

WINCHESTER AND ITS PATRON: THE ELECTIONS OF 1783 AND 1784

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ABSTRACT

Material in the Huntington Library throws light on the Duke of Chandos' influence over the representation of Winchester in the early 1780s and, in particular, the failure of Henry Flood, elected in 1783, to win re-election in 1784.

In the thirty-five years after the Winchester by-election of 1751 there were six general elections and three by-elections at Winchester. Not a single one was contested. The right of the election was in the freemen, many of whom were appointed simply for electoral reasons, leading to more competition over the appointment of freemen than over the choice of MPs. During that period the borough, which had two representatives, was represented by a total of eight MPs. Two were the Henry Pentons, father and son, of Eastgate House, Winchester, who represented the seat from 1747-61 in the case of the father, the borough's Recorder, and 1761-96 in that of the son. The other seat was contested between two local magnates, the Dukes of Chandos and Bolton. Relations of both families had been elected in the first half of the century, but a candidate of Bolton's held the seat in 1761-74, when Chandos secured the return of his candidate, Lovell Stanhope, apparently with the support of Henry Penton. In 1783 Stanhope died and in the ensuing by-election Henry Flood, a prominent MP in the Dublin Parliament, was elected. Flood was, however, not elected in the general election the following year, when, instead, Chandos returned his brother-in-law Richard Gamon, who was to sit

for the seat until 1812.¹ This election, held on 31 March 1784, led to a furious letter from Flood to the Duke of Chandos. The letter, sent from Cleveland Row in London on Saturday April 10 1784, is preserved in the Chandos papers in the Huntington Library in San Marino California.

'Mr. Flood presents his compliments to the Duke of Chandos and begs leave to repeat on paper to his Grace what he stated when the Duke did him the honor to call on him last Tuesday at Cleveland Row.

On the death of Mr. Lovell Stanhope, member for Winchester, Mr. Flood in September 1783 received a letter from his Grace desiring him to come to Winchester to attend the canvas; in consequence of an offer which the Duke had made to Mr. Flood the summer before of the first vacancy there to which he could recommend. Mr. Flood attended. Then for the first time his Grace mentioned an engagement to the Duchess for her brother Mr. Gamon. The Duchess was pleased readily to relinquish that engagement and repeatedly to declare that she wished Mr. Flood to represent Winchester for life. Any engagement to Mr. Gamon as to Winchester for the future was never hinted. On the contrary, a totally different object was, at the time, specified for Mr. Gamon.²

To prevent the possibility of error, in another point, Mr. Flood declared that he could not enter Parliament but as a free Representative, and that he should be always ready (when a seat could be found by his Grace and when called on) to acquire a seat for any friend

1. Namier L and Brooke J, *The History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1754-1790* (3 vols, London, 1964) I, 302.

2. Gamon was appointed Commissioner of the Salt Duties in January 1784, resigning in March to stand for Winchester.

the Duke should nominate. Mr. Flood last winter, without waiting to hear at all from his Grace did speak to a man of business to look out for such a seat; wishing only to consider Winchester as a security for his not being left out of Parliament in any event – without which security he could not have consented to have come in for the fragment of a Parliament.

Last winter, before Christmas, when a dissolution was hourly expected; in the continual conversations on the subject which passed between his Grace and Mr. Flood, not a hint ever fell that his Grace had any intention to have Mr. Gamon returned for Winchester. On the contrary, Mr. Gamon's friends advised Mr. Gamon to accept an office which was wholly incompatible with a seat in parliament. Neither was it ever suggested to Mr. Flood to look for a seat elsewhere. On the contrary, he went, by his Grace's express desire, to the man of business beforementioned, to order him to take certain steps respecting the election of Winchester, at Mr. Flood's expence, in like manner as the same person had done on Mr. Flood's first election for that City.

After Christmas also, the possibility of Mr. Flood's differing with administration being mentioned, The Duke said that he wished that no occasion of decided difference might arise, lest it might produce some application to embarrass his Grace in having Mr. Flood returned for Winchester, on a dissolution. Can anything be clearer?

There being no disagreement about the facts between his Grace and Mr. Flood; and Mr. Flood having repeated the idea on which he originally accepted his seat, viz, his readiness, when called on and when another seat should be found by his Grace, to acquire such seat without any expence to the Duke, for any friend his Grace should nominate – He has nothing now to add, but that he continues possessed with every disposition to facilitate his Grace's arrangements on the subject, consistently with what he owes to himself.³

Chandos replied in a manner that Flood found unsatisfactory, and on 15 April Flood

wrote to the Duke again. He recapitulated much that he had written on the 10th, but he added an account of the meeting between the two on 6 April. Chandos had apparently referred to the views of the constituents, a matter not hitherto mentioned in the correspondence,

'His Grace said, but without dwelling on it, that there was a difficulty in the people of Winchester. Thus mentioned, Mr. Flood did not enter fully into the ground, but said it would be strange if his support of the Winchester address should have hurt him at Winchester, when his very worthy Colleague had not been prejudiced by the contrary conduct. That topic being resumed in his Grace's letter, Mr. Flood adds, that he knows Winchester enough to respect highly the constituents of it; and not the less, for knowing that their attachments are not to be shaken: and that the same persons who recommended him before, could certainly recommend him again with equal effect. In short, Mr. Flood has a conscious knowledge that his own vote at Winchester is not to be shaken.'

Later in the letter of 15 April, Flood discussed how Winchester had originally been fixed on as his seat, and revealed that at first Chandos had thought of Newtown Isle of Wight, where a vacancy had been created in August 1782 by the death of Edward Meux Worsley.

'in the year 1782, the subject of a seat in the British Parliament for Mr. Flood (generally however and not specifically for Winchester) was brought forward by the Duke; for it never originated with Mr. Flood. On the day before Mr. Flood was to leave his Grace's House for [sic] Avington, for London; the subject was particularly pressed by the Duke, and he expressed concern that it had not occurred to him when they were near the Isle of Wight, where a vacancy had just happened. The Duke said he would write directly about that vacancy and send to London after Mr. Flood if necessary. Mr.

3. Flood to Chandos, 10 Ap. 1784, San Marino, California, Huntington Library, Stowe Collection 10, 47.

Flood went next morning. The Duke unexpectedly came after him and then at Chandos House there was a short conversation with his Grace's Law agent to this effect. The agent was sent to a person in London concerning the beforementioned vacancy, but it was found to be engaged. He was then desired to look out any where else he could for a seat at Mr. Flood's expence. There was no vacancy at Winchester at that time; nor was Winchester mentioned but incidentally thus. The agent was desired to try whether Mr. Stanhope would accept the Chiltern Hundreds, on condition of a seat being to be acquired for him at Mr. Flood's expence, as soon as possible; or upon the means being supplied to Mr. Stanhope himself. If a vacancy in Winchester could be so obtained the Duke declared he would bring in Mr. Flood for that Parliament. Mr. Flood admits the declaration went no further at that time. But it was not till a year after, that Mr. Gamon's name was mentioned for Winchester at all, as is stated in Mr. Flood's letter of the 10th instant. It is evident that on that occasion, Mr. Flood was to have treated with Mr. Stanhope not with the Duke, for the seat at Winchester. Now, that Mr. Flood should agree to be at the expence of another seat in order to vacate Winchester, on the condition of undoing his seat dependent on another, is an idea which confutes itself; and is worthy mentioning as it manifests a radical misconception, which he presumes will be no longer retained. The sentiment however viz. that Mr. Flood would render either his seat, or conduct, dependant on the approbation or disapprobation of another, is totally inconsistent with his being a free Representative; and is a conception which cannot meet with too speedy, or too perfect a disavowal. The whole idea of the Chiltern Hundreds, from

beginning to ending, amounted simply to this; that whenever another seat could be procured at Mr. Flood's expence, he was ready to vacate Winchester. As to Mr. Stanhope's conduct in not vacating Winchester as above proposed; certainly as the proposition then made was to allow Mr. Stanhope to make an advantage of the Duke's influence at Winchester which the Duke himself had never made, Mr. Flood thought it would be extraordinary if Mr. Stanhope should refuse such an offer. Mr. Flood's *conclusion* to the agent, was, that an *independent* seat was his object and he commissioned the agent to get *such* a seat for him. So much for the year 1782. . . As to his Grace's assistance in looking *now* for another seat; with deference, that ought to have preceded the omission of Mr. Flood at Winchester.⁴

Further letters of 23, 27 April and 1 May added little bar Flood's reproaches. In that of 23 April he wrote 'Mr. Flood cannot doubt the Duke's influence at Winchester' and on 27 April he made clear his relationship with the town, 'Mr. Flood never has wished to occupy Winchester for one moment longer than until another seat was obtained, and that without the smallest expence to the Duke.'⁵

Chandos did not oblige and when Flood next stood for Parliament, for Seaford in March 1785, he was introduced by a different interest.

The correspondence throws much light on attitudes to representation in the 1780s. The views of the electors of Winchester were given little weight and Flood's outraged response to Chandos' piece of family favouritism should not detract from Flood's limited interest in the seat. In 1790 Flood was to propose in the Commons an extension of the county franchise to all resident householders. How far his dissatisfaction with the existing system sprang from his experience at Winchester is unclear.

4. Flood to Chandos, 15 Ap. 1784, *Ibid.*, 48.

5. Flood to Chandos, 23, 27 Ap., 1 May 1784, *Ibid.*, 49–51.