, 1660–1784*, ed. Clyve Jones (Leicester, 1984), 107–21.

³⁴CJ, ix, 638.

³⁵CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 7r–v: Mitchell poll sheet, 17 Feb. 1681.

convergence of numerous factors. In addition to frequent bitter elections and accompanying dissemination of political divisions, Sir John Arundell's catholicism had forced him into a self-imposed exile in France. In August 1678, in the aftermath of Titus Oates's public allegations of a popish plot to murder Charles II, Arundell was ordered either to conform to protestantism or leave the court following his appointment as master of the horse to Queen Catherine of Braganza. With a touch of melodrama, Arundell decided that he would sooner leave England altogether than 'retire to my owne house (where I am told however I have lived amongst my neybour I had not been ever wellcombe)', and fled to France until at least 1683.³⁶ During his exile, Arundell told a friend that 'you will hardly beleive how retrayed I am', and it was perhaps only in the context of Arundell's retirement to France throughout the Exclusion Crisis that challenges to his franchise in Mitchell were successful.³⁷

Although Arundell's agents upheld the franchise in his absence by only accepting votes from the jury, the poll sheet of 1681 shows that Humphrey Borlase would have been comfortably elected under a wider franchise. How had the borough swung from being unambiguously tory in February 1679, to become riddled with partisan conflict by 1681? Across England and Wales, it was not uncommon for the level of hostility to have grown by the second election of 1679, and, despite Mitchell's small size and remoteness, it was not impossible for conflict to have been disseminated by various forms of media and MPs themselves.³⁸ Yet it is difficult to identify any consistent ideology among the voters. Of the six who refused to vote in August 1679, two voted tory in 1681, three for the Borlases, and one split his vote. None the less, there was clearly a degree of organisation underpinning the final exclusion election: Arundell's agent oversaw the formation of a jury which unanimously voted tory. Similarly, the Borlases found a sizeable cohort of supporters to act collectively. The rapid expansion of the voterate, combined with the number of voters who had never voted before and would never appear in Mitchell again, suggests that the Borlases had manipulated the electorate – either by bringing people into the borough, including underage boys, or including the parish poor. The major difference between the first and final exclusion elections, then, was possibly more energy (and money) on the part of Borlase. Equally, however, he could not have been successful without pre-existing divisions within Mitchell's community, and an unusual degree of independence among the electorate, facilitated by both Arundell's absence and a crystallisation of political division.

The new-found independence of Mitchell's electorate did not last long. After enduring three parliaments in which the Commons was dominated by his opponents, Charles II utilised powerful tory–anglican support and increased revenues to rule for the remainder of his lifetime without parliament. Meanwhile, the crown purged disloyal local officeholders from commissions of the peace and corporations. By 1683, the king could innovatively use writs of *quo warranto* to force boroughs to surrender their charters, and then re-grant them after the political make-up of the magistracy had been adjusted.³⁹ Arundell had barely returned to England when he was informed that the earl of Bath required the surrender

³⁶CRO, AR/25/49: Sir John Arundell to [unknown], [c.1679].

³⁷CRO, AR/25/56: Sir John Arundell to Sir John Chicheley, Jan. 1680 [draft reply].

³⁸John Miller, *After the Civil Wars: English Politics and Government in the Reign of Charles II* (2000), 258.

³⁹Halliday, *Body Politic*, 191–212, 236; Robert Pickavance, 'The English Boroughs and the King's Government: A Study of the Tory Reaction, 1681–85', University of Oxford DPhil, 1976, pp. 173, 179–80.

Table 3: *Mitchell Election Results, 1689–90*

Election	Candidates	Jury's votes	Additional votes
Jan. 1689	CHARLES FANSHAWE (4th Viscount Fanshawe)	24	
	FRANCIS VIVIAN	24	
	Humphrey Courtney	0	
Sept. 1689	WILLIAM CORYTON <i>vice</i> Fanshawe, discharged		23
	Humphrey Courtney		19
	COURTNEY <i>vice</i> CORYTON, on petition		
Mar. 1690	FRANCIS SCOBELL	14	12
	ANTHONY ROWE	10	21
	Humphrey Courtney	2	17
	Sir James Eyly	1	0
	John Vincent	1	0
	Mr Huddy	0	4
		11 refused <i>to vote</i>	
	COURTNEY <i>vice</i> ROWE, on petition		

of Mitchell's charter, promising that 'y[ou]r Interest such as to have it againe with more advantage then now'.⁴⁰

Historians have questioned the extent to which the crown's charter policy was aimed at manipulating elections, but Mitchell's new charter certainly overhauled the borough's franchise and restored Arundell's authority.⁴¹ The electorate now comprised a mayor and 17 freemen – largely local tory gentry (including three Arundells).⁴² Six members of the town's corporation were also named, all of whom had consistently voted for court candidates in 1679–81. This group, featuring stalwarts such as Frederick Vincent and Richard Hellens, indicates that a tory bloc existed within the borough which was loyal to Bath and Arundell. Upon the king's death in 1685, James II issued writs for a new parliament, and Bath effortlessly managed the election of two tories in Mitchell.⁴³

The re-establishment of Arundell's authority was equally short-lived, however. James's rule raised a whole spectrum of concerns; from his promotion of catholics to military and civil offices, to his use of the royal prerogative to disable penal laws against dissenters and his co-religionists. By 1688, his tory-anglican support was disintegrating, and the protestant William of Orange was preparing to invade. One of James's final proclamations cancelled all borough charters since 1679, and it was not long before the traditional franchise of Mitchell was again challenged.⁴⁴

⁴⁰CRO, AR/25/96: J. Newman to Sir John Arundell, 20 Nov. 1684; AR/10/36: earl of Bath to Sir John Arundell, 3 Dec. 1684.

⁴¹For discussion of crown efforts to alter franchises, see Halliday, *Body Politic*, 252; Pickavance, 'English Boroughs', chs 4–5.

⁴²CRO, AD107/22: Mitchell charter, 1685.

⁴³CRO, WH/1/5192, f. 9r: Mitchell poll sheet, 7 May 1685.

⁴⁴Halliday, *Body Politic*, 257–8.

The years 1689–90 witnessed a spate of contested elections in Mitchell, which revived partisan tensions. The election to the Convention Parliament of 1689 was conducted smoothly: a jury unanimously returned two tories, seeing off a new challenger: Humphrey Courtney, a deputy lord of the borough whose wife-cousin had inherited her brother's Trethurfe estate in 1683. Another ambiguous character, Courtney had a slight whiggish bent at the time of the revolution when working alongside Borlase, but shifted firmly to toryism in 1690.⁴⁵ Despite the smoothness with which the general election of 1689 was conducted, divisions soon resurfaced. When one of Mitchell's sitting members, Charles, Viscount Fanshawe, refused to take the oaths to William and Mary, a tense by-election ensued. Courtney stood against a Cornish tory, William Coryton. Arundell's agent, Peter Champion, selected two 'elizers' as usual, but failed to find enough inhabitants willing to be sworn into a jury. The election therefore proceeded by a popular vote, which Coryton won.⁴⁶ Fierce electioneering had taken place on the ground. Arundell's agents and the portreeve, Francis Gully, were accused of conspiring to illegally return Coryton, which was countered by claims that Courtney had withheld the election writ.⁴⁷ Those who had refused to be sworn into a jury testified that they had been subjected to 'threatings' by Courtney and his ally, Borlase, and feared 'being presented or sued by them'.⁴⁸

When a petition was lodged to the committee of elections and privileges by Courtney, claiming that the borough operated under a wider franchise, the Commons resolved that the right of election rested with 'the Lords of the said Borough, who are liable to be Chosen Portreeves of the same; and in the Householders of the said Borough not receiving Alms'. A procession of witnesses followed, who argued over which voters should be considered 'householders'. Ultimately, the arguments only served to reinforce divisions in the borough, as the House voted on obvious party lines, and seated the whiggishly-inclined Courtney. The report from the committee is significant for three reasons. First, it threatened to destroy Arundell's traditional franchise in favour of a popular householder-based vote. For the remainder of the 1690s, Arundell's agents persisted with the old franchise, while defeated candidates consistently petitioned the Commons based on this new franchise. Second, it laid bare the significance of the committee process itself; Coryton went so far as to print sheets of his defence and distribute them among MPs, as he knew they could easily unseat him. Finally, it provided the first clear evidence of bribery and threats. Two voters had allegedly offered to switch their allegiance for 40s., but were threatened with arrest by Borlase were they to do so.⁴⁹

This represented an astounding victory for a previously disenfranchised group of inhabitants. For over a decade, they had consistently put pressure on the Arundells' limited franchise, and overthrown an oligarchic system of election. This took a remarkable degree of local organisation which, whether by design or not, skilfully took advantage of the committee of elections and privileges' system to widen the town's franchise. Although they tended to side with whigs from 1681, it is not clear whether their push for enfranchisement was motivated by a dislike of Arundell's or the corporation's political views. It is equally possible

⁴⁵ HPC, 1660–90, i, 171–2; ii, 147.

⁴⁶ CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 12r–v: Mitchell poll sheet, 18 Sept. 1689.

⁴⁷ CJ, x, 272–3; *The Case of William Coryton, Esq; for the Borough of Mitchell* (1689).

⁴⁸ CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 24r–v: testimony of Mitchell inhabitants, 26 Oct. 1689.

⁴⁹ CJ, x, 306–7; *Case of William Coryton*.

that they sought to reap the material rewards that a vote could bring. None the less, party politics had clearly seeped into the borough, whether originating in the candidates or the voters.

4. The 'Open' Borough, 1689–1701

The Commons' ruling on Mitchell's franchise in 1689 ushered in a new era – one in which, despite its small electorate, the borough shared numerous characteristics with other towns with inhabitant-based franchises. They were often 'open' to numerous interests, and the poverty of their electorates made them especially susceptible to bribery, which, in turn, encouraged an influx of wealthy outsiders to stand as candidates.⁵⁰ Bribery became especially prevalent in Cornwall during the remainder of the Stuart period, to the extent that Robert Price could refer to an election being 'cornwallised' in Herefordshire, by 'scattering some guineas illegally'.⁵¹ However, Mitchell's electorate was not a monolith to be simply bought off. Sir John Arundell spent the 1690s doggedly attempting to preserve his traditional franchise, and could usually rely upon the same cohort of inhabitants to form a jury as he had done before the revolution. He was not necessarily concerned about *who* was elected, but in *how* they were elected. His chief concern was to retain his family's ancient interest. As he explained in the context of preserving his Church of England advowsons: 'I desire to conserve to thos that come after me what has beine left by thos that weare before me.'⁵² In many respects, his success in preserving his franchise highlights how difficult it was for an electorate to remain independent from the borough patron in a constituency like Mitchell.

After 1689, the political situation also shifted in Mitchell. Borlase joined James II in exile in France, leaving Courtney to swing towards his preferred toryism. At the election to William and Mary's first parliament, Courtney stood as a tory alongside another Cornish tory, Francis Scobell. Against them appeared a new whig challenger: Anthony Rowe, an active supporter of William of Orange in 1688. The arrival of Rowe typified the new phase the borough had entered. He stood as candidate six times between 1690 and 1701, dispersing ample cash along the way. Yet his industrious efforts ended in spectacular failure – he was only elected twice, for a total of ten months, before twice being unseated on petition for bribery. Towards the end of his lifetime, a tory pamphlet lampooned that '*Anthony's* misfortune was, Not to *Bribe* the Right Electors, or the Majority'.⁵³

However, bribery was not Rowe's only election tactic. At his first attempt, in March 1690, he was accused of dispersing 'divers scandalous Libels, reflecting upon several Members of the last House of Commons'.⁵⁴ The introduction of whig propaganda suggests that ideological divisions did exist among Mitchell's inhabitants, but the appeal to the voters' consciences was characteristically backed up with gold: Rowe offered £6 for a vote,

⁵⁰ HPC, 1690–1715, i, 107–19.

⁵¹ HMC, Portland MSS, v, 326–7.

⁵² CRO, AR/25/93: Sir John Arundell to bishop of Exeter, [1676–88].

⁵³ *The Old and Modern Whig Truly Represented* (2nd edn, 1702), 28.

⁵⁴ CJ, x, 355. This was *A Letter to a Friend, upon the Dissolution of the Late Parliament ... Together with a List of those that were against making the Prince and Princess of Orange, King and Queen* (1690).

including a guinea for their wives.⁵⁵ Despite parliament's ruling on Mitchell's franchise, Peter Champion selected 'elizers' and formed a jury as usual. Emboldened by the ruling, however, an unprecedented 11 members refused to vote, and later returned to force Champion to poll their votes with the rest of the borough's householders.⁵⁶ In alliance with the portreeve and returning officer (Francis Gully again), Champion simply returned indentures based on the jury's vote, which Scobell and Rowe won. The failure of this intervention highlights the instability of the enlarged electorate's influence. Courtney was left to protest Rowe's election with a petition, arguing that he had won votes through bribery and libel.⁵⁷ The House found Rowe guilty, and seated Courtney in his place.⁵⁸ Those inhabitants who had accepted bribes had certainly profited materially from the new franchise, but if the aim had been to gain more electoral influence, then it had not been an obvious triumph.

Yet it is unclear whether there had ever been a unified motive behind the fight for a broader franchise. Moreover, those who had favoured a broader franchise in 1679–81 were increasingly no longer members of the electorate by the 1690s. Mitchell had undergone significant demographic changes; only 50% of the 1681 voter rate returned in 1690. Many of the well-established families – the Frees, Hellens, Vincents, Rickards, and Starts – persisted, but there was also an injection of new families, prominent among them were the Dolbridges, Julians, Grosses. All three families were named as members of Mitchell's corporation and preferred the householder franchise, so that oligarchic unity in support of the traditional franchise was beginning to weaken.

Voting behaviour between the September 1689 by-election and 1690 general election does suggest that Mitchell's inhabitants held consistent political views, but also that the dispute over the franchise was not necessarily allied to these political ideologies. Every inhabitant who voted for Coryton in 1689 gave one of his votes to Scobell in 1690, and, likewise, every voter for Courtney in 1689, voted for him again in 1690. The second votes of each of these groups, however, were evenly split between the two remaining candidates. For example, every Courtney supporter in September 1689, voted for him again in 1690 – but six gave their second vote to a tory, five to a whig, and three to Courtney's associate, 'Mr. Huddy', who was not even listed as a candidate. It was common practice in England for voters to 'reserve' one vote, but keep the other independent.⁵⁹ However, if one focuses on the 11 men who had refused to vote as part of a jury in 1690, it becomes apparent that they were not acting on behalf of a single candidate – their votes were evenly divided among the three main candidates. Rather, it seems that they acted on their own initiative and held a range of views from across the political spectrum.

The ambiguous position of the electorate continued for the remainder of the 1690s; they continued to profit from elections, but could not fully determine their outcome. Almost a year before the 1695 general election, Rowe gave several bullocks to the town, and distributed beef among the inhabitants closer to the poll.⁶⁰ Although enlarged polls were taken of all householders (which unfortunately do not survive), Arundell's agents continued to

⁵⁵ CJ, x, 469–70.

⁵⁶ CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 14r–v: Mitchell poll sheet, 5 Mar. 1690.

⁵⁷ CJ, x, 355.

⁵⁸ CJ, x, 469–70.

⁵⁹ Holmes, *Great Power*, 332 n. 6.

⁶⁰ CJ, xi, 690.

Table 4: Mitchell Election Results, 1695–8

Election	Candidates	Jury's votes	Additional votes
Oct. 1695	HUMPHREY COURTNEY	12	
	THOMAS VIVIAN	13	
	ANTHONY ROWE	5	
	THOMAS DODSON	0	
		10 refused to vote	
Mar. 1697	<i>Double return, COURTNEY and VIVIAN seated</i>		
	JOHN POVEY <i>vice</i> Vivian, chose to sit for Fowey	17	
	John Tregagle	0	
	Arthur Fortescue	0	
	Anthony Rowe	0	
		8 refused to vote	
Mar. 1697	JOHN TREGAGLE <i>vice</i> Courtney, deceased	17	
	Arthur Fortescue	1	
	Anthony Rowe	0	
		7 refused to vote	
Aug. 1698	SIR JOHN HAWLES	15	0
	JOHN POVEY	16	1
	Sir Richard Blackham (1st Bt)	2	24
	Anthony Rowe	1	25
		7 refused to vote	

undermine the wider franchise by affixing indentures to the election writ based solely on the jury's vote – albeit with some members consistently refusing to vote. In 1695, Rowe countered by attaching his own indentures to the writ in London, but a protracted and fiercely partisan series of debates in the house of commons saw his two tory opponents emerge victorious.⁶¹ Arundell's opposition was not necessarily to Rowe himself – he had, after all, seen him elected in 1690 – but resulted from an innate desire to maintain his interest in the borough.

The typical means by which Arundell preserved his traditional franchise was by colluding with the borough's returning officer, the portreeve. Before the 1698 general election, his agents, Peter Champion and George Bere, approached the portreeve – Cornwall's leading whig, Hugh Boscawen – and convinced him to continue with the old franchise by promising to rig the jury in favour of his nominated court-supporting candidates.⁶² In opposition

⁶¹ CJ, xi, 343, 356–7, 361, 567–8, 603, 690; HPC, 1690–1715, ii, 91–3; CRO, AR/25/116: John Tregagle to Sir John Arundell, 6 Feb. 1697.

⁶²CRO, AR/3/56: Peter Champion to Sir John Arundell, 8 Aug. 1698.

stood Rowe and an incomer, Sir Richard Blackham, a wealthy Turkey merchant who had spent three weeks in the Fleet for bribery offences, leading one commentator to note wryly that he was therefore 'a fitt Companion for Mr. Rowe'.⁶³ On election day, Boscawen 'would not accept a noise which were not of the Jury', and his candidates were returned, with seven members refusing to vote.⁶⁴ Unlike the previous elections of the 1690s, a second enlarged poll survives among the Arundell papers, which shows that Rowe and Blackham had comfortably won the popular vote.⁶⁵ Through their alliance with the deputy lords, Arundell and his agents repeatedly undermined the popular vote in Mitchell.

Yet Arundell was not working alone; he relied upon a loyal cohort of inhabitants who repeatedly voted as part of a jury. In 1698, Champion claimed that the 'most antient Inhabitants of the Towne' had insisted on the old franchise, and labelled their opponents 'disturbers of their rights'.⁶⁶ He was doubtless referring to families such as the Frees, Vincents, and Hellens, who had formed a loyal bulwark by consistently voting in juries since 1673, and usually backed candidates nominated by Arundell or his allies. Equally, however, there were several inhabitants who would consistently refuse to cast a vote once named to the jury, and who pressed for a broader franchise. Thomas Rickard, for example, was a supporter of Anthony Rowe after 1690, and was described as 'one of the greatest opposers' of Arundell's interest in Mitchell.⁶⁷ It was undoubtedly this cohort which unsuccessfully petitioned the committee of elections and privileges alongside Rowe and Blackham in 1698, accusing Boscawen's deputy, Frederick Vincent, of 'illegal Practices ... in great Violation of the Petitioners Right'.⁶⁸ Champion regarded them with disdain; in the poll sheet, their votes were headed 'The Mob', and he informed Arundell that the majority were 'poore beings noe Scott or lott men'.⁶⁹

At the same time, the inhabitants increasingly voted along party lines. It became commonplace for the voter to cast their two votes for complementary candidates, probably because the two pairs of candidates acted in partnership.⁷⁰ Moreover, those who refused to vote in the jury were progressively more likely to vote whig. The seven men who refused in 1698 cast all but one of their 14 votes for the whigs, while virtually the entire remainder of the jury voted for the court candidates. Rowe's championing of the wider franchise was typical of a radical whig populism evident during the early 1690s. Yet he continued to advocate a popular franchise throughout the decade, despite the whig party nationally abandoning such a position before 1695, perhaps garnering himself a personal following in Mitchell as a result.⁷¹ It is therefore unclear how far voting patterns resulted from genuine allegiance to either party; the personal influence of key individuals – such as Rowe, Boscawen, and Arundell – certainly played a role. Venality was also a motivation: in 1695, one voter claimed that if the tories had matched Rowe's offer of £10, he would happily

⁶³ CRO, AR/10/18/36.

⁶⁴ CRO, AR/3/55–6.

⁶⁵ CRO, AR/10/18/36.

⁶⁶ CRO, AR/3/57: Peter Champion to Sir John Arundell, 19 Dec. 1698.

⁶⁷ CRO, AR/10/68: George Bere to Sir John Arundell, 12 Feb. 1700.

⁶⁸ CJ, xii, 350.

⁶⁹ CRO, AR/10/18/36; AR/3/57.

⁷⁰ In 1698, only four voters mixed their votes.

⁷¹ HPC, 1690–1715, i, 251–3.

have switched his vote.⁷² While some voters may have been ideologically driven, the ability of the electorate to determine the outcome of an election was never straightforward.

5. *The Portreeve's Borough, 1701–14*

In the final years of William's reign, an inhabitant-based franchise was unequivocally established in Mitchell after loyal support for Arundell's franchise crumbled during the first election of 1701. Three candidates stood: the whig, Anthony Rowe, and two Tories, Sir Richard Vyvyan (a deputy lord of the borough) and William Beaw (the brother-in-law of Lord Arundell of Trerice). The portreeve, Hugh Boscawen, again 'express'd a great deal of service' to Sir John Arundell and promised to preserve the traditional franchise in an uneasy alliance with Vyvyan. However, Boscawen struggled to nominate a deputy portreeve, with several inhabitants 'declining it at length'. When one John Greeby was finally chosen, it took 'a great deal of paines' to convince him to proceed via a jury. This was ultimately a moot point as 'all but Frede Vincent' refused to act as 'elizers', and Greeby was forced to continue by a popular vote, which was won by Rowe and Beaw.⁷³ Both had allegedly spent the weeks preceding the election bribing the inhabitants.⁷⁴ The losing candidate, Vyvyan, petitioned against the 'Bribery, and several other ill Practices' of Greeby, who had also been acting as Rowe's local agent. This presented an opportunity for several inhabitants to submit a petition of their own, ostensibly to support Vyvyan, but also to claim that the right of election was in the inhabitants paying scot-and-lot (or ratepayers) – a narrower franchise than had been determined in 1689. The Commons confirmed this new franchise, and subsequently seated Vyvyan in place of Rowe.⁷⁵

The election revealed a significant shift in the loyalties of Mitchell's inhabitants. Support for the traditional franchise was clearly fading among Arundell's old allies, as only the dependable Frederick Vincent was prepared to serve as an 'elizer'. It is likely that it was this faction – the 'most antient Inhabitants of the Towne' – who petitioned alongside Vyvyan. After all, the group which had spent the previous decade pushing for a wider franchise had consistently voted for Rowe, and was unlikely to have abruptly switched allegiance to Vyvyan. Moreover, George Bere implied that Arundell had lost the loyalty of *all* Mitchell's inhabitants when he lamented that 'the people there are grown very insolent'.⁷⁶ Why, then, had they petitioned to change the franchise? The answer is twofold. First, by this time the Tories had become the party which was more likely to take a populist stance, and Vyvyan no doubt encouraged Arundell's traditional allies to shift their position.⁷⁷ Second, their request for the vote to be limited to scot-and-lot payers was significant. This would have only enfranchised the more affluent townsmen and excluded the majority of their political opponents; as Champion had observed in 1698, most of Rowe's supporters were 'poore beings noe Scott or lott men'. The petition was therefore a compromise: the faction accepted

⁷² *CJ*, xi, 690.

⁷³ *CRO*, AR/10/110: George Bere to Sir John Arundell, 27 Jan. 1701.

⁷⁴ *HPC*, 1690–1715, ii, 91–3.

⁷⁵ *CJ*, xiii, 328, 335, 416–17.

⁷⁶ *CRO*, AR/10/110.

⁷⁷ *HPC*, 1690–1715, i, 252–3.

an inhabitant-based franchise, despite the damage it caused to Arundell's authority, so long as it strengthened their own position. As in 1679, the conflict revolved around contested views of who was deemed worthy of enfranchisement.

The motivations of Rowe's supporters remain opaque. As we have seen, Rowe continued to associate himself with the broader franchise in the years after the whig party had generally abandoned this position. It is likely that John Greeby had never genuinely wanted to use the traditional franchise, as shortly after the election it was reported that there was 'no extraordinary good understanding' between him and Arundell's agents.⁷⁸ There was doubtless some truth to the bishop of Exeter's claim that Rowe's supporters were simply inspired 'by his guineas'.⁷⁹ However, there were also strong links between Rowe and local nonconformists. His local agent, Greeby, was married into a local dissenting gentry family, the Flamanks of Gounrounsan in the parish of St Enoder. The Flamanks had long been a bulwark of dissent in Cornwall; since 1662, the ejected congregationalist, Henry Flamank, had ministered a conventicle at Gounrounsan, which was inherited and licensed by his brother, Roger, after the 1689 Toleration Act.⁸⁰ The Flamanks were also involved in electioneering at Mitchell – it was to Gounrounsan that Greeby sent members of Mitchell's electorate to collect their bribes.⁸¹ The close connections between Rowe, Greeby, and a local nonconformist family tantalisingly raises the possibility that attendees of this small congregation were inhabitants of Mitchell, and constituted the most determined supporters of Rowe and the whig cause. In this light, the impetus to exclude Rowe's voters from the electorate become clearer.

The unambiguous establishment of an inhabitant-based franchise had the paradoxical effect of further diminishing the inhabitants' ability to determine the outcome of elections. Instead, the portreeve held the balance of power. As returning officer, he could reject voters based on their perceived 'illegitimacy', and thus return his favoured candidates. As this scenario became increasingly common across England, there were fierce struggles to control strategic corporate offices – there was no simple correlation between larger electorates and more 'open' elections.⁸² In Mitchell, the principal adversaries became the two most influential deputy lords: the whig, Hugh Boscawen, and tory, Sir Richard Vyvyan.⁸³ Moreover, with the costs of an election in Mitchell soaring to £1,200 (due to 'barefac't bribery on all hands') the opposing party often preferred to leave the election uncontested, or only offer a token contest.⁸⁴ Between them, Boscawen and Vyvyan therefore determined the outcome of the final elections of Anne's reign.

With the loss of local support, the Arundell family finally resigned itself to the inhabitant-based franchise, and adopted a firm impartiality for the remainder of the period. As Bere surmised, any attempts to influence Mitchell elections would 'make many enemies and great ones too'.⁸⁵ Their local influence diminished further when Sir John died in October

⁷⁸CRO, AR/10/110.

⁷⁹DHC, Moger 'Basket C' 9: Sir Jonathan Trelawny to Francis Cooke, 18 Jan. 1701.

⁸⁰A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934), 200; H. Brown Miles, *The Church in Cornwall* (Truro, 1964), 84–5; CRO, AD103/17: deed by Roger Flamank, St Enoder, 17 July 1707.

⁸¹DHC, 1262M/0/O/EP/1: examinations of Alice Nicholas and Thomas Harvey, 17–19 Feb. 1709.

⁸²Halliday, *Body Politic*, 314; Speck, *Tory and Whig*, 50–1; *HPC, 1690–1715*, i, 253.

⁸³This Hugh Boscawen was the nephew and namesake of the aforementioned Hugh, who largely shared his uncle's politics and inherited his vast electoral interest.

⁸⁴CRO, AR/10/382: George Bere to Richard Bellings-Arundell, 25 Sept. 1710.

⁸⁵CRO, AR/1320.

Table 5: *Mitchell Election Results, 1701–2*

Election	Candidates
Jan. 1701	ANTHONY ROWE WILLIAM BEAW Sir Richard Vyvyan (3rd Bt.)
Dec. 1701	VYVYAN <i>vice</i> ROWE, on petition SIR RICHARD VYVYAN WILLIAM COURTNEY Philip Bertie Francis Painter
July 1702	RENATUS BELLOTT FRANCIS BASSETT William Courtney

1701, leaving the Lanherne estate to his daughter's London-based son, Richard Bellings-Arundell.⁸⁶ Although Bere repeatedly tried to persuade Lady Frances Bellings (Sir John's daughter) to 'insist upon the old way of electing', it proved impossible to do so without upsetting the residing portreeve. As the Arundell family's steward, Bere still supervised the election of the portreeve, which was increasingly a site of conflict due to the increased influence of the office. Bere was warned not to 'make any great opposition to any body', and he worked diligently to manage them impartially.⁸⁷ It was hoped that the elections could be resolved amicably by rotating the office between the five deputy lords of the borough. While this worked in 1708, both Boscawen and Vyvyan attempted to manipulate the date of the court in 1710 to gain control of the portreeveship, with the latter succeeding.⁸⁸

Throughout Anne's reign, the portreeve successfully returned his nominated candidates (Tables 5 and 6), and the electorate played an insignificant role in determining the outcome of these elections. In December 1701, 1702, and 1713, Vyvyan oversaw the election of tories, with the resulting petitions accusing him of rejecting legitimate votes.⁸⁹ Correspondingly, in 1705, Boscawen returned whigs, with a petition lodging the same allegations against him.⁹⁰ The Arundell poll sheet shows that Champion doggedly attempted to nominate two 'elizers', but that they 'refused to bee sworne accordinge to the antient waye' as it would be 'obnoxious' to the Commons' recent ruling.⁹¹ The elections of 1708 and 1710 went uncontested, as the portreeve's opponent deemed his chances of victory negligible – thus, Boscawen oversaw the election of whigs in 1708, and Vyvyan returned tories in 1710.

⁸⁶ *Post Boy*, 16–18 Oct. 1701.

⁸⁷ CRO, AR/10/132.

⁸⁸ See CRO, AR/10/324: George Bere to Richard Bellings-Arundell, 28 Oct. 1708; AD864/36: George Bere to Richard Bellings-Arundell, 11 Sept. 1710; AR/10/378–80: correspondence between Richard Bellings-Arundell, Sir Richard Vyvyan, and Hugh Boscawen, Sept. 1710.

⁸⁹ *CJ*, xiii, 652; xiv, 6.

⁹⁰ *CJ*, xv, 10, 21, 85.

⁹¹ CRO, WH/1/5192, f. 19r: Mitchell poll sheet, 19 May 1705; AR/10/247: George Bere to Frances Bellings, 21 May 1705.

Table 6: Mitchell Election Results, 1705–13

Election	Candidates	Votes
May 1705	SIR WILLIAM HODGES (1st Bt)	28
	HUGH FORTESCUE	39
	Chester Nance	13
May 1708	SIR WILLIAM HODGES	
	HUGH FORTESCUE	
Oct. 1710	ABRAHAM BLACKMORE	
	RICHARD BELASYSE	
Sept. 1713	SIR HENRY BELASYSE	29
	JOHN STATHAM	30
	Sir William Hodges	2
	Hugh Fortescue	6
	John Fortescue	1

Two poll sheets survive from the reign of Anne – for the 1705 and 1713 elections – which reveal remarkably inconsistent voting behaviour among the electorate.⁹² Of the 18 inhabitants who voted in both elections, only one gave his votes to the same party on each occasion. For W.A. Speck, this was evidence of a substantial ‘floating vote’ which determined its allegiance on the issues at hand.⁹³ However, this argument requires modification. The manipulation of the voterage by the portreeve has already been noted, and we must also account for the context of the elections. In 1705, only one tory candidate (Chester Nance) stood, and, not wanting to waste a vote, his supporters all gave their second vote to a whig candidate (Sir William Hodges or Hugh Fortescue). In 1713, when two tories stood (Sir Henry Belasyse and John Statham), all those who had previously voted for Nance gave both of their votes to the tories. This consistency in tory voting can be contrasted with the inconsistency of whig support. Despite a landslide whig victory in 1705 (for Hodges and Fortescue), their votes had completely dissipated by 1713, with almost every vote going to the tories.

Such a swing in voting patterns may have been driven by a number of factors. Deference to the respective portreeves, Boscawen and Vyvyan, perhaps played a role; alternatively, it is possible that the whigs decided to focus their resources elsewhere in 1713, making only a cursory challenge in Mitchell which failed to retain their previous support – it is notable that none of the losing candidates challenged the result. One must also account for changing national contexts between the two elections. From 1710, the whigs were beset by a string of crises, most notably the Sacheverell affair and the collapse of the Marlborough–Godolphin ministry, which had possessed a particularly strong electoral interest in Cornwall due to the earl of Godolphin’s regional network.⁹⁴ Moreover, if whig support in Mitchell was

⁹²DHC, 1262M/0/O/EP/1: Mitchell poll sheet, 19 May 1705; CRO, WH/1/5192, ff. 19v–20r: Mitchell poll sheet, 8 Sept. 1713.

⁹³Speck, *Tory and Whig*, 23–4.

⁹⁴Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (1967), 258, 323. The 1713 general election was a disaster for the whigs across Cornwall, with many tories claiming a ten to one majority in the county: *Post Boy*, 17–19 Sept. 1713; HMC, *Portland MSS*, v, 330–1.

composed partly of dissenters, then the conditional whig support for the passage of the Occasional Conformity Bill in 1711 may have sparked disillusionment with the party.

6. Conclusion

The case study of Mitchell reveals how precarious the electorate's ability to determine the outcome of elections could be. For the most part, Arundell retained enough authority to maintain his traditional franchise, or the outcome was determined by the committee of elections and privileges. By the reign of Anne, powerful local gentlemen had reasserted control over the elections, and had settled into a routine that persisted for the next two decades. Hugh Boscawen, later created Viscount Falmouth, managed the uncontested return of ministerial candidates, and after 1713 the electorate was not called upon again until 1734.⁹⁵ The inhabitants of Mitchell had ceased to play a decisive role in the outcome of elections.

At the same time, Mitchell serves as a reminder that the proprietorial interest which characterised 'pocket' boroughs did not necessarily preclude underlying partisan conflict. Indeed, far from being supine and monolithic, the electorates of small, rural constituencies could be multifaceted communities with varied political opinions. In 1714, George Bere complained that Mitchell's electorate had lost any loyalty to the Arundells; they were 'bowy'd up by great men', and 'very unruly and ... will present as they are most inclin'd or most encourage'd'.⁹⁶ This implies that their unruliness came from two causes: straightforward venality ('bowy'd up' and 'encourage'd'), but also their own political views ('inclin'd'). As this article has shown, the electorate was deeply divided. Throughout the period, one faction of inhabitants displayed populist independence and initiative, while another vacillated between deferring to the borough's patron and attempting to solidify their own influence. These disputes did not always align with party allegiances, but during the 1690s the fight for a wider franchise became associated with whig candidates, and the bloc which had initially sought to preserve the Arundells' authority only backed an inhabitant-based franchise once the tories had begun to drift towards populism nationally. Although larger towns presented many opportunities for this kind of simmering partisan conflict to boil over, it could only occur within small, rural boroughs if the right conditions aligned. In Mitchell, these conditions were a combination of the fraught elections to the Exclusion Parliaments, and the disabling catholicism of the Arundells. The resulting uncertainty was seized upon by disenfranchised inhabitants to push for a broader franchise, albeit with only temporary success.

⁹⁵ *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715–1754*, ed. Romney Sedgwick (2 vols, 1970), i, 215–16.

⁹⁶ CRO, AR/10/494.